

Caroline Beail  
Grade 4  
Dailard Elementary School  
San Carlos Library

“What?” I screamed, ready to faint. I had just received news that all the books in the world were about to disappear, except one that I could save. Which book should I save?

Then I decided on *Charlotte’s Web*. I loved *Charlotte’s Web*. The interesting characters were fun, and the author, E.B.White, kept you guessing at what was going to happen next.

One of the reasons I liked this book enough to save it was because it was about loving animals. The main character, a little girl named Fern, loved her pig dearly. She believed that the animals at her pig’s farm talked even though no one else did. Plus the animals themselves, Wilbur, Charlotte, and Templeton, moved me by spinning webs for each other, if you know what I mean.

Another thing I loved about *Charlotte’s Web* was that it was imaginative. Fern had imagination by calmly accepting the fact that the animals talked. After all, someone who didn’t have much imagination might think that they were going crazy. And her imagination was so strong that she still believed in the animals when her mother, Mrs. Arable, did not believe her.

And lastly, I should save this book because it was a moving story. Wilbur and Charlotte, a spider and a piglet, of all creatures, had a very strong friendship. Charlotte made big sacrifices and took risks for her friendship. She went to the fair with the pig and spun a web for him there even though she would probably have rather died in the barn instead of at the fairgrounds.

If I could save only one book, I would save *Charlotte's Web* because it was an imaginative, moving book for animal lovers. Even if all the books were to disappear, including this one, I would still carry the story in my heart because it was memorable to me since Fern and I share many qualities and personality traits. We both have big imaginations, and we are passionate.

Cole Black  
Grade 4  
Hawthorne Elementary School  
North Clairemont Library

If all the books in the world were to disappear, but you could save one, what would it be?

It is just another frigid October morning in England. We can hear the familiar whistle of our master and run excitedly to the door to start the day. This day, however, was anything but normal. I find myself and 68 other Canadian sledging dogs being loaded onto a ship. We are embarking on a journey that many of us won't survive. We will attempt to cross the South Pole on the brave ship *Endurance*.

Two weeks into the journey our ship gets stuck in the ice. Our supply of provisions is dwindling, and we slowly begin to starve. Chained in our kennels, many of us suffer from infections from sitting too long. Frozen and restless, we are finally allowed to leave the ship and escape to the icy land below. As our paws touch down on the ice, our ship gives one mighty groan before it slowly sinks to the ocean floor.

Our time on the ice is not fun, but we do what we are told and don't complain. The ice brings new dangers like polar bears, cold exposure, and worsening starvation. Our job is to serve our leaders and complete the tasks we are given. We provide companionship to the distraught crew and pull 1000-pound sleds for hundreds of miles. The desperate crew has started to sacrifice us for meat. Even though we are scared for our lives, we know our sacrifice is essential for the survival of the group. I am the only one left from the 69 of us who began this voyage. I know that my time is coming soon, and I am ready.

I could not help but compare the plight of the sledging dogs with the challenges of today's soldiers. In both scenarios the issue of sacrifice is displayed in many different ways. On the *Endurance* the dogs sacrificed their bodies, strength, and finally their lives. Such sacrifices can be observed in the lives of today's military. Military personnel sacrifice time with their families, their lives, their bodies, minds, and often their lives.

While the dogs' sacrifice was involuntary, I know of a story about a Navy SEAL named Michael Monsoor who sacrificed his life *voluntarily*. This brave man jumped on a grenade, knowing it would take his life in order to save the lives of his platoon mates. He could have dived away from the grenade and saved himself. Instead he selflessly sacrificed himself to ensure the survival of the group. This act of bravery earned him the Medal of Honor.

If all the books in the world were about to disappear, and I could save just one, I would save *The Endurance* by Caroline Alexander because of the important lessons it teaches. These lessons include bravery, determination, sacrifice, and selflessness. The sledging dogs in *The Endurance* symbolize these important lessons just as the brave soldiers do on the front lines of today's military conflicts.

If this book were to disappear, these lessons would be lost from society forever. This would be a catastrophe because we would start to become selfish and cower before our obstacles. Our society would plunge into turmoil, and nobody would look out for each other. By preserving this book, we would guarantee that these critical lessons would survive, continue and *endure*.

Cole Black  
Grade4  
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Issues of sorrow and grief as seen in *Sky of Red Poppies* by Zohreh Ghahremani

The novel *Sky of Red Poppies* is a story about sorrow, grief, and loss and a woman's struggle to face these challenges. The story's main character, Shereen, is a poor Iranian woman who struggles against discrimination throughout her life because of her social class and beliefs. Her life is defined by one disaster after another. Her brother and husband participate in a bank robbery that the secret police, SAVAK, consider an act of terrorism. For their part in the robbery, they are both killed. Shireen is taken into custody because of her husband's role in the Fadaiyan and for sympathizing with the rebels to overthrow the monarchy in Iran. Shireen's bail is set so high that her poor family can't afford to pay it. While in prison, she is faced with beatings and solitary confinement as the SAVAK demand that she give them information about the rebels. The SAVAK threaten to cut off her baby's fingers if she does not give them the information she wants. These are some examples of how Shireen faces physical and mental anguish throughout her life.

While the injustices Shireen faced were described vividly, I was even more impressed by how she handled these unthinkable challenges. She copes with her rough life by being resilient and proud and pushes through the obstacles. She accepts her eight-year prison sentence despite the injustice so that her family doesn't have to find bail money and because she is proud of her values. She shows strength even through torture and beatings and tries to hold on to whatever dignity she has left. She does not want to show any weakness. Shireen

prays to her God so that she can get out of prison. But soon she begins to lose faith in her God when her prayers are not answered. To keep her sanity she teaches other prisoners language and poetry. This is an example of her selflessness even in the harshest circumstances.

In many ways Shireen is like a red poppy. Red poppies survive through tough winters and flourish and bloom despite harsh conditions. They are proud, resilient, independent, and fighting flowers – just like Shireen. Throughout the story Shireen always has hope that things will get better. She pulls through the toughest obstacles when others would crumble. Her life symbolizes that of the red poppy.

I can't identify with this book or Shireen in any way, shape, or form. And that's exactly why I picked this book. I live in a family with five boys and one girl. I know very little about a woman's perspective on life. I live in a democracy and in one of the nicest cities in the world. I know little to nothing about being or taking part in a rebellion against a monarchy. My family is intact, healthy, and free from political strife. I have no experience with political unrest, uprisings or murders. Reading this book has expanded my knowledge and awareness about suffering and pain in other places of the world.

Shireen had to deal with so much grief in her life that it makes me wonder how I would react if something terrible happened to me or someone I love. Would I be like a red poppy and stand tall and push through my adversity? Or would I lock myself away from the world and live in the sorrowful memories of my past. My life is easy compared to the hardship Shireen had to endure. What would I do? How would I react when trouble eventually came to my door?

Delilah Delgado  
Grade 4  
Hearst Elementary School  
Benjamin Library

## The Last Book

If, for some unknown reason, all the books in the world disappeared, I would simply not be able to bear it. I would have to save at least one. I would probably have a tough time deciding, but I would most likely choose *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling. Why, do you ask? Well, I'll tell you.

First of all, the plot captures you and reels you in. You will never be able to stop reading after you find out that Harry is a wizard and goes to a special, magical school just for people like him. And to top it all off, he is apparently the "chosen one" who is supposed to avenge a famous dark wizard who killed Harry's parents. It is jam-packed with surprises and mystery.

Second of all, the detail is amazing. The book is packed with it, and it's not the kind of detail that bores you and makes you go to sleep. It's the kind of detail that forms a vivid picture in your mind, that paints the colors of the story. It uses descriptive words such as in the sentence, "His face was almost completely hidden by a long, shaggy mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard, but you could make out his eyes, glinting like black beetles under his hair." Now, that's what I call detail.

Third, the characters, aside from being wizards, are exactly like you and me. They feel the same emotions as you, think the same thoughts as you might, and may react the same way you would if you were in that particular plight. You can compare yourself to any of the characters. For example, I compare myself most

to Hermione Granger because I always carry around a stack of books, I read textbooks in bed (which is indecent in anyone except Hermione), I love school, and I have brown frizzy hair and brown eyes.

I hope all the books in the world never disappear, but if it does happen, then I hope you can now see why I would choose this amazing book to save.



Hannah Nguyen  
Grade 4  
Ellen Browning Scripps Elementary School  
Scripps Ranch Library

My grandparents would sometimes talk about Vietnam where my family is from. Hearing my mom's childhood stories was never a big deal to me, but I wasn't sure why. My mom often said, 'Someday you will understand.' My mom along with her two siblings fled Vietnam before the Communists took power. What I remember most from my mom's stories was the word *hope*. She used it quite often when she talked about her childhood. I never understood the true meaning of the word until I read *Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhha Lai. It made me think that if my grandparents had never had hope, my mom's situation would be a lot different, and I wouldn't be so lucky to be living in San Diego. If all the books in the world were to disappear and I had to choose one book, this would be the book I would save and cherish.

In the story Thanhha was forced to flee her native country, Vietnam. Although the United States would give a better education, unlimited food choices, freedom and safety from Communist ruling, she was forced to leave a familiar place, a place where she was comforted by familiar food scents, sounds of her native language, and kids with "pale skin" and "slanted eyes" just like herself. She often thought, "No one would believe me, but at times I would choose war time in Saigon over peace time in Alabama." Thanhha often thought it would be easier to live with familiarity than learn new changes. Just like Thanhha my mom had many hopes that helped her overcome many difficult periods in her life. Thanhha's hope to one day take care of her mother in America helped her survive 30 days on a boat from Vietnam to Guam without any private restrooms

or showers, and limited food and water. Her hope to speak English just as well as her American classmates helped her to become a successful writer.

Going back to my mom's saying "Someday you will understand," it was in late November, the day I finished reading the book. My mom's hope for me to understand not only where she came from but to be able to imagine her starting a new life in America while learning to overcome challenges happened when I read the book. I never want this book to disappear because I don't want this part of history to be forgotten. My hopes are one day my children and their children will read it. Ms. Thanhha Lai would like readers to understand she had a lot of hope which kept her from being afraid of telling her story. She hopes for others to not be afraid to share their meaningful stories which can make a difference in someone's life. When my mom suggested that I read this book, I have to admit, my hope was just to have one more entry in my reading log. It wasn't until I finished the book, that I hoped my mom realized that her childhood stories are now more than a big deal to me, they are part of who I am.

Anyah St. Pierre  
Grade 8  
St. Didacus School  
Kensington Library

### Saving *White Fang*

Imagine you turned on the TV just in time to hear a news anchor announce that a strange scientific phenomenon would cause all books in the world to disappear. However, a scientist appears and declares that each person on the planet can select one book to be put into a special safe that would protect its contents from being destroyed. You rush to your bookshelf only to find yourself facing dozens of choice. Which book would you save? If I were facing this situation, I would choose *White Fang* because of its psychological theories, its being a classic, and its conclusion.

*White Fang* is a wonderful classic written by Jack London that takes place in the 1890s right around the time of the Gold Rush. It is the story of an animal that is part wolf and part dog and how his personality is altered as his surroundings change. One of the reasons why this book should be saved is because of how well the main character's personality displays human nature. White Fang, the protagonist of the book, starts out as an innocent puppy, and as he ages, he passes through the hands of multiple cruel owners. Eventually he is molded into a creature so fierce and merciless that when he does get a chance to have a peaceful life, he, at first, rejects it. White Fang's human-like personality in the story opens a window for us so that we may get a glimpse at the human condition. This book shows us that we are affected by our environments, that our very personalities are altered. For example in *White Fang* the wolf-dog passes from the paws of his nurturing mother to the hands of the cruel Native American,

Gray Beaver, to the hands of the horrible Beauty Smith. He goes from being young and innocent to obedient and deathly afraid of punishment. When he is put in the dog fights, he becomes a bloodthirsty creature with only one thought on his mind: "Kill or be killed." Many people are changed after a dramatic experience, good and bad. They may develop intense fears after a traumatic event or have large personality defects because of the way certain individuals have treated them. *White Fang* gives the reader a chance to examine human nature and the way certain environments affect people.

This book can be a good tool to look into the human condition, but here is a much simpler reason for why *White Fang* should be saved: it is important to remember the classics. While the definition of classics may be "works of art of recognized and established value," I define the word as "works of art that should be remembered for all time." *White Fang* fits this definition. Even if all the books in the world were not about to disappear, remembering the classics is a big issue. Most people are so caught in the chaos and ideas of our modern day that they forget that we can read about simpler times. Books all over the world had constantly disappeared until we decided to preserve the works of writers before us. Many ideas that we have today are derived from concepts discussed in the classics. This book displays many of those ideas through the life of White Fang.

Not many classics have cliffhangers which leads me to my next point. *White Fang* should be saved because of its conclusion. Nowadays too many books end with cliffhangers which often leave an unsatisfied feeling in the reader. Some cliffhangers are well written and well timed so that the reader is left with a good mystery that they can play out on their own, but others end so abruptly that the books don't leave any mystery, just a story that hasn't been finished. I believe

a well written book should make the reader pleased with the conclusion, not the absence of one. *White Fang* gives a good ending but throws in all the adventure and surprises of a story with a good plot. While tragedy and cliffhangers can make a story end well, they must be used to show a purpose, demonstrate a moral or lesson, or help begin another story. *White Fang* can cause tears and laughter while holding you in suspense as all the twists and turns cause you to doubt your visions of the ending again and again.

You should stop, and, if only for a second, think “classic v. modern-day literature.” You should not have to choose between the two but simply know that while modern literature is often well-written and interesting: classics are seriously under-rated. *White Fang* is my favorite book because of its take on human nature, its conclusion, and its being an extraordinary classic. If all the books in the world were about to disappear forever, *White Fang* is worthy of being saved.

Daniela Schoenfeld  
Grade 4  
De Portola Middle School  
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*Into the Beautiful North*

To many non-Americans America is like the light at the end of the tunnel. It is a dream that seems as if it may never come true; yet you never forget it.

*Into the Beautiful North*, a realistic fiction novel by Luis Alberto Urrea, discusses this dream through the adventures of Nayeli and her friends as they travel from Sinaloa to San Diego.

Nayeli, along with many American-hopefuls, wants to join this beautiful nation where people can go to church or choose not to. They want to become part of the ranks that enjoy liberties and securities that range from knowing that the police are working for them, all the way to having the freedom to date someone of the same gender. While some Americans tend to lose sight of these liberties and securities, non-Americans hold them very dear to their hearts.

Just like so many other immigrants and non-Americans Nayeli and her friends think that America is trouble free. Former President Ronald Reagan said in his 1984 acceptance speech, America is “a shining city on a hill.” (*Reagan Denney*). After all everywhere people look, they see super stars and billionaires. America seems perfect to them when they see celebrities wearing designer clothes while driving their Porsches and Ferraris all over the news.

However, like many other countries, America is struggling. There are people out of work and homeless people in the streets. Millions live below the poverty line. But still, Nayeli and her fellow non-Americans have not lost faith in

the American dream. They believe that if they come to America and they work hard enough, they can make a decent life for themselves and their families. Many of the people that come over the border have nothing to lose. They tell themselves things can only get better.

Nayeli, her girlfriends, and Tacho expose a truth though. When Nayeli thinks that “Only American skies, apparently were so stunningly blue” (Urrea 54), she discovers that it is the same sky she lives under in Sinaloa. Once she and her friends learned what life was like in America, they realized how special their home was and decided that they wouldn’t trade it for anything.

This came as shock. This was the Nayeli who had always dreamed of big cities and sparkling skylines, the Nayeli who fantasized about America, the Nayeli that wanted adventure and change. And now, all she wanted was to return to her village in Sinaloa.

To the reader it seems as though she would fall in love with the beautiful country and decide to stay. While she did fall in love with America, she couldn’t bear the thought of leaving her modest town of Tres Camarones to wither and die. On her journey she finds that many of the men that had left their homeland for the north, longed to return to their country and their homes. Many of the men discovered that work was even harder to come by in America than in their own villages.

Everyone needs a place to call home. We may not think much of it, but once we leave it, we realize just how precious it is to us. Home truly is where the heart is, and while adventure and change are exciting and grand, there is nothing like the feeling of returning home.