

Secular Book List Classics Analysis

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Grade Level: Elementary - High School

Description:

Updated for 2012: An aid for Torah educators who are evaluating if certain commonly studied classical works of literature are appropriate to be used in their classes. The descriptions and comments on the books are written in as much detail as possible, in order to aid principals and educators in deciding if and how these works will be used in their school. Comments on Cliff's Notes, or similar explanatory notes, are included as well. Note: This list does not give recommendations; it only states facts so that educators can decide what is appropriate for their students. Available with a concise lesson plan as a non-editable PDF, or without the lesson plan as an editable Word document.

Goals/Objectives:

Principals and teachers will be able to select appropriate classical literature for their students.

Instructions:

1. Read carefully through the introduction to understand the rationale and methods behind this book list.
2. This list is for educators only.
3. Happy reading!

Classics and Books Commonly Assigned for School *A Detailed Analysis for Educational Purposes*

*In our general book list, we have worked to provide parents and educators with our comments and suggestions regarding children's reading material. We have found it necessary to compile a separate list devoted to books which are commonly assigned for in-class or at-home reading assignments. Unfortunately, it is extremely rare to find classics that are as completely problem-free as we would like. In addition, many classics gloss over sensitive issues, but schools should be aware that students can easily access Cliff's Notes or similar explanatory notes (either on-line or at the library) that clarify these issues in graphic detail. Introductions, prefaces, biographies of authors and other addenda often provide inappropriate information as well. **Therefore, although our comments are based on our reading of the original works, we also provide comments on the Cliff's Notes, etc. so that schools and teachers can make informed choices. (Experienced educators have informed us that forbidding the use of explanatory notes is generally ineffective as some students are determined to read them in the place of the original text)***

*We have begun to compile a list for educators, in which we list our comments about classical works (some with comments on specific editions or Notes). These comments are written in as much detail as possible, in order to aid principals and educators in deciding if and how these works will be used in their school. We have included grade recommendations; however, keep in mind that these are based on our own, unscientific approximation. **Please note: on this list, we generally do not make recommendations. Each school will need to balance the potential problems in a book, with the educational value it seeks.***

Aiken, Joan

The Wolves of Willoughby Chase (4-6)

Two girls outsmart wicked governess with help of a peasant boy. Describes some very cruel adults who eventually get punished, but also some very kind adults. Girls dress like boys to save themselves.

Albom, Mitch

Tuesdays with Morrie (9+)

A man meets with his former college professor to get lessons about life as professor is dying from Lou Gherig's disease. Very philosophical and deep. Quite graphic about progression of illness and deterioration of body including need to "pee in a beaker" and have someone "wipe his ass" and catheter inserted "into his ____". Mentions of JC used as a mild curse. Talks about being raised as an observant Jew and became agnostic in response to tragedy. A few descriptions of Buddhists. Native American beliefs - no descriptions. Language: Damn, bitch, tush. Rabbi conducted cremation service. School should consider the weightiness of the theme before assigning for independent reading.

Alcott, Louisa May

Little Women (6-8)

4 sisters grow up together, fall in love, and marry, except for one who dies young. Very religious family – father is a minister.

- Many references to religion but not explained clearly – eg many mentions of “Pilgrim’s Progress” and trying to reach the “celestial city” by being good, eg p 10-11 (part 1 chapter 1), p. 132 (part 1 chapter 13)
- a lot of x-mas presents, santa claus, being good on x-mas. E.g. p. 3 (part 1 chapter 4), entire chapter 2 (part 1)
- Talk of heavenly father p. 77 (part 1 chap 8)
- crosses and rosaries – p. 178-179 (part 1 chap 19)
- JC – p. 184 (part 1 chap 20)
- Madonna and child and x-mas – p 202 (part 1 chap 22)
- hymn – p. 206 (part 1 chap 22)
- a lot of old fashioned boy/girl, many dances described, talk of flirting. Eg p. 300-301 (part 2 chap 32)
- a lot of platonic boy/girl and questions if platonic relationship can turn into romantic love and then back to platonic again
- a lot of negiah. Some affectionate between “friends”, some mildly romantic, a lot unclear eg:
p. 171-172 (part 1 chap 18)
p. 210 (part 1 chap 23)
p. 233 (part 1 chap 25)
p 390-391 (part 2 chap 41)
p. 439 (part 2 chap 46)
- a lot of courting leading to marriage which includes mild negiah.

Armstrong, William H.

Souder (6-8)

Son of a black sharecropper deals with father's prison sentence (who stole to feed family), and heart wrenching devotion of father's dog. Lots of biblical quotes and thoughts but nothing too objectionable. Sad.

Babbit, Natalie

Tuck Everlasting (5-7)

A family who drank from eternal spring can never die. A little girl discovers their secret but doesn't choose their way of life. Lots of philosophical discussion of immortality. Eternally teenaged boy tries to convince young girl to drink from spring when she's older and become immortal and marry him. Rich classroom discussion potential.

Balliett, Blue

Chasing Vermeer (6-8)

A convoluted and strange mystery/puzzle book where children try to locate a stolen work of art. P 33 - juvenile rhyme about boy and girl stuck in closet together. A few mentions in passing of art in museum being paintings of ladies in "too tight dresses" or "naked people" - easy to cross out. Talk of supernatural and if coincidences are real. Some kids will love the book and some won't get it.

Banks, Lynne Reid

The Indian in the Cupboard (4-6)

A boy receives magic cupboard and discovers it can bring plastic cowboy and Indian models to life. Some minor rough language. Great story.

Boyne, John

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas (6-8)

Unique book written from perspective of fictional son of a concentration camp Commandant. In the book, the son does not fully understand what is going on in the camp, and ends up befriendng a child interred there. Although the book is written about a 9-year old, and the language appears to be on a 4-6 grade level, the subtleties of the story line are geared to be understood by older children. Some educators expressed concern that the implication that it was possible for a child of a commandant not to know what was going on, might confuse child readers and make them think it was not so bad after all. We recommend that educators read this book and make a decision for their students, and if read should be read with guidance.

Bradbury, Ray

Fahrenheit 451(9+)

Set in future where they burn books and try to keep everyone artificially happy and not thinking deeply. One man rebels. Language: damn, hell (as a curse), JC (as a curse). Book has some deep concepts which need adult discussion - I wouldn't give it to a teenager as independent reading.

Burnett, Frances Hodgson

A Little Princess (5-8)

Beautiful story about a little rich girl in a boarding school. When her father dies she is treated as a servant until she is discovered by father's old friend.

Little Lord Fautleroy (5-8)

A little boy raised in a simple way by his American mother, suddenly finds out he is a lord and must go to England to live with his crotchety grandfather. Innocent comments about liking to look at girls (p. 102 chapter 6). Description of church service - kneeling and folding hands in prayer - no heavy religion (p. 134-135, chap. 7). Drawn out description of a beautiful woman who all the men fawn over, seen through a young boy's eyes (p. 176-177 ch. 10; p 234 chap 15)

The Secret Garden (5-8)

A lonely unsociable child is sent to live with hunchback uncle. Magical religious hymn about father, son & holy ghost, other minor religion

Card, Scott

Ender's Game (8+)

Boy genius saves the world from aliens. Language, male anatomy. Other books in series are very inappropriate for children.

Cather, Willa

My Antonia

(Oxford World Classics Edition-9+)

A man recalls his childhood growing up on a farm as well as the childhood of a his neighbor, a Bohemian immigrant girl. In this edition the introduction is highly problematic, clearly discussing

the author's gender preferences. (see pg XX) IT also briefly summarizes the plot including pg IX "her romantic entanglement with Larry Donovan, a deceitful railroad man, and subsequent mothering of an illegitimate child". Ont the same page it mentions the narrator's struggles with "sexuality- particularly his attention to immigrant hired girls and his romance with Lena Lingard" all of the above themes, excluding the author's gender preferences are relatively clearly stated in the plot as well.

Book I.

I-p11- boy is so startled by the vastness of the sky he felt that G-d wasn't with him

P14-"undraped female figures" on cowboy's boots are angels

P14-grandfather reads psalms- boy loves his way of saying "Selah""- explained in notes at end p.201- a musical or liturgical direction, perhaps indicating pause or rest"

III-p20- older man takes older woman's hand in greeting

IV-p23-mention of xmas melons

VII-p30- ditto

VIII-p34-boy and girl curl up close together in wagon

P36-38-story of 2 men who were driving a bride and groom. Men threw the couple to the wolves to lighten the wagon to save themselves.

IX-p42-singing in church

P47-christian people often forget "they were her brother's keepers"

XI-p48-52-xmas described-gifts, tree, story of 3 kings and baby in manger (not told in great detail), father reads chapter in St. Mathew about the birth of JC, prayers, man makes sign of the cross

XIV-p51-60-old man commits suicide- described vividly. People say he is in purgatory.

XV-p61-the family wants a priest to "pray over him"man says we believe you don't need a priest because "JC is our only intercessor"

P62-boy helps priest at the alter, first communion, vessels of the "holy sacrament"

XVI-p67-family makes sign of the cross on the dead body

P68- sing hymn- "JC lover of my soul"

XVII-p70- "he not JC"

P71-girl takes boy's hand- affectionate, not romantic

XVIII-p72-74-minor violence

P77-woman kisses man's hand out of gratefulness

Book II

IV-p92-92-detailed description of married man who enjoyed being with single girl

VI-p98-woman believes that JC was born in Bohemia

VII-p105- mixed dancing

VIII-p108- ditto

IX-p109-112 (whole chapter)- description of the dynamics of boy/girl relationships

X-p113- girl slaps soon to be married (to someone else) man when he tries to kiss her

XII-p122-mixed dancing, boy wants to kiss girl

XIV-p130-girl flirts with boy- runs fingers through his hair

XV-p134-135-man unsuccessfully tries to rape girl- not stated explicitly but clearly understood

Book III

IV-p156-157-girl explains why doesn't want to marry

P157- brief kiss

P158- ditto

Book IV

Beginning of book IV, especially chapter III- description of how woman had illegitimate baby- states clearly that she never married baby's father.

Book V

II-p188-boy describes how he and his father (married) danced with females

Explanatory notes

P208 -209- JC

P216- man impregnated hired girls

P221- greek mythology, hell

P222- woman should agree to be man's mistress

Clements, Andrew

Frindle (3-5)

Boy tests out rules of language by coining a new word. Very well written and engaging story. Undertone of lack of respect for adults and authority, and message that kids know best.

Dahl, Roald

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (5-7)

Poor boy is selected to go on fantastic chocolate factory tour. Minor language. Mr. Wonka is insulting to other adults. Very tongue in cheek.

Defoe, Daniel

Robinson Crusoe(8+)

(Bantam Classic Edition)

A classic story of a man who is shipwrecked on a desert island and manages to survive. The biggest issue here is hashkafa. He is raised as a religious Christian but when he runs away to sea against his parent's wishes he abandons his faith, only regaining it after almost dying on the desert isle. From the time he regains his faith the book goes into minute detail describing his thoughts about G-d and religion. Even more detail when he teaches his slave about Christianity. A lot of it is neutral and even correct, but there is a lot of belief in JC mentioned in very detailed unacceptable ways. However, most children will tend to skip the myriad pages of religious discussion and look for the action in the story. Teachers and parents have to decide if they want to rely on that tendency.

Some of the places with hashkafa issues (though book should be previewed in full)

Chapter-Pirates-p II

The Journal:Illness- whole chapter

The Journal:Recovery- P92

The Journal:Exploring The Island-p100-101

The Journal:Reflections-p115

A Footprint-p139-142

Bones-p149,153-155

Enounter With Savages-p176-177

Friday Observed-p188

Friday Instructed-whole chapter

Return To England- p255

Dickens, Charles

A Tale of Two Cities (9+)

(Bantam classic Edition with an afterward by Stephen Koch)

A French nobleman who has moved to England and renounced his heritage, returns home in the middle of the French Revolution, and is sentenced to death by a blood thirsty mob. Very gory and violent and detailed descriptions of people put to a violent death for crimes both real and imagined. Language – damned (chap 2 book 1 p 7), d-n (with dash) (chap 12 book 2 p 145 & 146, chap 24 book 2 p 241). A lot of non-romantic negiah, mostly of the polite variety. Two men want to marry the same woman – the one who doesn't marry her eventually gives his life to save the one who does. Romantic negiah between husband and wife – p 210 & 211 book 2 chap 20; p 247 book 3 chap 6. A man and woman on the way to be killed become friends and there is some

negiah – p 360 book 3 chap 13, p 380 book 3 chap 15. A quote about the resurrection – p. 319 chap 9 book 3, p. 380 chap 15 book 3. Description of a cruel nobleman raping a woman but not very explicit – chap 10 p 323 . The afterward in this edition is truly horrific and makes what is not explicit, very explicit, and problems that don't even seem to exist suddenly appear.

Dickens, Charles

David Copperfield (9+)

(Penguin Classics Edition)

A typical (long) novel of Dickens. An orphan struggles to make it in the world, overcomes cruel circumstances, finds a savior in a eccentric great aunt, eventually becomes a successful author. Lots of intertwined plots and romance of the old fashioned variety. Minor Religion. Refers to friend/girlfriend as a "lover". Old fashioned romantic negiah usually of the soon to be married variety or at dances. Long and detailed description of a marriage between a mature young man and an immature flighty girl and how he made the best of it even though he realized they were not well matched. One story line involves a young girl married to a man many years her senior and everyone's suspicions that she is having an affair with a younger man - turns out to be not true. Describes in detail some adults who treat children cruelly and some who don't. Lots of youthful crushes, some flirting, some juvenile kissing and mild negiah.

Quote about the resurrection – p. 142 chap 9.

. Black and white illustration of women nursing a baby – somewhat detailed

Language – stupid, drat (p 120 chap 8)

For C___ sake (p 345 chap 22)

One important story line about an upper class boy who seduces a lower class girl who is engaged to someone else and they run away together until he abandons her. She is so ashamed she moves to Australia.

Penguin Classics Edition- Introduction

P. xxii – reference to home for "fallen women" - prostitutes in Australia

Cliff's Notes

Overall, much more subtle than usual but a few problems. Reviews a few of boy's childhood crushes clearly noting a kiss (eg chapters 9-10) and co-ed dancing (chapters 17-18). Alludes to a character as being a "fallen woman" but doesn't explain. Describes how she "flirts" because the one she really loves is talking to another man (chap 33-34).

Chap 47-48 woman wants to commit suicide (not clear in book)

Chap 43-44 says author married Catherine Hogarth even though apparently cared more for wife's sister.

Spark Notes

Overall, not much more problematic than the book itself, but uses different labels for things that are problematic – eg, says a character is suspected of having an "affair" with her cousin. No mention of prostitution.

Dickens, Charles

Oliver Twist (9+)

(Penguin Classics Edition)

Young orphan is severely mistreated by both the System and cruel individuals. Boy discovers he is illegitimate son of wealthy man. Tone very sarcastic and tongue-in-cheek. One of villains is caricatured Jew who was "villainous looking... repulsive face" etc. Comical scene of man

proposing to woman involving some romantic negiah (begins book II chapter I); Young couple kisses (book II chapter V). Language: Damn, ass, idiot. Detailed description of boy's father hating wife and leaving her (without divorce) and taking up with younger woman and having Oliver illegitimately. Called a "bastard child" (book III chapter 13). Intro to this edition discusses one of the characters is thief's prostitute (not explicit in main text, only implied) and she had a "significant sexual relation" with him and "shared a bed" (not explicit in main text). Only thing explicit in main text is she gave him a kiss on the lips (book 3 chapter 3). In author's introduction to the third edition (1847), quoted here in appendix A, Dickens states "the girl is a prostitute".

Doyle, Arthur Conan

The Hound of the Baskervilles (8+)

A classic Sherlock Holmes mystery. A wealthy man is killed and all clues point to a ghostly hound as the killer until Holmes catches the murderer. A very important part of the plot is a woman who masquerades as her husband's sister in order to cause the victim to fall in love with her, while her husband, also pretending to be single, causes a woman to divorce her husband so she will be free to marry him - she becomes as accessory to the murder. Detective wonders if the servant he saw sneaking out of the house has a "love intrigue" (servant is married). A man attempts to put his arm around a woman, she moves away from him. Many mentions of Neolithic man. Language: hell-hound, hell, sucker, stupid.

Adventures & Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes (7+)

Description of opium & casual cocaine use, "aversion to women"

Dumas, Alexandre

The Count of Monte Cristo (9+)

A Frenchman falsely accused of treason and imprisoned in a terrible jail. He meets an eccentric priest who leaves him a fortune. When he escapes he transforms himself into a count and formulates a detailed plan to punish all who betrayed him. A good deal of the plot revolves around his feelings for his fiancée who marries his enemy while he is in jail. Various other romances entwined as well. Some romantic negiah described, some implied (P. 12-14). A few discussions of having a mistress instead of a wife and of buying a mistress, but not description (P. 173). Minor mention of JC. (P. 63). More detailed description of JC and Satan (P. 213). Every once in a while main character invokes name of G-d to justify his actions - needs discussion. One storyline involves a woman who is unfaithful to husband - discussed in vague terms (p. 272-273). Strong theme of revenge at all costs.

DuPrau, Jeanne

The City of Ember (5-8)

Great story set in underground society with no knowledge of outside world. Implications of world being destroyed by war but never stated outright (may be scary to some kids). Minor non-romantic negiah. Brief mention of liking a boy (p 146 ch 11). Very well written. Sequels are not of the same caliber.

Eliot, George

Silas Marner - The Weaver of Roveloe (9+)

(Pages below refer to Modern Library Classics edition)

A man is falsely accused of robbery so he leaves his small church based community and his faith in his religion and exiles himself to a small village where he lives an isolated life. Eventually a baby wanders into his house and he is transformed by raising her. A good deal of religious discussion including Satan, souls, judgment and disappointment that G-d didn't clear him of a crime when he was falsely accused. A kind woman urges him to go to church on Sundays and not work on that day. Many pages detailing her reasoning (p. 96-100). Mentions JC born on X-mas day. One of the rich villagers married an "opium addled" woman from a lower class, had a child with her and then regretted it. He hid her away in another town and courted a different lady. When his wife died he happily married the other without telling her or acknowledging the child until many years later. Courtship scenes and dances. Some minor romantic negiah. In Introduction to this edition mentions that author (a woman) eloped with a married man who was her "companion" for 24 years.

Erdrich, Louise

The Birchbark House (4-6)

Realistic description of Native Americans. Smallpox epidemic and death discussed very matter of factly. Lots of emphasis on Indian beliefs - needs adult guidance

Estes, Eleanor

The One Hundred Dresses (2-4)

Girls feel bad that they made fun of a poor classmate who bragged she owned a hundred dresses. A few minor mentions of x-mas; no religion

Fleischman, Sid

The Whipping Boy (3-5)

A spoiled prince and his street smart whipping boy run away from the castle and come to trust each other.

Forbes, Esther

Johnny Tremain (6-9)

Historical fiction. Set in Boston, Revolutionary War. An orphan gets involved with the Patriots. Ongoing subtle love story runs throughout the novel but not integral focus.

Frank, Anne

A Diary of a Young Girl – The Definitive Edition (9+)

(Pages below refer to Doubleday edition; Journal entry dates included for use with other editions. Note that this edition includes passages not included in earlier editions)

The diary of a Jewish girl who struggles with coming of age while in hiding during the Holocaust. Although it's very moving, there are quite a few very clear and explicit passages dealing with boy/girl, negiah, and physical maturation. In addition, girl is very clear about negative feeling toward parents and especially lack of respect for mother. Also sprinkling of hashkafic issues. Not recommended for casual reading. For educators: this book would be difficult to censor sufficiently, but problematic passages are listed below.

Forward – page vi Explains how certain passages dealing with sexuality were omitted in the original book but added in this edition.

6/15/42 p. 5 – Lists and describes boys who admire Anne, using adjectives such as “a filthy mind”, “girl crazy”, “Absolute flirt”, “has gone all the way”.

6/20/42 p. 10 – Boys give “passionate glances”, blow kisses, take hold of her arm

10/3/42 p. 50 – Teenage girl lay in bed next to an adult man and everyone thought it shocking – her comment – “I would never want to sleep with him the way they mean”

10/3/42 p. 52 – Women sell bodies on the street, menstruation

11/2/42 P. 60 – menstruation

11/10/42 p. 62 – Man lives with a woman – probably not married “but that’s besides the point”

12/7/42 p. 73 – Celebrate St. Nicholas Day and Chanukah together

4/2/43 p. 96 – One example of Anne’s relationship with mom (regular theme throughout)

5/2/43 p. 100 – bra

5/18/43 p. 103 – a single man says to married woman “come into my bed my child”; everyone thinks it’s a grand joke.

10/30/43 p. 140-142 – Anne’s relationship with parents

11/3/43 p. 143 – Jews learning “New” Testament; J. C

1/6/44 p. 161 – menstruation, female anatomy

Photo insert, center – teenager in bathing suit

1/6/44 p. 162 – Anne’s ecstatic feeling when sees unclothed female

1/6/44 p. 162-163 – Dreams of negiah

1/7/44 p. 164 – First love

1/7/44 p. 166 – Dreams of negiah

1/24/44 p. 173-176 – Learning about sex – detailed – discusses it with boy

3/2/44 p. 202 – Her attitude that it’s OK to have relations without marriage as long as there is true love.

3/8/44 p. 212 – dreaming of kissing boy

3/18/44 p. 223-324 – her opinions about learning about sex and that it’s OK for a man to bring a little experience into a marriage

3/24/44 p. 236-237 – more very detailed and explicit discussion between boy and girl about their anatomy

3/31/44 p. 247 – menstruation

4/16/44 p. 266-267 first kiss

4/17/44 p. 268 – her opinions as to why it’s ok to kiss a boy when you are just a teenager even if parents disapprove.

5/9/44 p. 290-291 – Joke involving explaining how babies are conceived

5/11/44 p. 292-293 – boy is chutzpadik to mother

5/19/44 p. 300 – more negiah

7/15/44 p. 332 – girl wonders if was a mistake to use physical intimacy to get close to boy, which ruled out other forms of friendship

Golding, William

Lord of the Flies (9+)

(Perigee Book Edition)

A group of boys are marooned on a desert isle without adults, and try to form some semblance of society, but instead revert to being savages and even attacking each other, leading to the death of 2 boys. Discussion potential about man’s essential nature being essentially evil according to author.

- Language:

Lots of shut up

Chap 1 p 13 sucks, boy calls asthma “ass-mar”

Chap 4 p 74 damn you

Chap 6 p 101 sucks

Chap 8 p 124 hell; p 135 ass; p 140 ass-mar

Chap 10 p 162 ass-mar; p 168 “I hit him in the pills “ (slang for male anatomy).

Biggest issue – in back of book, “Note on Lord of the Flies” goes into great descriptive detail pointing out how the killing of a sow was accomplished as a form of intimacy (not phrased quite this nicely), which is something kids would never pick up on independently (p 206—207)

Hemingway, Ernest

The Old Man and the Sea (9+)

(Scribner Edition)

A short novel about an old fisherman and his battle with a huge fish, and his relationship with a boy who cares for him.

A lot of symbolism involving the sea, some of it sexual – e.g. calls sea a “whore” (p. 35). P. 77 – “as though the ocean were making love with something under a yellow blanket”

P. 36 – references to “strange love making of turtles”.

P. 42 – Ch--- (Last name of JC)

P. 64 – promise to say “Hail Marys’ to “our fathers” and make a pilgrimage to the virgin of Cobre.

P. 65 – Hail Mary written out; talking about JC and Holy mother of god and blessed virgin, etc.

P. 66 – Ch---.

Language: p. 36: stupid; p. 123: damn; p. 125: hell.

A few mentions of men “urinating”.

Lee, Harper

To Kill A Mockingbird (8+)

Well-written story about girl whose father defends a black man accused of raping a white woman in pre-civil-rights South. Whole topic problematic but not very explicit. Most problematic descriptions are written in “high-falutin” genteel type language kids probably won’t get, ie: rape is called carnal knowledge of a woman. Innuendo to sexual abuse and incest but not spelled out. Cliff Notes spell out clearly all inappropriate details, including the fact that it was the father who raped his own daughter. Cliff Notes also define and clarify sophisticated problematic language that might have otherwise been overlooked by students.

Orczy, Baroness Emmuska

The Scarlet Pimpernel (9+)

A beautiful French woman marries a wealthy Englishman during the time of the French Revolution, and tries to save her brother by discovering the identity of a man known as “The Scarlet Pimpernel”, who rescues French aristocracy. Language: constant use of “demmed” (damned) in a British slang sort of way, eg: “demmed marvelous”. Men and women described dancing at a ball, but not very romantically. A tame love story as a minor plot, ends in marriage. An estranged marriage described: husband and wife live in separate wings of the house, wife tries to rekindle his “passion”. P 153 – a few descriptions that could end up in inappropriate detail, but it doesn’t. P 157 – “He would have taken her in his arms”, etc, but he didn’t. Jew described as greedy, dirty, downtrodden, of “loathsome appearance”.

Rowlings, Marjorie Kinnan

The Yearling (7+)

A Pulitzer Prize winning story depicting relationships between a boy, his parents, his neighbors, and his pet deer in the backwoods of Florida. Characters use a somewhat difficult dialect. Extremely detailed descriptions of hunting and preparing animals for food. A lot of description of his helpful yet rowdy and drunken neighbors who are a family of brothers who like to dance and play without clothing and rarely shower. The local doctor is also generally drunk since the loss of

his wife. Brief mention of man waking up beside the "sleeping bulk" of his overweight wife. Although she was "built for childrearing", they lost many babies since the skinny husband's "seed were as puny as himself" (p. 20). Many mentions of animal mating and courting but no descriptions. Language: blasted, bitch (female dog), hell, a Tinker's Dam, darn, booger. Father teases son about having a sweetheart since he saw him holding hands with a girl - he said it was just a game - then boy gets mad and throws a potato at her. A sad scene where boy's crippled best friend dies. Graveside service (p. 211). Boy thinks a lot about the difference between men and women and concludes women are only good for cooking. Side story of 2 men who physically fight over a "sweetheart". Eventually she follows one of them to the next town - all of the ladies are horrified - say it's not proper. They return married. A scene about Xmas - special dinner, tree, new clothing. Father jokes that he spent the night with an "old gal" of his - really he stayed in her empty house.

Shakespeare, William

The Merchant of Venice (9+)

Cliff's Complete *has play in original language and commentary next to it. Page numbers below refer to Cliff's Complete.*

Introduction:

P 3: Shakespeare born 6 months after parents' marriage - discussion of pregnancy before marriage in 16th century.

P 19: Jew in Elizabethan society - suggest play not anti-Semitic.

P 23: Summary of Italian story that Shakespeare may have based play on - woman promises to give fortune to first man who sleeps with her.

P. 28: Love between men (friendship) compared to love between man & woman.

The Play and its Commentaries:

P. 72: man wonders how Jewish girl can be so beautiful unless mother cheated on her father with a Christian.

P. 108: Man kisses woman before marriage (not in detail).

P 115: Picture of unclothed Hercules - frontal area minimally obscured.

P. 125: Conflict between platonic friendship and sexual love (also p. 151).

P. 129: Speculation Jewish girl's mother committed adultery. Talk of her being "saved" because eloped with Christian and converted. Mention of man having affair (and baby) with black woman.

P. 166 - Since husband gave their engagement ring as payment to doctor, wife teases him that she will now consider self doctor's wife. "I'll not deny him anything I have, not my body, nor my husband's bed... I'll have him for a bedfellow. "

P. 171 States the above point more clearly but explains it was a joke.

Shakespeare, William

Julius Caesar (9+)

(Pages below, and comments regarding introduction, refer to The Folger Library General Reader's Shakespeare)

Introduction, page 19 – Shakespeare was married hastily and daughter was born 6 months later. Introduction, page 22 – Shakespeare's daughter married under "somewhat scandalous circumstances".

When Julius Caesar, member of the Roman senate, seems to be seeking the crown, he is killed by a group that includes one of his friends. Another friend avenges his death. Use of the words "damned" and "hell" in their proper usages.

Act 2, Scene 1 (line 300) – Wife states that if husband won't share his concerns with her, she is like a harlot and not a wife.

Act 5, Scene 4 – bastard used in non-specific usage

Shelley, Mary ***Frankenstein (9+)***

(Pages below, and comments regarding introduction, refer to Penguin Classics Edition)

A classic tale which is often much distorted in modern culture. A young man discovers the secret of creating life and succeeds in creating a monstrous being. He later regrets his creation. The monster eventually takes revenge on his creator by killing all the people his creator cares for. In this edition the front and back covers depict an unclothed man which is really stark and should probably be covered with a book cover.

The introduction is highly problematic in detailing in a painstaking fashion the immoral lifestyle of the author. It also goes into very deep philosophical discussions about the nature of creation and various philosophical belief systems.

Other than the premise that man can give life and create a living and thinking being there is little else problematic.

Vol.I. Chapt V p 59-man imagines embracing a girl (his future bride) and a "kiss on the lips" but she dies in his arms.

Chapt VI p69-d-n the fellow

Vol II chapt.V p123-old man kisses and embraces his son's fiancé

Chapt.VII p 132-brief discussion about book "Paradise Lost"- "An omnipotent G-d warring with his creatures..."

A few mentions of hell implying a terrible experience- chap V p60, Chapt VIII p89, vol II chapt. VIII p138, vol.III chapt VII pg 206

The appendix and notes in the back of the book were not reviewed as of yet.

Steinbeck, John ***The Red Pony (9+)***

Series of four well-written short stories about a boy growing up on a ranch. Contains many literary elements which are ripe for discussion. Although each story is about a child, these are not stories written for children. None of the stories end happily. The final story has a somewhat hopeful ending, at least superficially, since the boy offers his sad grandfather a cup of lemonade. However, it is not clear if this is an act of generosity or an act of rebellion against his father who callously caused the grandfather's sadness. (Throughout, the father is portrayed as rather insensitive and incapable of being a good father to his son, and the son is portrayed as somewhat rebellious).

This book contains many detailed and gory descriptions of the death of various animals. Especially vivid are the deaths caused by the boy's cruelty as well as death caused by birth complications.

One mention of J-- as religious figure (intro xxvi)

Two mentions of J-- used as an expletive (p. 36, 74)

Language: damn (p. 48, 49, 74, 75, 78, 80)

Hell (p. 63, 69)

The boy takes his female horse to a neighboring ranch to be "bred" with a male horse. Some description but mostly inference (p. 57-61)

Spyri, Johanna

Heidi (4-6)

Classic story of girl brought up on mountain by eccentric grandfather. Good midos. Many minor religious references - pretty neutral, ie "higher being": pages 124, 192, 263, 277

Stevenson, Robert Lewis

Treasure Island (7-8)

Classic adventure story. Boy goes to find treasure. Lots of violence. Check specific book for illustrations

Stowe, Harriet Beecher

Uncle Tom's Cabin (9+)

This very famous novel had a major impact on American history, but it is full of Christian theology. Lots and lots of JC as the lord and him dying for everyone and loving everyone. Plot depicts horrors of slavery - starkly details the abuse, the forcing of slave women to "live with" their masters, the attitude that blacks are no better than animals. Lots of discussion about Christianity's opinion on slavery. Description of unhappy marriage - husband really loved another. Wife is selfish and thinks only of herself.

Swift, Jonathan

Gulliver's Travels (8+)

Satirical commentary on human nature about adventures of an Englishman's voyage. Lots of bathroom references, religious references, and procreation references which are wholly inappropriate but written in such sophisticated and ironical language that a child reading this story for adventure may miss it. However, an older child reading it carefully (i.e. for school) will encounter all sorts of unacceptable descriptions.

Taylor, Mildred

Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry (6-8)

Historical fiction. Well written engaging story. A black girl experiences prejudice. Many descriptions of very cruel discrimination and violence including burning, tar and feathering. Mentions of black men being accused of flirting with white women "making advances". Mention of a boy and girl who loved in secret (p. 177).

Taylor, Sydney

All of a Kind Family (4-6)

Historical Fiction. Beautiful story but, Jewish girl has crush on non-Jewish Peddler, minor religion. Later books have other problematic issues. Schools should think carefully before introducing this series as Jewish children tend to relate to it closely, and assume the unacceptable is fine.

Taylor, Theodore

The Cay (6-8)

A boy is shipwrecked on a deserted island together with an elderly black man. Overcomes prejudices.

Thurber, James

The 13 Clocks (8+)

A prince sets out to find jewels so that he can win the princess's hand in marriage, and appease her evil uncle. Written like a children's fairy tale but extremely sophisticated in its play on words and ideas and symbolism. Many children reading this will not get it on their own.

Twain, Mark

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court - The Library of America Edition (9+)

Complete text. A very satirical tongue-in-cheek story about an 18th century man who finds himself in King Arthur's court and tries to modernize them. A lot of direct criticism of the power of the Catholic Church, but not criticism of religion in general. The man unwillingly goes on a quest with a fair maiden sitting on the horse behind him - eventually he marries her. Description of wives kissing husbands before they are killed, and women suckling newborns before they are burned at the stake. Some anatomy detailed. Somewhat vague references to the queen being unfaithful to the king.

The Prince and the Pauper - The Library of America Edition (8+)

Complete Text. A pauper boy in a slum is born the same day as the heir to the throne of England. Lives of the lower class clearly described in detail, including hunger, filth, drunkenness, begging, robbery and abuse of children. Chapter 18 P. 114: vague allusion to "familiarities" of a band of lawless men with a farmer's daughter - not explained. Some rough language but very old fashioned - nothing very severe in modern terms. A lot of mentions of religion but depicted in a very satirical way - a crazy man believes himself to be an archangel. Call a church by J's name as a location: J___'s Church. Tragic burnings at stake described in detail.

Verne, Jules

Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea (7+)

A classic tale of captives who are taken on an amazing underwater journey by a captain with a mysterious past. Violence and death described. Language- stupid.

Wells, H.G.

The Time Machine-Signet Classic Edition (9+)

Introduction- pVIII-Darwin

pIX-author was a "flagrant womanizer"

pXII-Darwin and evolution. Darwinians needed the world to be very old to explain gradual evolution.

pXIV-Author separated from his wife and had an affair with his future wife.

Chapter 1 p9-damned

P11-xmas (as a time period)
Chapt 2 p16-damned
Chapt 4 p33-in future little differentiation of the sexes and why
Chapt 5 p48-"making love in a half playful fashion"
P49-man and female kiss each others hands.
P50-female sleeps with her head "pillowed on his arm"
P52-Darwin's theories of what will happen to the planets at the end of days.
P54-male and female engaged in "amorous sport"-he flings flowers at her
P56-57-theory of what happened to mankind in the future
Chapt 6-p60-man kisses female farewell
Chapt 7-p 68-man carries female
P 69-man takes her in his arms and caresses her. She puts her arms around his neck and presses her face against his shoulder.
Chapt 8-p75-he finds the paleontology section of an old museum and finds fossils and skeletons of prehistoric creatures.
P78-he takes her hand
P79-fossil from millions of years ago
Chapt 9-throughout chapter bloody violence as man tries to defend himself against human like creatures
p89-damned
chapt 12-p103-damned
epilogue-mention of prehistoric periods
appendix p 112-113-discussion of evolution of man in the distant future

The Invisible Man - Signet Classic Edition (9+)

A man makes himself invisible and tries to take advantage of his new state. He discovers how helpless he suddenly is and gradually becomes more and more violent until he commits murder. Violence described in detail. Many mentions that he goes around "naked" so his clothing will not be visible. An extensive discussion of the science of light.

Introduction-px-brief mention of Darwin's theory of evolution.
Chapt II-p11-damn it
Chapt IV-p25-damnable
Chapt VI-p32-never goes to church on Sunday
P33-darmed (mispronunciation of curse)
P34-go to the devil
Chapt VII-p35-go to the devil
P40-damned
P41-darm it (mispronunciation), stupid
Chapt IX-p48-blarsted (mispronunciation)
P50-darn
Chapt XIII-p68-stupid
P69-shut up
Chapt XIV-p74-blarsted (mispronunciation)
P75-ass (as an insult)
P75-asses (as an insult)
Chapt XVII-p85-asses (as an insult)
P89-devilry
Chapt XIX-p100-work like a nigger
Chapt XX-p110-112-somew
hat negative description of a Polish Jew
Chapt XXIII-p130-one word xmas
P131-damn
P133-damn
Chapt XXVII-p157-damn

Wharton, Edith

Ethan Frome-Enriched Classic Pocket Books Edition

A man in an unhappy marriage falls in love with a cousin who is living in his house to help his sickly wife. He imagines being with her but in the end he can't be unfaithful to his wife so they try to unsuccessfully try to commit suicide together.

Introduction-pVIII-author had an unhappy marriage and had a "passionate love affair" for three years.

pX-author's husband committed "infidelities"

pXIII-women who didn't end up marrying had to either work in a factory or become prostitutes.

First chapter-I p12-hell

P14-mention of church (as a landmark)

Chapter I-p24-38-married man stands outside church watching a coed dance and dreams of being with a single girl

chapter II-p47-he puts his arms around her

p52-he thinks about kissing her

chapter III-p58-he thinks about being alone in the house with her for the night while his wife is away

chapter IV-p67-man interrupts engaged couple kissing

chapter VIII-p108-110-considers leaving his wife and running away with the girl he loves

chapter IX-p135-they kiss

notes on the book-p152-Greek mythology

p153-prostitution

p160-virgin

critical excerpts-p169-extramarital liason, sexual passion

p174-sexual maturity

suggestions for interested reader-p181-182-brief reviews of novels which may or may not be appropriate

White, E. B.

Stuart Little (3-5)

A mouse born to a human couple runs away to seek his fortune and to find his bird-friend. One chapter about a date (chap 14) with a short girl, that ends in disaster; nothing romantic. Mention of the poem "The Night Before Xmas". One sentence mention of a girl receiving a present from a boy to remember him by (chap 12 p. 98).

White, E.B.

The Trumpet of the Swan (3-5)

A boy becomes friend with a mute swan who eventually learns to blow a trumpet so he can win a mate. This book is essentially a gentle love story between swans. The only "negiah" is one swan putting neck on the other. A lot of focus on swans finding mates and falling in love - done in a very gentle way. One unimportant mention of nature as a force (p. 54 chap 6). Minor language: darned (once). Head counselor of boys camp encourages them to go swimming without bathing suits. Xmas - no religion.

Wiggin, Kate Douglas

Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm (4-7)

Classic story of a poor girl who comes to live with her spinster aunts and ends up coming to appreciate them, and they her. Novel follows her as she grows up always backed by an older single man- not overtly romantic but might end up that way in a future book. Some classics mentioned by title. Many mentions of church and Sunday school. Girl writes a poem about "seraphim" angels, goes to a missionary meeting, hymn singing, an actual hymn written out (p181-182), hymn "J. should reign" (not written out p 183), girl makes up a prayer –relatively innocuous, many mentions of xmas presents. During the war one of the aunts was engaged and her fiancé was injured so she went to nurse him and "hold his hand through hours of pain" and he died "in her arms". Mention of boys and girls mingling, boys carrying books for girls, "flirtations", and "school girl romances" but none of it described in detail. Girl wishes she could wear gowns with low necks that show her shoulders. Humorous description of a family with a father who is in and out of jail and mother not really around to raise them, leading to a dysfunctional household. Language- stupid, consarned, idiot.

Wilder, Laura Ingalls

Little House On The Prairie (4-6)

Classic story of a family that moves west. Girl asks parents if dogs go to heaven - father answers:"yes, G-d wouldn't leave a good dog out in the cold". A full chapter on xmas and girls hope of santa claus bringing her presents. Very warm and fuzzy description of the holiday.Father sings song about angels and saints (p170). Brief unimportant mention of women's undergarments. Description of "naked" Indians. Some scary moments when cabin is surrounded by wolves and when fear Indians will "massacre" (never defined but implication is clear).

Wilder, Laura Ingalls

Little House in the Big Woods (3-5)

Little girls growing up in a log cabin. Slaughter of animals described in painstaking detail. X-mas described in warm and fuzzy detail. Sunday described in detail - kids will draw parallel to Shabbos (lehavdil). Bedtime prayer - "now I lay me down". Co-ed dance - illustration of men and women dancing. Can tear out pages.

Williams, Tennessee

The Glass Menagerie

The Definitive Text- A New Directions Book

A play about a dysfunctional family that tries to escape their unhappy reality. The brother brings home a "gentlemen caller" to meet his extremely shy and withdrawn sister so he can run away and leave the family.

Introduction (by Robert Bray)p VIII-"celluloid brassieres"

pXII-"each struggling with an individual version of hell"

pXV-mention of a kiss and a brief romantic interlude

PXXII-brief mention of saints and madonnas

Scene One-p5-father abandoned the family

P6-mother is difficult. Son is chutzpadik (throughout the play)

P7-brother smokes (throughout the play)

P8-mother dreams of a time when she had 17 gentlemen callers at once

P8-nigger

P9-married man carried picture of another woman with him

Scene Two-p15-girl goes to the movies (and so does boy-thoughout the play)

Scene Three-19-mother sells magazine subscriptions to ladies who think in terms of

“delicate cuplike breast” etc.
p20-calls a woman with a sinus infection a “Christian martyr”
Scene Five-p39-a dance hall where couples outside are “kissing behind the ash pits and telephone poles”
P52-mother stuffs powder puffs in daughter’s bosom- calls them “gay deceivers”
Scene Six-p59-“a hell uv a lot
Scene Seven-p70- mention in jest of church of heavenly rest
P84-boy teaches girl to dance
P88-boy kisses girl
In back of book short essay by the author about how success can corrupt. Mentions “the bitch goddess” (p104)

Wyss, Johann David

The Swiss Family Robinson (6-8)

A very religious Christian family gets shipwrecked and make a wonderful life for selves on desert island. Lots of religion but nothing really objectionable. Very specific and painstaking details about all they did including killing animals for food and clothing; may be gory for some.