CANDYFREAK: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE CHOCOLATE UNDERBELLY OF AMERICA BY STEVE ALMOND
The appropriately named Almond goes beyond candy obsession to enter the realm of "freakdom." Right up front, he divulges that he has eaten a piece of candy "every single day of his entire life," "thinks about candy at least once an hour" and "has between three and seven pounds of candy in his house at all times." Indeed, Almond's fascination is no mere hobby—it's taken over his life. And what's a Boston College creative writing teacher to do when he can't get M&Ms, Clark Bars and Bottle Caps off his mind? Write a book on candy, of course. Almond's awareness of how strange he is—the man actually buys "seconds" of certain candies and refers to the popular chocolate mint parfait as "the Andes oeuvre"—is strangely endearing. -Publishers Weekly

COLUMBINE BY DAVE CULLEN
In this remarkable account of the April 20, 1999, Columbine High School shooting, journalist Cullen not only dispels several of the prevailing myths about the event but tackles the hardest question of all: why did it happen? Drawing on extensive interviews, police reports and his own reporting, Cullen meticulously pieces together what happened when 18-year-old Eric Harris and 17-year-old Dylan Klebold killed 13 people before turning their guns on themselves. Readers will come away from Cullen's unflinching account with a deeper understanding of what drove these boys to kill, even if the answers aren't easy to stomach. -Publishers Weekly

THE PSYCHOPATH TEST: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE MADNESS INDUSTRY BY JON RONSON
In this madcap journey, a bestselling journalist investigates psychopaths and the industry of doctors, scientists, and everyone else who studies them. The Psychopath Test is a fascinating journey through the minds of madness. Jon Ronson's exploration of a potential hoax being played on the world's top neurologists takes him, unexpectedly, into the heart of the madness industry. An influential psychologist who is convinced that many important CEOs and politicians are, in fact, psychopaths teaches Ronson how to spot these high-flying individuals by looking out for little telltale verbal and nonverbal clues. And so Ronson, armed with his new psychopath-spotting abilities, enters the corridors of power. … Ronson not only solves the mystery of the hoax but also discovers, disturbingly, that sometimes the personalities at the helm of the madness industry are, with their drives and obsessions, as mad in their own way as those they study. And that relatively ordinary people are, more and more, defined by their maddest edges. -Amazon

LIFE ANIMATED: A STORY OF SIDEKICKS, HEROES, AND AUTISM BY RON SUSKIND
Imagine being trapped inside a Disney movie and having to learn about life mostly from animated characters dancing across a screen of color. A fantasy? A nightmare? This is the real-life story of Owen Suskind, the son of the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Ron Suskind and his wife, Cornelia. An autistic boy who couldn't speak for years, Owen memorized dozens of Disney movies, turned them into a language to express love and loss, kinship, brotherhood. The family was forced to become animated characters, communicating with him in Disney dialogue and song, until they all emerge, together, revealing how, in darkness, we all literally need stories to survive. -Amazon

ONE SHOT AT FOREVER BY BY CHRIS BALLARD
In 1971, a small-town high school baseball team from rural Illinois playing with hand-me-down uniforms and peace signs on their hats defied convention and the odds. Led by an English teacher with no coaching experience, the Macon Ironmen emerged from a field of 370 teams to become the smallest school in Illinois history to make the state final, a distinction that still stands. There, sporting long hair, and warming up to Jesus Christ Superstar, the Ironmen would play a dramatic game against a Chicago powerhouse that would change their lives forever. -Amazon

GANG LEADER FOR A DAY BY SUDHIR VENKATESH
In the late 1980s and 1990s, rogue sociologist Venkatesh infiltrated the world of tenant and gang life in Chicago's Robert Taylor Home projects. He found a complex system of compromises and subsistence that makes life (barely) manageable. Venkatesh excellently illustrates the resourcefulness of impoverished communities in contrast to a society that has virtually abandoned them. He also reveals the symbiotic relationship between the community and the gangs that helps sustain each. -Publishers Weekly
RIPPED: HOW THE WIRED GENERATION REVOLUTIONIZED MUSIC BY GREG KOT
In what has become a growing field, Kot's account of the music industry's massive struggles and glimmers of success in the digital age stands out for its sturdily constructed prose and command of up-to-date facts. The narrative moves chronologically from the late 1990s to the late 2000s, pivoting deftly from such subjects as the havoc deregulation wreaked on mainstream radio, the recording industry's attempted shock and awe-style crackdown on downloading and the recent pay-what-you-want online selling model pioneered by Radiohead and Nine Inch Nails. One of Kot's great strengths is that he is an able and passionate chronicler of the independent labels, musicians and critics whose rise in influence has been the definite upside of the old power structure's collapse. Kot gives us the first essential, critical account of the ever-expanding reach of the indie music Web site Pitchfork Media, a well informed analysis of the history and recent hyperdevelopment of sample-based music and self-contained portraits of new model artists such as Arcade Fire and Bright Eyes. -Publishers Weekly

MOUNTAINS BEYOND MOUNTAINS by TRACY KIDDER
Kidder, a master documentarian, has primarily practiced his art on his home turf, Massachusetts, proving that one small place abounds in amazing stories. Now, in his most compelling chronicle to date, this Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award winner investigates a far harsher world in the company of Paul Farmer, a radical public health reformer devoted to providing medical care to the poor, mainly in Haiti. A Harvard-educated medical anthropologist, TB expert, and MacArthur "genius" gifted with an unshakable moral imperative, an ardent imagination, and limitless energy, compassion, and chutzpah, Farmer created Partners in Health, a renegade yet hugely influential organization. A powerful presence, this uncompromising visionary is too spectacularly impressive not to be disconcerting, and Kidder shares his puzzlement over and occasional discomfort with this charismatic and tirelessly giving man who eschews personal comfort to care for the "underdogs of the underdogs." As Kidder accompanies Farmer on his exhausting and risky daily routines and epic travels, he parses the cruel realities of deep poverty and the maddening politics of international health care. Most importantly, Kidder portrays a genuinely inspired and heroic individual, whose quest for justice will make every reader examine her or his life in a new light. -Booklist

OUTLiERS: THE STORY OF SUCCESS by MALCOLM GLADWELL
In Outliers, Gladwell (The Tipping Point) once again proves masterful in a genre he essentially pioneered — the book that illuminates secret patterns behind everyday phenomena. Outliers begins with a provocative look at why certain five-year-old boys enjoy an advantage in ice hockey, and how these advantages accumulate over time. We learn what Bill Gates, the Beatles and Mozart had in common: along with talent and ambition, each enjoyed an unusual opportunity to intensively cultivate a skill that allowed them to rise above their peers. A detailed investigation of the unique culture and skills of Eastern European Jewish immigrants persuasively explains their rise in 20th-century New York, first in the garment trade and then in the legal profession…Gladwell tears down the myth of individual merit to explore how culture, circumstance, timing, birth and luck account for success — and how historical legacies can hold others back despite ample individual gifts. -Publishers Weekly

YOU ARE NOT A GADGET: A MANIFESTO by JARON LANIER
Computer scientist and Internet guru Lanier's fascinating and provocative full-length exploration of the Internet's problems and potential is destined to become a must-read for both critics and advocates of online-based technology and culture. Lanier takes a step back and critiques the current digital technology, more deeply exploring the ideas from his famous 2000 Wired magazine article, One-Half of a Manifesto, which argued against more wildly optimistic views of what computers and the Internet could accomplish. His main target here is Web 2.0, the current dominant digital design concept commonly referred to as open culture. Lanier forcefully argues that Web 2.0 sites such as Wikipedia undervalue humans in favor of anonymity and crowd identity. He brilliantly shows how large Web 2.0-based information aggregators such as Amazon.com — as well as proponents of free music file sharing— have created a hive mind mentality emphasizing quantity over quality. -Publishers Weekly

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------Rank your top 4 choices. I will make every effort to accommodate your first choice, but because of group sizes, you may end up with a different text. Online survey opens 4/2 at 3 PM.