

The Reality Tour Reading & Viewing List

Friends Beyond Borders and The Knights of Independence

The following books have been most helpful to Friends Beyond Borders and have strongly informed the itinerary of our summer project. These selections should offer you some background and themes to consider in preparation for our journey. **As always, parental discretion is advised.**

In the Time of Butterflies. Julia Alvarez, 1994. A beautiful novel inspired by the true story of the three Mirabal sisters who, in 1960, were murdered for their part in an underground plot to overthrow the Trujillo dictatorship. Because so little is known about the Mirabal sisters, they have almost become mythical. Julia Alvarez takes liberties when painting their picture and in doing so, creates characters not unlike ourselves. The campfire story that was once of three renegades is transformed into the very real and relatable story of the Mirabal sisters. Alvarez adds humanity and depth, forcing us to ask ourselves why we can't also stand for what's right. The book was adapted into a feature film starring Selma Hayek in 2001. [Click here to see the trailer.](#)

The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao. Junot Diaz, 2007. Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about an overweight boy from New Jersey who seeks love and success. When he travels to his homeland of Dominican Republic, he discovers the nation's history and fuku- a generational curse. **Diaz uses graphic language and racy content as the story unfolds.** As described in *The Guardian*: "The novel is narrated in a voice that's exotic in a very different way. This voice, which mixes street talk and dollops of Spanish with heavyweight nerd-speak and literary references, could easily have been a joke that soon got old. Instead, it starts to seem totally natural for the narrator to refer to "Papa Doc" Duvalier as "P Daddy" or say of Trujillo ("T-zillo"): 'Homeboy dominated Santo Domingo like it was his very own private Mordor'."

Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America. Juan Gonzalez (2011) Penguin Books. (Adapted as a documentary film). "Harvest of Empire," examines the direct connection between the long history of U.S. intervention in Latin America and the immigration crisis we face today. The section on the Dominican Republic and the aftermath of two U.S. occupations is particularly strong. (Dominican clip begins at 25:34) http://democracynow.org/2012/9/25/harvest_of_empire_new_film_recounts

The Farming of Bones Edwidge Danticat. *New York: Penguin, 1998.* Haitian writer describes the events in the Dominican Republic of 1937, when a nationalist uprising on the part of Haitian workers resulted in a little-known massacre. It is 1937 and Amabelle Désir, a young Haitian woman living in the Dominican Republic, has built herself a life as the servant and companion of the wife of a wealthy colonel. She and Sebastian, a cane worker, are deeply in love and plan to marry. But Amabelle's world collapses when a wave of genocidal violence, driven by Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, leads to the slaughter of Haitian workers. Amabelle and Sebastian are separated, and she desperately flees the tide of violence for a Haiti she barely remembers. Already acknowledged as a classic, this harrowing story of love and survival—from one of the most important voices of her generation—is an unforgettable memorial to the victims of the Parsley Massacre and a testimony to the power of human memory.

Dominican Haven: The Jewish Refugee Settlement in Sosua, 1940-1945 Marion Kaplan, 2008. A definitive history of this small and evanescent colony of German speaking Jews in the Dominican Republic, "Dominican Haven". This is the story of a small group of Jews, who, fleeing for their lives from Nazi persecution, found a welcoming haven in the Dominican Republic. The settlers arrived amid lush, tropical vegetation and could only describe this refuge as paradise. But they faced daunting problems. Middle-class, urban Europeans, they needed to learn a new language and acquire new skills while

adjusting to a new climate and worrying about loved ones left behind in Europe. They created a Jewish community with a synagogue, built a school, and a thriving dairy industry, working side by side with Dominicans in an atmosphere that was distinguished by its lack of Anti-Semitism.

Black in Latin America. Henry Louis Gates (2011) New York University Press (Also adapted as PBS documentary). The theme of race and culture identity is one of our major focus points as we examine the Haitian-Dominican border. In an NPR interview, Gates says, "My favorite country to explore this question was the Dominican Republic. In the DR, I spent two weeks asking people who would definitely be called black in [the United States] how they would describe themselves. And to a woman or a man, they each described themselves as 'indio,' though overwhelmingly, the mitochondrial DNA goes straight back to Africa. ... But when I asked 'Who's black? Who's negro?' they said, 'Oh, the Haitians. The Haitians are the negroes. We don't have any of them here.'" For a good read click here: [NPR Interview with Henry Louis Gates](#) To watch the Dominican-Haitian episode, click here: [Full Episode](#)

Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola, Michele Wucker, 2000 Michele Wucker uses the Caribbean's popular blood sport of cock fighting as an analogy for the complex, convoluted, histories of the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Like two roosters in a fighting arena, Haiti and the Dominican Republic are encircled by barriers of geography and poverty. They co-inhabit the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, but their histories are as deeply divided as their cultures: one French-speaking and black, one Spanish-speaking and mulatto. Wucker studies the cockfight ritual in considerable detail, focusing as much on the customs and histories of these two nations as on their contemporary lifestyles and politics. Wucker argues, Haitian and Dominican leaders often stir up nationalist disputes and exaggerate their cultural and racial differences as a way of deflecting other kinds of turmoil.

Lonely Planet. Dominican Republic <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/dominican-republic>

Waste Land 2010 Documentary NR - Although it's impossible to adequately prepare to experience the life behind "a dollar a day," this documentary offers a preview of what you'll see. Explained in a Netflix review, "Waste Land is an absolute powerhouse of a documentary. From the music to the cinematography, and especially in the portrayal of its beautiful characters, this film is a true masterpiece that is not to be missed. It follows the story of modern artist Vik Muniz as he undertakes his next project to show the world the true beauty and power of the human spirit as displayed through the lives of the people of the Gramacho landfill in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil - people who eat, sleep and live in garbage. It explores their tragic stories while following their individual transformations brought on by the raw power of art."

Blood Brother 2013 Documentary NR – On our journey we'll visit an orphanage where the children have been infected with the HIV virus. This documentary, as inspirational as it is educational, is about a guy who has visits the same type of orphanage in India and his life is forever changed. Another Netflix review, "A deeply affecting psychological portrait of a young do-gooder as he adapts to the regularity of tragedy in his new life. Addressing the heartrending issue of children living with HIV and AIDS is enormously complex, but Blood Brother accomplishes the challenge with sufficient grace and empathy to give hope to anyone concerned with this global affliction. It's clear that both Rocky and Hoover have been greatly changed by their experiences; what's more surprising is how effective Blood Brother is at moving the audience as well. The incredibly emotional footage shot over a five year period is by turns shocking, moving and heartbreaking. An affecting, unusual and intensely personal film, although it works more effectively on an emotional level than a fact-disseminating one. "Love is making someone who is sad feel happy," one girl says, answering an interviewer's question. "Blood Brother" shows that love."