

AFCLC Reads: Books about culture and language to add to your reading list

AFCLC's Outreach Team

Looking to gain more language, regional, and cultural knowledge? The Air Force Culture and Language Center's team of experts has compiled a list of their recommended reads. Here are some of their top picks below:

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Penguin Books, 1994)

This is novel is the first of a trilogy dealing with African encounters with European colonialism, and is one of the most well-known works of fiction from Africa. It follows one man's ultimately unsuccessful struggle to resist British colonialism as it undermines Igbo indigenous traditions in the late 1800s.

Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012)

The health crises of a Hmong child with epilepsy is at the center of the book, as the adults around her attempt to safeguard her health in culturally specific ways. The story reveals differences between Hmong ideas of epilepsy vs. Westernize medicine. These vastly differing views of health, medicine and identity lead to disastrous health consequences. While everyone in the story had the best intentions, readers come to see that cultural misunderstandings can derail even the most earnest efforts.

W.B. Gudykunst, Stella Ting-Toomey, & T. Nishida, *Communication in Personal Relationships Across Cultures* (Sage, 1996)

A great book for anyone interested in the field of intercultural communication, this edited volume with contributions from important scholars both explains and features what's known as emic and etic approaches to studying interpersonal communication across cultures. Concepts such as face, honor, individualism and collectivism, power distance, respect, and more are examined in specific cultural, regional, and country contexts. Although this is an academic book, it is presented in an accessible and engaging manner.

John Okada, *No-No Boy* (University of Washington Press, 1976)

This is a novel about a Japanese American man who refuses to serve in the U.S. military during a time when his family is detained in the WWII-era internment camps. It explores the personal and social consequences faced by people who were both the targets of systemic racist discrimination and were conscripted to fight in the war. Because they looked like the "enemy," many Japanese Americans felt forced to hyper-perform their loyalty to the U.S. This sometimes involved making choices that were not recognized as patriotic at the time.

Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (Random House, 1991)

This graphic novel depicts the experiences of the author's father who survived the Holocaust in Poland. The volumes tell the story in a rich and complex way using the cartoon genre. In depicting the Jews as mice, Spiegelman captures both the sense of small, defenseless victims and the Nazi characterizations of them as vermin. The volumes also delve into the often difficult relations between survivors and the next generation as the story alternates between the father's memories of Poland and their present-day encounters in New York.

Colin Woodard, *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America* (Penguin Books, 2012)

This book looks at North America through the lens of eleven distinct nations, each with its own unique history and identity. It offers a timely insight into the various, diverse elements that make up American culture today. He traces historical influences and conflicts to the current time and describes how each region continues to maintain distinguishing cultures, dialects, and identities and how those affect today's understanding of who is (or isn't) American.