

## Book Group

Our Book Group meets ten times a year, almost always at 7:15 on the last Thursday of the month. While some of our participants come to just about every meeting, others drop in only when they are particularly interested in the current month's selection.

Most of our books are contemporary or classic fiction, but we also dabble in the occasional drama, poetry collection, or work of nonfiction. We welcome suggestions on what to read next, our only caveat being that we need to be able to borrow from other libraries sufficient copies of the book to meet demand.

Take a look below to see what we've read so far:

### 2016:

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi	<i>Americanah</i>
Straub, Peter	<i>Ghosts</i>
Klebold, Sue	<i>A Mother's Reckoning--Living in the Aftermath of Tragedy</i>
Rogan, Charlotte	<i>Lifeboat</i>
Brown, Daniel	<i>The Boys in the Boat--Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Olympics</i>
Payton, Brian	<i>The Wind is Not a River</i>
Ng, Celeste	<i>Everything I Never Told You</i>
Backman, Frederik	<i>A Man Called Ove</i>
Butler, Nickolas	<i>Shotgun Lovesongs</i>
Mandel, Emily St. John	<i>Station Eleven</i>

### 2015:

Doyle, Brian	<i>The Plover</i>
Lovecraft, H. P.	<i>Selected stories</i>
Theroux, Paul	<i>Mosquito Coast</i>
Simsion, Graeme	<i>The Rosie Project</i>
Markham, Beryle	<i>West with the Night</i>
Fowler, Karen Joy	<i>We are All Completely Beside Ourselves</i>
Grissom, Kathleen	<i>The Kitchen House</i>
Brooks, Geraldine	<i>The People of the Book</i>
Zevin, Gabrielle	<i>The Storied Life of A. J. Fikry</i>
Kent, Hannah	<i>Burial Rites</i>

### 2014:

#### Schwalbe, Will *The End of Your Life Book Club*

We all agreed that this was a touching tribute to Schwalbe's mother. With one or two exceptions, though, it did not generate the list of "must reads" that some of us had hoped for.

#### Poe, Edgar Allan *Selected short stories*

One of us enjoyed the short stories but most of us, to varying degrees, disliked them. Almost all of us, though, could find at least one or two that we did like and, interestingly, we did not necessarily enjoy the same stories. A good discussion selection, however.

#### Gaiman, Neil *The Anansi Boys*

This was chosen to give us a more light-hearted book, after a couple of recent intense readings, and it seemed to do the trick. As with many entertaining stories, however, it did not generate a lot of discussion (although it did lead to some interesting talk about wild animals we have seen, etc.). Most of us liked it to varying degrees, and it was the first some of us had heard of Anansi, the trickster god, so it was also educational!

#### Tuchman, Barbara *The Guns of August*

We read this nonfiction Pulitzer in honor of the 100th anniversary of World War I, "The War to End all Wars." It was a more detailed book than we usually read, and just a few of us managed to get through the entire book. We did have a fair amount of discussion, both about the war and about the author's writing.

#### Johnson, Adam *The Orphan Master's Son*

We had mixed reactions to this Pulitzer prize-winning novel about life in Kim Jong-Il's North Korea. Those of us who liked it found the story compelling, if uncomfortable, and the writing beautiful. One person did not care for the small part of the book she had read, and chose not to continue, and one of us

who did finish the book found it so unhappy and depressing that he could not feel happy to have read it. It was, however, a book that led to a lot of spirited discussion.

**Jonasson, Jonas**

***The One-Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out  
the Window and Disappeared***

This was a lighthearted change of pace from our last couple of books, with one of us comparing it to the novels of Donald Westlake and another of us, to Carl Hiassen. "Caper" was the term that came to mind for one of us. Most of us agreed that the story was amusing, although one of us was a bit uncomfortable that Allan and his companions went unpunished for their misdeeds, and another found the switching back and forth between time periods was confusing. Sadly, it wasn't a great book for conversation, not even (to the surprise of one of us) about the issues associated with old age.

**Kingsolver, Barbara**

***The Poisonwood Bible***

Most of us enjoyed this almost without reservation, and it led to stimulating conversation, but a couple of us did feel that we could have done without the final section, which we described as "preachy" and an "overlong epilogue." Highly recommended!

**Atkinson, Kate**

***Life after Life***

We were a mixed bag when it came to enjoying this. A couple of us just couldn't get into it, while several of us liked it very much. We all agreed that it was difficult to keep track of just where we were in Ursula's life (and, indeed, which life!), but most of us seemed to enjoy speculating on the "what ifs."

**Gibbons, Stella**

***Cold Comfort Farm***

Most of us liked this, to varying degrees, although a couple of us didn't finish it. One of us felt like she was missing the joke with references that she didn't recognize. Another of us thought the book was amusing and enjoyable even without recognizing all of the references.

**Crichton, Michael**

***Timeline***

One person could not get over the lack of literary quality in this story, and felt it overshadowed anything the author was trying to say. The rest of were willing to forgive the inferior quality because of the intriguing science fiction premise of time travel.

**1997:**

Berg, Elizabeth

***Pull of the Moon, The***

Good discussion about aging, dreams, women's issues.

Lewis, Sinclair

***Main Street***

Most of the group found this cumbersome to get through, old fashioned, and not particularly interesting.

Berg, Elizabeth

***Durable Goods***

Most of the group enjoyed this, but it didn't generate much discussion.

de Bernieres, Louis

***Corelli's Mandolin***

Great story and beautiful writing.

Atwood, Margaret

***Handmaid's Tale, The***

A favorite of the person who suggested it, but not liked by the others.

"Too depressing." See 2007 entry, though.

Sparks, Nicholas

***Notebook, The***

Liked by some, disliked by some, and others had mixed feelings. Generated a lot of discussion both on the subject matter of Alzheimer's and on the author's writing style.

Berendt, John

***Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil***

Generally liked; some fascination with The Lady Chablis.

Drabble, Margaret

***Realms of Gold, The***

Another favorite of the person who suggested it, but strongly disliked by most of the group. "Tedious."

Gordimer, Nadine

***My Son's Story***

Card, Orson Scott

***Ender's Game***

Most readers didn't have much of a reaction to this, and one person suggested it be left to the teenagers.

Hegi, Ursula

***Stones from the River***

**1998:**

Thomas, Elizabeth Marshall

***Reindeer Moon***

Not a great book for discussion, but interesting, and enjoyed by most of the group.

Brown, Rosellen

***Before and After***

Generated a lot of discussion about teenagers, guilt, and families.

Ireland, Patricia

***What Women Want***

Interesting reading; lots of discussion.

Ackerman, Diane

***Natural History of the Senses, A***

Most of the group thought the book was too long and detailed, but we ended up

talking a lot about perfume, weirdest foods we've eaten, etc.

Munro, Alice *Open Secrets*

Consensus was that the stories were so "clever" that we missed the point of most of them. Little discussion. Awkward silences!

Cornwell, Patricia *Postmortem*

People either liked or or didn't, but not much to discuss.

Mayes, Frances *Under the Tuscan Sun*

Sheehy, Gail *Understanding Men's Passages*

Alexie, Sherman *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, The*

Yoshimoto, Banana *Kitchen*

Eliot, George *Middlemarch*

**1999:**

McCourt, Frank *Angela's Ashes*

Enjoyed by all. Lots of discussion about the author's life and how remarkable it was that he pulled himself out of poverty.

Garcia Marquez, Gabriel *Love in the Time of Cholera*

Disliked. One reader suggested it should have been named "Lust in the Time of Cholera."

Hansen, Ron *Mariette in Ecstasy*

Cather, Willa *Professor's House, The*

du Maurier, Daphne *Frenchman's Creek*

Lukewarm response. Most people thought it was an OK entertainment, but had nothing to discuss.

Gardner, John *Grendel*

Faulkner, William *As I Lay Dying*

**2000:**

O'Connor, Flannery *Short Stories*

Most of us liked at least some of her stories. Pretty good conversation.

Trollope, Anthony *Warden, The*

Not a memorable discussion, but people liked the book.

Alvarez, Julia *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*

Rivers, Edgar Lee *Spoon River Anthology*

Hardy, Thomas *Far From the Madding Crowd*

Guterson, David *Snow Falling on Cedars*

Bohjalian, Chris *Trans-Sister Radio*

James, Henry *Turn of the Screw, The*

Lanchester, John *Mr. Phillips*

White, Michael *Brother's Blood, A*

**2001:**

Austen, Jane *Pride and Prejudice*

Frankl, Viktor *Man's Search for Meaning*

Banks, Russell *Sweet Hereafter, The*

Naslund, Sena Jeter *Ahab's Wife*

Reardon, Lisa *Blameless*

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor *Crime and Punishment*

Erdrich, Louise *Beet Queen, The*

Orwell, George *Animal Farm*

**2002:**

Hardy, Thomas *Woodlanders, The*

Liked by most of the group, but not as much substance as some of his other works.

Irving, John *Widow for One Year*

Mixed reactions. One person wouldn't finish it. Led to some interesting discussion about morals, parenting, etc.

Greene, Graham *Human Factor, The*

A favorite of the person who recommended it, but a lukewarm response from everyone else.

Paton, Alan *Cry the Beloved Country*

Well-liked; generated a good discussion.

Steinbeck, John *Pastures of Heaven*

Not a favorable reaction to the short stories, but it generated a lot of discussion about motives, blame, etc., so ended

up a success.

Morris, Willie *My Dog Skip*

Fun discussion of childhood freedom then vs. now, and lots of "back in my day..."

Lewis, C. S. *Screwtape Letters, The*

Hardy, Thomas *Pair of Blue Eyes, A*

Shelley, Mary *Frankenstein*

Tannen, Deborah *I Only Say This Because I Love You*

**2003:**

Steinbeck, John *Grapes of Wrath, The*

Shute, Neville *On the Beach*

Letts, Billie *Honk and Holler Opening Soon, The*

Collins, Wilkie *Moonstone, The*

Wodehouse, P. G. *Code of the Woosters*  
 Peters, Ellis *Potter's Field, The*  
 Stowe, Harriet Beecher *Uncle Tom's Cabin*  
 Fitzgerald, F. Scott *Great Gatsby, The*  
 McCall Smith, Alexander *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, The*  
 Hawthorne, Nathaniel *House of the Seven Gables, The*  
 Hersey, John *Hiroshima*

**2004:**

Wharton, Edith *Buccaneers, The*  
 Brooks, Geraldine *Year of Wonders, A*  
 Beckett, Samuel *Waiting for Godot*  
 Hemingway, Ernest *Sun Also Rises, The*  
 Gaines, Ernest *Lesson Before Dying, A*  
 Hurston, Nora Zeale *Their Eyes Were Watching God*  
 Haddon, Mark *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*  
 Dickens, Charles *Our Mutual Friend*  
 Jackson, Shirley *Haunting of Hill House, The*  
 Condon, Richard *Manchurian Candidate, The*

**2005:**

Caldwell, Ian *Rule of Four, The*  
 Forster, E. M. *Room with a View, A*  
 Miller, Arthur *Death of a Salesman*  
 Picoult, Jodi *My Sister's Keeper*  
 Wilde, Oscar *Picture of Dorian Gray*  
 Smith, Dodie *I Capture the Castle*  
 Goldberg, Myra *Bee Season*  
 McCullough, David *John Adams*  
 Stoker, Bram *Dracula*  
 Ishiguro, Kazuo *Never Let Me Go*

**2006:**

Cather, Willa *My Antonia*  
 Sinclair, Upton *The Jungle*  
 Russo, Richard *Straight Man*  
 Dante *Inferno*  
 Warren, Robert Penn *All the King's Men*  
 Wilder, Thornton *Bridge of San Luis Rey, The*  
 Fergus, Jim *One Thousand White Women*  
 Boulle, Pierre *Bridge Over the River Kwai*  
 Otsuka, Julie *When the Emperor Was Divine*  
 Lee, Harper *To Kill a Mockingbird*  
 Atwood, Margaret *Alias, Grace*

**2007:**

Picoult, Jodie *Pact, The*  
 Lahiri, Jhumpa *Interpreter of Maladies*  
 Atwood, Margaret *Handmaid's Tale, The*  
 Good discussion about the story, and its relevance.  
 Jones, Edward P. *Known World, The*  
 LeHane, Dennis *Shutter Island*  
 Austen, Jane *Mansfield Park*  
 Allgor, Catherine *Perfect Union : Dolley Madison and the Creation of the*  
*American Nation, A*

Maguire, Gregory *Wicked : The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of*  
 Robinson, Marilynne *Gilead*

*the West*

**2008:**

Anderson, Sherwood *Winesburg, Ohio*  
 Niffenegger, Audrey *Time Traveler's Wife, The*  
 Enjoyed by all.  
 Rodriguez, Deborah *Kabul Beauty School, The*  
 Most of us enjoyed this, and had fun discussing it.  
 Stegner, Wallace *Angle of Repose*

Difference of opinion about the writing style--what some of us thought was beautiful others considered over the top. We thought the story was interesting, though.

Steinbeck, John *East of Eden*

Most of the group enjoyed this. One person commented that there were a lot of philosophical issues to ponder. On the flip side, another reader thought the book was too wordy.

Ehrenreich, Barbara *Nickel and Dimed : On (Not) Getting By in America*

Liked by most. Plenty to discuss.

Pilcher, Rosamunde *The Shell Seekers*

Liked by most. Not much discussion of the book itself, but it led to a meandering but enjoyable conversation about gardening, travel, etc.

Chabon, Michael *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*

Several people couldn't get into it, but those of us who persevered liked it. Beautiful language.

King, Stephen *The Shining*

Most of us liked this and found it appropriately scary.

**2009:**

Kingsolver, Barbara *Prodigal Summer*

Liked by most of us.

Dubus, Andre *House of Sand and Fog*

Most of us liked this, although we all agreed it was depressing.

Bryson, Bill *The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid*

Everyone thought this was a fun book to read, and it led to a lot of reminiscing.

Kingsolver, Barbara *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle--A Year of Food Life*

We all thought this was a great book which led to a discussion about local food production, gardening, and much more.

Eugenides, Jeffrey *Middlesex*

Strout, Elizabeth *Olive Kitteridge*

We differed on how much we liked the book, and on our reactions to Olive. Should have led to a lively talk, but discussion really foundered.

Boyle, T. C. *Tortilla Curtain*

Most of us liked this and it led to a good discussion about prejudice.

Gordon-Reed, Annette *The Hemingses of Monticello*

We found this painfully slow and cumbersome to get through, and some of us found the author's endless conjectures and arbitrary footnoting irritating. The book and the subject matter did lend themselves to a lively discussion, though.

Moore, Christopher *A Dirty Job*

Opinions ranged from lackluster to those who would try other books by Moore, but no one hated (or loved) the book.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel *The Scarlet Letter*

Again, a good discussion about a book that some of us enjoyed while others of us found a real snoozer.

**2010:**

Genova, Lisa *Still Alice*

Most of us found this a well-written and compelling story.

Benioff, David *City of Thieves*

Interesting, fast-paced story, but didn't really lend itself to discussion.

Miller, Walter *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

The two of us who had read this years before still liked it very much. The others were not so fond of it. Some gave up on it, one found it too dry, another said he read it and now needed someone to tell him what he had read.

Cleave, Chris *Little Bee*

Most of us liked it (one of us loved it and wrote down particularly beautiful passages to remember later), but one

reader didn't like it, found most of the characters irritating, and thought Little Bee was too good to be true.

Sutcliffe, William *Whatever Makes You Happy*

Two of us didn't like this at all, most of us liked it OK, but only two of us would seek out another of his books. There was some interesting discussion about the behavior of the various characters, but none of us particularly recognized either ourselves or our children in them.

Bohjalian, Chris *Skeletons at the Feast*

Most of us enjoyed this book, although one of us found some of the images too disturbing. Another reader wrote "a very hard read--the reality of it all overwhelmed me--the inhumanity was horrendous."

Interestingly, it led to as much discussion about issues of bigotry and insularity in our lives as it did to specific discussion about the book itself.

**Schaefer, Jack**                      *Shane*

One of us thought it was dated and one-dimensional, but most of us enjoyed it to varying degrees, from the person who called it "a nice little Western" to the one who rereads it every few years.

**Woolf, Virginia**                      *To the Lighthouse*

This one got mixed reviews, although everyone agreed it was a challenge. Some couldn't finish, and a couple who did so bemoaned the lack of plot. One person, who both listened to the audiobook and read the book, compared it to reading poetry, and one or two of us could see reading it again in the future.

**Priest, Christopher**                      *The Prestige*

Although one person thought it too dry, most of us liked it, although none of us was wowed by it.

**Rand, Ayn**                              *Atlas Shrugged*

Opinions both about the writing and the author's philosophy varied, and only two of us managed to finish, but people did have opinions, which is always a good thing for a discussion group!

**Greene, Graham**                      *The Comedians*

One of us very much appreciated the writing and the story in this bleak tale of Haiti under Papa Doc's reign of terror. A couple of us disliked it--one not making it more than 10 pages into the story. The others liked it OK, but didn't have much to say about it and a couple thought the writing was dated.

**Donoghue, Emma**                      *Room*

Everyone liked this, but, surprisingly, most of us didn't have much to say.

**Simonson, Helen**                      *Major Pettigrew's Last Stand*

No one had any major criticism of this "feel good" story that, nevertheless, gave rise to discussion about cultural differences, parent-child relationships, and religion.

**Vonnegut, Kurt**                              *Slaughterhouse-Five*

Some of us liked this. Some of us didn't like it. So it goes.

**Stein, Garth**                              *The Art of Racing in the Rain*

One of us liked this, and most of us thought it was OK. One of us disliked it, feeling that it didn't deliver on its promise, either as a good story or as a philosophical inquiry. Also, the dog should have had more pride in its "dog--ness."

**Haruf, Kent**                              *Plainsong*

Most of us enjoyed this, and it fostered a nice discussion. Interestingly, only one person did not see it as a sentimental story.

**Bell, Alden**                              *The Reapers are the Angels*

This was our Halloween selection because of the zombies, but they were actually not the main focus of the book. Instead, the book was an exploration of good and evil and predestination. Most of us liked the book, but one of us could not get beyond the lack of technical integrity in a post-apocalyptic story.

**Shaffer, Mary Ann**                      *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*

All of us liked this, although most of us agreed that the "modern day" parts detracted from the World War II story.

## 2012

**Bradbury, Ray**                              *Fahrenheit 451*

We certainly had mixed feelings for this one! A couple of us found it dated, shoddily-written, and with stereotyped depictions of women. A couple of us liked it well enough, although with reservations about the datedness or the writing style. A couple of us liked it almost without reservation, feeling that the main points of the book survived the test of time.

**Gaiman, Neil**                              *Stardust*

Although none of us is a reader of fantasy fiction, we all enjoyed this fairy tale for adults. The illustrations by Charles Vess were a nice complement to the story.

**Patchett, Ann**                              *State of Wonder*

Most of us enjoyed this, appreciating the writing and the rain forest locale, and finding the characters interesting, even if not particularly likeable. Those who did like the book, would want to try something else by the author. One of us who did not particularly appreciate the book could not move beyond his disbelief in its overall concept. Another of us found the book bland.

**Skloot, Rebecca**                              *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*

This fascinating blend of science, medical ethics and family history was enjoyed by all of us.

**Sparks, Nicholas**                              *The Last Song*

## *The Town That Food Saved*

One of those books that comes along every once in a while where we don't so much discuss the book itself, as allow it to send us off in varying directions in our conversation. So, a good choice.

**Jackson, Shirley**

***We Have Always Lived in the Castle***

This was our Halloween selection for the year and, although there were no monsters, zombies or pools of blood, it was a suitably unsettling choice. One of us thought it was only OK, but the rest of us liked it and had a good conversation about Merricat and Constance, how much we disliked Charles, and speculation about how long the two sisters would be able to survive in isolation.

**Foer, Jonathan Safran**

***Everything is Illuminated***

Several of us found the jumping around between the various time periods confusing, and some of us found the silliness of the early *shtetl* story irritating. One person persevered with the book but never did come to like it, and another person stopped after the first 50 pages with the comment, "Life is too short."

The rest of us liked the book, and found the juxtaposition of the Nazi atrocities with the day-to-day life in the *shtetl* quite compelling.