

Defending Jacob: A Novel
by William Landay
January 16, 2013

Andy Barber has been an assistant district attorney in his suburban Massachusetts County for more than twenty years. He is respected in his community, tenacious in the courtroom, and happy at home with his wife, Laurie, and son, Jacob. But when a shocking crime shatters their New England town, Andy is blindsided by what happens next: His fourteen-year-old son is charged with the murder of a fellow student. Every parental instinct Andy has rallies to protect his boy. Jacob insists that he is innocent, and Andy believes him. Andy must. He's his father. But as damning facts and shocking revelations surface, as a marriage threatens to crumble and the trial intensifies, as the crisis reveals how little a father knows about his son, Andy will face a trial of his own—between loyalty and justice, between truth and allegation, between a past he's tried to bury and a future he cannot conceive. Award-winning author William Landay has written the consummate novel of an embattled family in crisis—a suspenseful, character-driven mystery that is also a spellbinding tale of guilt, betrayal, and the terrifying speed at which our lives can spin out of control.

A Warrior's Path: Reflections along an Ancient Route
by Professor Casey Clabough
February 20, 2013

One of North America's oldest and most storied routes, "the Warrior's Path," as it was known by the Iroquois, was formed centuries ago by migrating animals and the humans who followed them. It spanned from the Iroquois lands of what is today New York State down the Appalachian Valley system and into the Cherokee country of Tennessee and North Georgia. Casey Clabough recently set out to hike more than five hundred miles of the route from Maryland to Tennessee and, in the process, to connect history, culture, and nature to the story of his own colonial German ancestors who traversed that particular section en route to the Smoky Mountains at the close of the 1700s. The Warrior's Path is both the story of Clabough's journey and a philosophical meditation upon the extraordinary people and events that have populated the thoroughfare over the course of several centuries. Rich in energy and lore, Clabough deftly employs both his ancestors' journey and his own as springboards for understanding the path's and the region's centrality in the American experience. ***Author will be joining the discussion.

The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that changed America
by Erik Larson
March 20, 2013

Author Erik Larson imbues the incredible events surrounding the 1893 Chicago World's Fair with such drama that readers may find themselves checking the book's categorization to be sure that *The Devil in the White City* is not, in fact, a highly imaginative novel. Larson tells the stories of two men: Daniel H. Burnham, the architect responsible for the fair's construction, and H.H. Holmes, a serial killer masquerading as a charming doctor. Burnham's challenge was immense. In a short period of time, he was forced to overcome the death of his partner and numerous other obstacles to construct the famous "White City" around which the fair was built. His efforts to complete the project, and the fair's incredible success, are skillfully related along with entertaining appearances by such notables as Buffalo Bill Cody, Susan B. Anthony, and Thomas Edison. The activities of the sinister Dr. Holmes, who is believed to be responsible for scores of murders around the time of the fair, are equally remarkable. He devised and erected the World's Fair Hotel, complete with crematorium and gas chamber, near the fairgrounds and used the event as well as his own charismatic personality to lure victims. Combining the stories of an architect and a killer in one book, mostly in alternating chapters, seems like an odd choice but it works. The magical appeal and horrifying dark side of 19th-century Chicago are both revealed through Larson's skillful writing.

Life of Pi by Yann Martel
April 17, 2013

The son of a zookeeper, Pi Patel has an encyclopedic knowledge of animal behavior and a fervent love of stories. When Pi is sixteen, his family emigrates from India to North America aboard a Japanese cargo ship, along with their zoo animals bound for new homes. The ship sinks. Pi finds himself alone in a lifeboat, his only companions a hyena, an orangutan, a wounded zebra, and Richard Parker, a 450-pound Bengal tiger. Soon the tiger has dispatched all but Pi, whose fear, knowledge, and cunning allow him to coexist with Richard Parker for 227 days while lost at sea. When they finally reach the coast of Mexico, Richard Parker flees to the jungle, never to be seen again. The Japanese authorities who interrogate Pi refuse to believe his story and press him to tell them "the truth." After hours of coercion, Pi tells a second story, a story much less fantastical, much more conventional—but is it more true?

***Lynchburg Reads Selection