

Welcome to: THE *Laid-Back* BOOK CLUB 2025



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Welcome to the Laid-Back Book Club at Harvard Diggins Library. In our self-paced book club, there are no meetings, no deadlines, just great books. Read on schedule, read ahead, read behind - the choice is yours. The library will have copies of each book available on-schedule, but you can request any book, anytime, through your PrairieCat account or digitally on Libby or Boundless.

- This booklet includes all of the reading guides for the books
- Fill in the stars to rate each book you read
- Join our Facebook group for discussion prompts and announcements
- Questions? Contact Leticia at LeticiaG@harvard-diggins.org



Download the Beanstack app to log each read book as an 'activity' for entries towards the grand prize at the end of the year

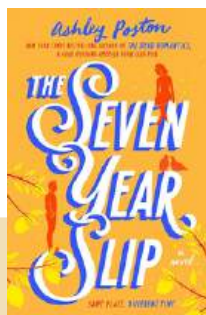
Don't forget - you can earn **BONUS** badges and raffle entries for attending any virtual **Illinois Libraries** Present author events throughout the year.

The 2025 Book Selections



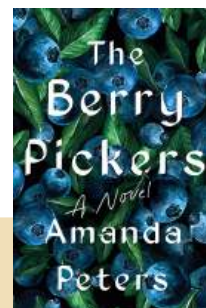
January
The Collected Regrets of Clover by Mikki Brammer

Contemporary;
Literary Fiction



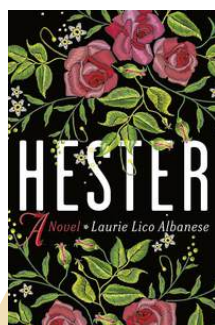
February
The Seven Year Slip by Ashley Poston

Romance;
Magical Realism



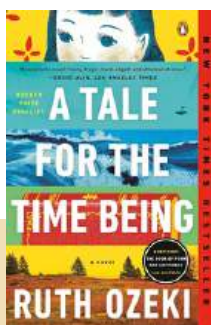
March
The Berry Pickers by Amanda Peters

Historical Fiction;
Mystery



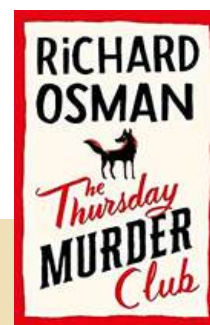
April
Hester by Laurie Rico Albanese

Historical Fiction;
Romance



May
A Tale for the Time Being by Ruth Ozeki

Multi-Genre
Fiction



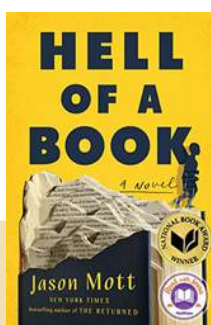
June
The Thursday Murder Club by Richard Osman

Mystery



July
Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant by Curtis Chin

Memoir



August
Hell of a Book by Jason Mott

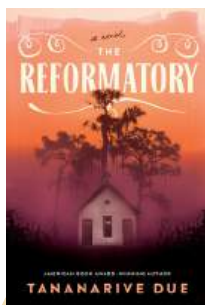
Contemporary
Fiction



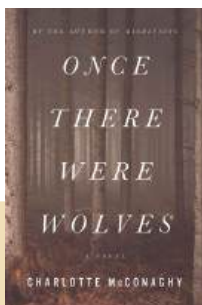
September
Honor by Thrity Umrigar

Literary Fiction

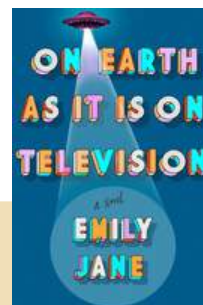




October
The Reformatory
by Tananarive Due
Horror; Historical Fiction



November
Once There Were Wolves by Charlotte McConagh
Thriller; Mystery



December
On Earth as It Is on Television by Emily Jane
Science Fiction; Humor



FAQ

How do I join?

There is no specific way to join this book club. You may join our Facebook group and register for an account on Beanstack to fully participate, however you decide how you would like to participate - reading the books, logging the books on Beanstack, and/or engaging in conversations on Facebook are just a few ways that you can participate. You can stay in our Facebook group and register for Beanstack, even if you aren't sure if you're ready to participate right now.

How do I use this booklet?

This booklet is yours to keep as a log of the books you read, take notes, read about the book selections, and learn about similar books. Some of the discussion questions listed in the booklet will be asked in our Facebook group.

How do I participate on Facebook?

You may comment on any Facebook post, new or old, to discuss the books with other members. You may also post in the group if you'd like to discuss with others who are reading along or have already read the book you're working on. No spoilers, please! You can warn others that a spoiler is ahead by typing "SPOILER ALERT:" in front of your post or comment.

How do I participate on Beanstack?

Beanstack is a platform that the Laid-Back Book Club uses to allow readers to record their books and receive badges and raffle tickets. If you prefer to use this on a computer, you can find a link to our Beanstack page on the Library's website. You can also easily track on-the-go with the Beanstack app on your mobile device, and search for Harvard Diggins Library when registering on the app.

Whenever you read a Laid-Back Book Club selection, or participate in a bonus activity, record it in Beanstack as an **ACTIVITY** to receive a raffle ticket towards the grand prize at the end of the year.

Illinois Libraries Present

Earn bonus badges for attending these currently scheduled events:

Thurs Jan 9, 7pm - *Chicago Pizza: Past, Present, and Future* with Steve Dolinsky

Thurs Jan 23, 7pm - *Love and Laughs* with Michelle Buteau

Tues Feb 4, 7pm - *An Evening with James McBride*

Wed Feb 19, 7pm - *Slowing Down* with Amy Tan

Tues Mar 4, 7pm - *Exploring Space* with Coralie Adam

Wed Apr 10, 7pm - *The Art of Foraging* with Alexis Nikole Nelson

Sat May 3, 2pm - *Art and Adventures* with Children's Author/Illustrator Dan Santat

Thurs May 13, 7pm - *Poverty: A Discussion* with Matthew Desmond

More Illinois Libraries Present events to be announced later this year.



THE *Laid-Back* BOOK CLUB



January 2025 Book Selection: *The Collected Regrets of Clover* by Mikki Brammer



What's the point of giving someone a beautiful death if you can't give yourself a beautiful life?

From the day she watched her kindergarten teacher drop dead during a dramatic telling of *Peter Rabbit*, Clover Brooks has felt a stronger connection with the dying than she has with the living. After the beloved grandfather who raised her dies alone while she is traveling, Clover becomes a death doula in New York City, dedicating her life to ushering people peacefully through their end-of-life process.

Clover spends so much time with the dying that she has no life of her own, until the final wishes of a feisty old woman send Clover on a road trip to uncover a forgotten love story—and perhaps, her own happy ending. As she finds herself struggling to navigate the uncharted roads of romance and friendship, Clover is forced to examine what she really wants, and whether she'll have the courage to go after it.

Probing, clever, and hopeful, *The Collected Regrets of Clover* is perfect for readers of *The Midnight Library* and *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* as it turns the normally taboo subject of death into a reason to celebrate life. --Goodreads

Published May 2023

Genres: Contemporary; Literary Fiction

Setting: New York, NY

Subjects: Friendship; Death

Tone: Moving

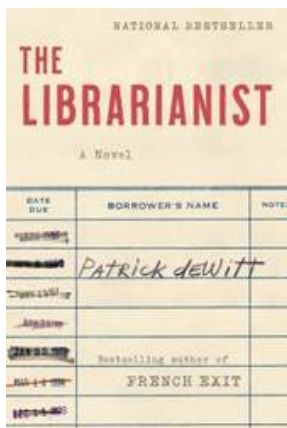
Pages: 320

Content Warning: Death/Dying/Grief

*“The secret to a
beautiful death is living
a beautiful life.”*

**See back page for
discussion questions**

If you enjoyed this book, you might also enjoy:



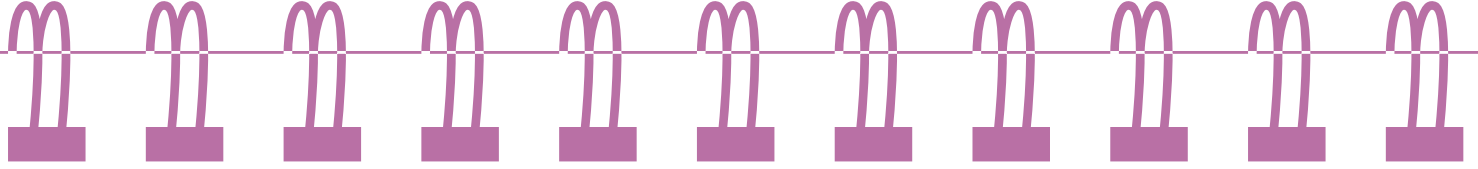
The Librarianist by
Patrick deWitt

Tells the story of Bob Comet, a man who has lived his life through and for literature, unaware that his own experience is a poignant and affecting novel in itself.



What We Remember by
Sarah Echavarre

While caring for Opal, a dementia patient struggling to remember, hospital chaplain Isabel Myles, who copes by forgetting, finds the more invested she becomes in Opal's vanishing world, the more open she is to forming bonds, realizing she no longer has to face her traumatic past alone. A moving novel about hope, loss, the power of memories, and the enduring bonds of family.



Things to ponder while you read...

Clover believes that one of the reasons that death is such a scary topic for people is because no one really talks about it in Western society. Were you apprehensive about reading this book because it was about death? How did you feel about the topic once you had read the book?

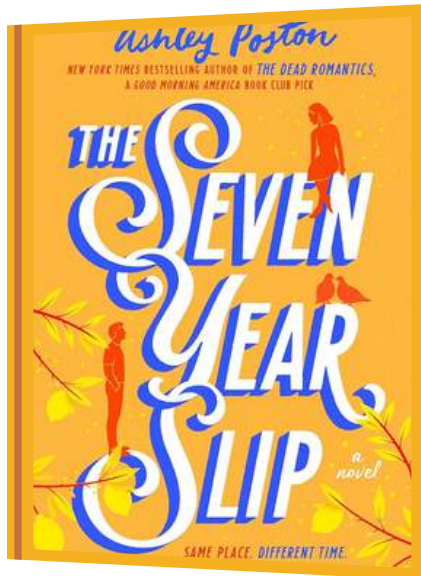
Even though Clover is seen as a 'loner' by society, she is actually quite emotionally intelligent and good with people. Why do you think this disconnect exists? Why is it so hard for her to connect with people outside of a professional context?

If today were your last day on earth, which of Clover's three notebooks – Advice, Regrets, or Confessions – do you think you would end up in and why?

THE *Laid-Back* BOOK CLUB



February 2025 Book Selection: *Seven Year Slip* by Ashley Poston



Sometimes, the worst day of your life happens, and you have to figure out how to live after it. Clementine forms a plan to keep her heart safe: work hard, find someone decent to love, and try to remember to chase the moon. The last one is silly and obviously metaphorical, but her aunt always told her that you needed at least one big dream to keep going. And for the last year, that plan has gone off without a hitch. Mostly. The love part is hard because she doesn't want to get too close to anyone—she isn't sure her heart can take it.

And then she finds a strange man standing in the kitchen of her late aunt's apartment. A man with kind eyes and a Southern drawl and a taste for lemon pies. The kind of man that, before it all, she would've fallen head-over-heels for. And she might again.

Except, he exists in the past. Seven years ago, to be exact. And she, quite literally, lives seven years in his future.

Her aunt always said the apartment was a pinch in time, a place where moments blended together like watercolors. And Clementine knows that if she lets her heart fall, she'll be doomed. After all, love is never a matter of time—but a matter of timing.

Published June 2023

Genres: Romance; Magical Realism

Setting: New York, NY

Theme: Time Slip

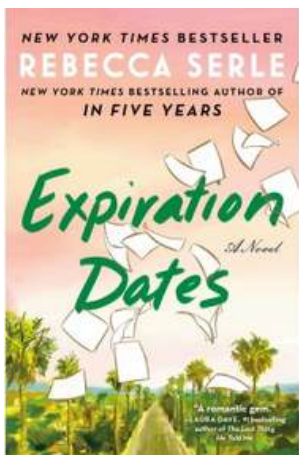
Tone: Witty, Funny

Pages: 352

“Isn't it strange how the world works sometimes? It's never a matter of time, but a matter of timing.”

See back page for discussion questions

If you enjoyed this book, you might also enjoy:



Expiration Dates by Rebecca Serle

Every time she meets a new man, Daphne Bell receives a slip of paper with his name and a number on it--the exact amount of time they will be together; usually she is right, but when she meets Jake, her whole system is thrown for a loop.



The Second Chance Year by Melissa Wiesner

When her wish to redo her awful year comes true, Sadie Thatcher, with her life in shambles, navigates her second chance, seeing the red flags she missed in both her relationship and career while harboring a secret crush on her brother's best friend.



Things to ponder while you read...

The apartment can only travel seven years into the future or past—would you travel seven years into either your future or past? And if so, who would you want to meet there, and why?

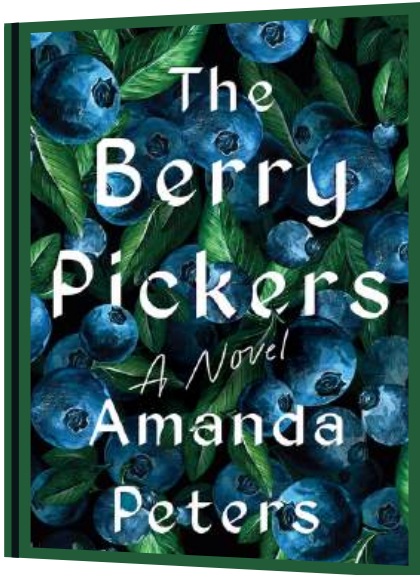
Do you think a chef who invents new recipes and flavors is more talented than the chef who perfects an old, but exquisite, recipe?

Grief is difficult to manage, but especially sudden and traumatic grief. How does Clementine cope with hers? How does Iwan?

THE *Laid-Back* BOOK CLUB



March 2025 Book Selection: *The Berry Pickers* by Amanda Peters



July 1962. A Mi'kmaq family from Nova Scotia arrives in Maine to pick blueberries for the summer. Weeks later, four-year-old Ruthie, the family's youngest child, vanishes. She is last seen by her six-year-old brother, Joe, sitting on a favorite rock at the edge of a berry field. Joe will remain distraught by his sister's disappearance for years to come.

In Maine, a young girl named Norma grows up as the only child of an affluent family. Her father is emotionally distant, her mother frustratingly overprotective. Norma is often troubled by recurring dreams and visions that seem more like memories than imagination. As she grows older, Norma slowly comes to realize there is something her parents aren't telling her. Unwilling to abandon her intuition, she will spend decades trying to uncover this family secret.

For readers of *The Vanishing Half* and *Woman of Light*, this showstopping debut by a vibrant new voice in fiction is a riveting novel about the search for truth, the shadow of trauma, and the persistence of love across time.

Published April 2023

Genres: Historical Fiction; Mystery

Setting: Maine, 1962

Theme: Childhood Trauma

Tone: Haunting, Character-Driven

Pages: 307

"I found it strange that no word exists for a parent who loses a child. If children lose their parents, they are orphans. If a husband loses his wife, he's a widower. But there's no word for a parent who loses a child. I've come to believe that the event is just too big, too monstrous, too overwhelming for words. No word could ever describe the feeling, so we leave it unsaid."

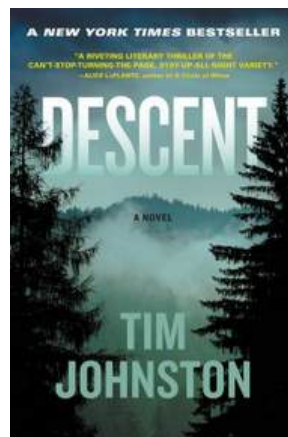
See back page for discussion questions

If you enjoyed this book, you might also enjoy:



The Removed by
Brandon Hobson

A Cherokee family takes in a remarkable foster child on the eve of the Cherokee National Holiday and anniversary of a loved one's death.



Descent by Tim Johnston

When their daughter disappears while out for a morning run during a late-summer vacation in the Rocky Mountains, her parents embark on a harrowing journey down increasingly divergent and solitary paths where they must answer some difficult questions to find the truth.



Things to ponder while you read...

Do you prefer Joe's voice, Norma's or the combination? Were there other characters you wished could give their point of view?

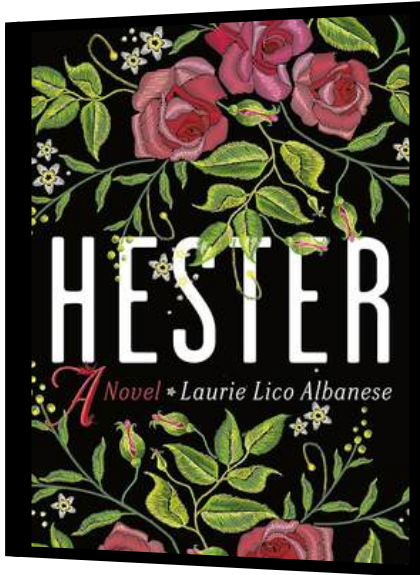
How does Ruthie's disappearance echo tragedies and atrocities in the broader history of Indigenous peoples?

Why do you think art-making becomes so important in the story? Are there other themes that jump out at you about making a meaningful life after loss?

THE *Laid-Back* BOOK CLUB



April 2025 Book Selection: *Hester* by Laurie Lico Albanese



Published Oct 2022

Genres: Literary Fiction;
Historical Fiction

Setting: 19th Century Scotland

Themes: Neurodivergent

Tone: Evocative, Atmospheric

Pages: 322

Isobel Gamble is a young seamstress carrying generations of secrets when she sets sail from Scotland in the early 1800s with her husband, Edward. An apothecary who has fallen under the spell of opium, his pile of debts have forced them to flee Edinburgh for a fresh start in the New World. But only days after they've arrived in Salem, Edward abruptly joins a departing ship as a medic—leaving Isobel penniless and alone in a strange country, forced to make her way by any means possible.

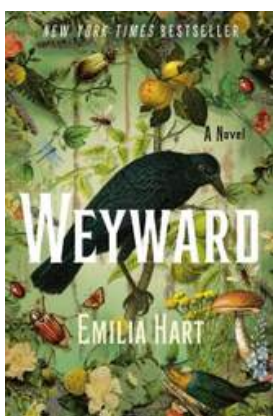
When she meets a young Nathaniel Hawthorne, the two are instantly drawn to each other: he is a man haunted by his ancestors, who sent innocent women to the gallows—while she is an unusually gifted needleworker, troubled by her own strange talents. As the weeks pass and Edward's safe return grows increasingly unlikely, Nathaniel and Isobel grow closer and closer. Together, they are a muse and a dark storyteller; the enchanter and the enchanted. But which is which?

In this sensuous and hypnotizing tale, a young immigrant woman grapples with our country's complicated past, and learns that America's ideas of freedom and liberty often fall short of their promise. Interwoven with Isobel and Nathaniel's story is a vivid interrogation of who gets to be a "real" American in the first half of the 19th century, a depiction of the early days of the Underground Railroad in New England, and atmospheric interstitials that capture the long history of "unusual" women being accused of witchcraft. Meticulously researched yet evocatively imagined, *Hester* is a timeless tale of art, ambition, and desire that examines the roots of female creative power and the men who try to shut it down.

"But there's another kind of strength we've got...It comes from knowing the difference between who you are and who they think you are."

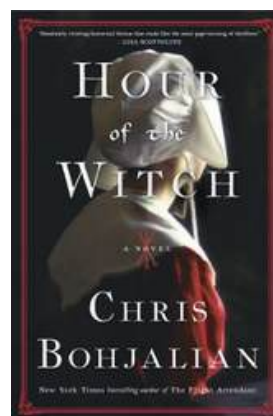
See back page for discussion questions

If you enjoyed this book, you might also enjoy:



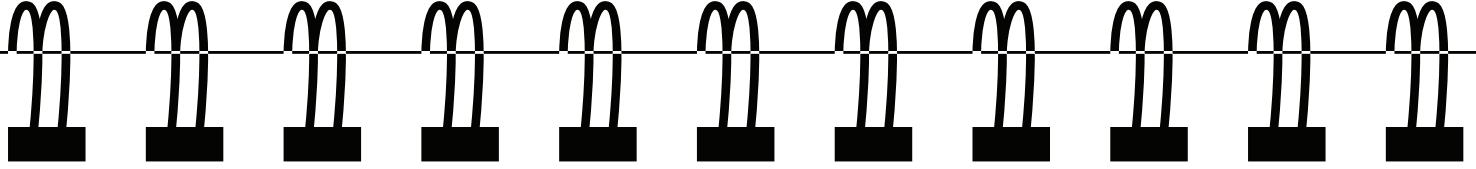
Weyward by Emilia Hart

Told over five centuries through three connected women, this riveting novel follows Kate, in 2019, as she seeks refuge in Weyward Cottage; Altha, in 1619, as she uses her powers to maintain her freedom; and Violet, in 1942, as she searches for the truth about her mother's death.



Hour of the Witch by Chris Bohjalian

A resourceful Puritan woman in 1662 Boston plots to escape a violent marriage only to find herself targeted by her disapproving and superstitious neighbors for failing to save a child's life.



Things to ponder while you read...

Scottish myths and elements of the magical world run throughout the novel. How does Isobel's belief in magic and the spirit world change throughout the novel? What do you believe is real, or possible?

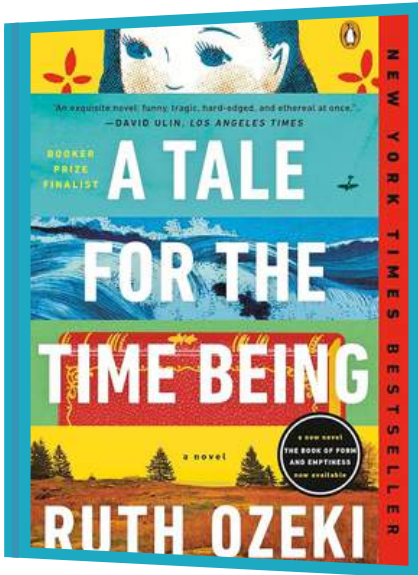
Hester is a novel that imagines the inspiration for Hester Prynne, the heroine of *The Scarlet Letter*. If you have read *The Scarlet Letter*, does Isobel's story resemble how you might have imagined this woman's life?

On page 313, Isobel says, "Like Nat himself, the book was a truth within a lie, and a lie within a truth." Consider Nat's personal journey and his relationship with Isobel. In what ways is this statement true?

THE *Laid-Back* BOOK CLUB



May 2025 Book Selection: *A Tale for the Time Being* by Ruth Ozeki



In Tokyo, sixteen-year-old Nao has decided there's only one escape from her aching loneliness and her classmates' bullying, but before she ends it all, Nao plans to document the life of her great-grandmother, a Buddhist nun who's lived more than a century. A diary is Nao's only solace—and will touch lives in a ways she can scarcely imagine.

Across the Pacific, we meet Ruth, a novelist living on a remote island who discovers a collection of artifacts washed ashore in a Hello Kitty lunchbox—possibly debris from the devastating 2011 tsunami. As the mystery of its contents unfolds, Ruth is pulled into the past, into Nao's drama and her unknown fate, and forward into her own future.

Full of Ozeki's signature humour and deeply engaged with the relationship between writer and reader, past and present, fact and fiction, quantum physics, history, and myth, *A Tale for the Time Being* is a brilliantly inventive, beguiling story of our shared humanity and the search for home.

Published March 2013

Genres: Multi-Genre Fiction

Setting: Canada & Tokyo, Japan, 2011

Theme: Metafiction

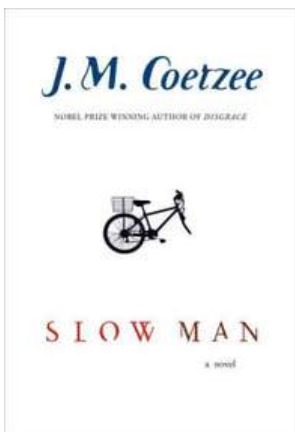
Tone: Reflective; Stylistically Complex

Pages: 432

“Sometimes when she told stories about the past her eyes would get teary from all the memories she had, but they weren't tears. She wasn't crying. They were just the memories, leaking out.”

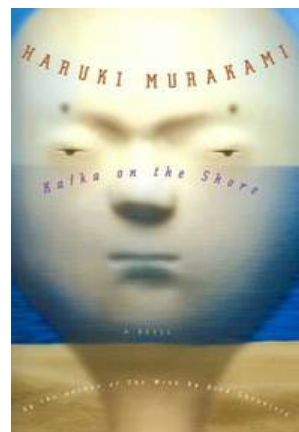
See back page for discussion questions

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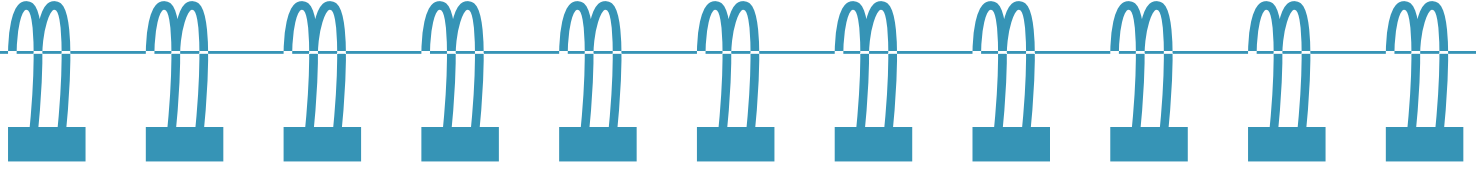
Slow Man by
J.M. Coetzee

Dependent on others after losing his leg in an accident, sixty-year-old Paul Rayment finds himself falling in love with a down-to-earth Croatian nurse and encouraged by a mysterious writer to take an activist role in his own life.



Kafka on the Shore by
Haruki Murakami

An unlikely alliance forms between Kafka Tamura, a fifteen-year-old runaway, and the aging Nakata, a man who has never recovered from a wartime affliction, as they embark on a surreal odyssey through a strange, fantastical world.



Things to ponder while you read...

How does Ozeki seem to view the relationship between a writer and her reader? What do they owe each other? How must they combine in order to, in Nao's phrase, "make magic"?

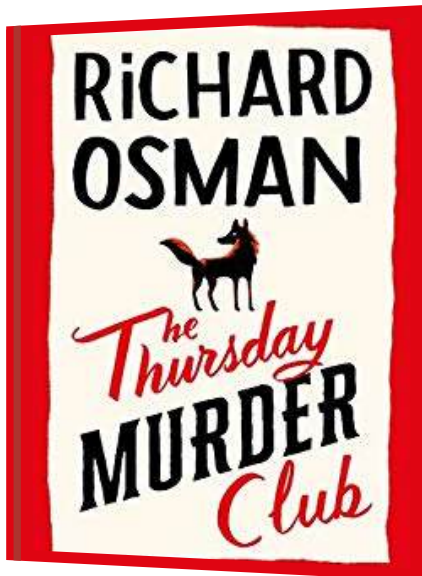
More than once in *A Tale for the Time Being*, a character's dream appears to exert physical influence on actual life. Does this phenomenon weaken the novel by detracting from its realism, or does it strengthen the book by adding force to its spiritual or metaphysical dimension?

Imagine that you had a notebook like Nao's diary and you wanted to communicate with an unknown reader as she does. What would you write about? Would you be as honest as Nao is with us? What are the benefits and risks of writing such a document?

THE *Laid-Back* BOOK CLUB



June 2025 Book Selection: *The Thursday Murder Club* by Richard Osman



In a peaceful retirement village, four unlikely friends meet up once a week to investigate unsolved murders.

But when a brutal killing takes place on their very doorstep, the Thursday Murder Club find themselves in the middle of their first live case. Elizabeth, Joyce, Ibrahim and Ron might be pushing eighty but they still have a few tricks up their sleeves.

Can our unorthodox but brilliant gang catch the killer before it's too late?

Book #1 in a 4-part series

Check out the new
movie based on the
book available to
stream on Netflix!



Published Sept 2020

Genres: Mystery

Setting: Kent, England

Theme: Ensemble Cast

Tone: Witty & Suspenseful

Pages: 382

*“You always know when it’s
your first time, don’t you? But
you rarely know when it’s your
final time.”*

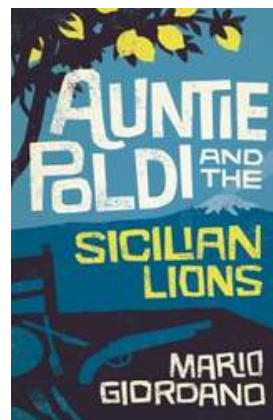
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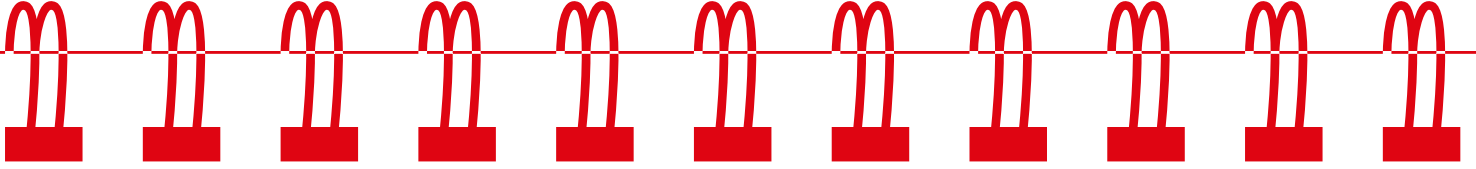
Magpie Murders by Anthony Horowitz

Susan Ryeland is a London book editor who has just received the latest manuscript from one of her most irascible authors, Alan Conway. But the manuscript's ending appears to be missing and she learns that Conway has committed suicide. As Ryeland learns more about his death, she starts to question whether a murder has occurred and begins to investigate.



Auntie Poldi and the Sicilian Lions by Mario Giordano

Auntie Poldi, sassy, brassy and sixty, moves to Sicily for a quiet alcohol-fuelled retirement. A murder spoils her plans.



Things to ponder while you read...

Though the book follows the four friends—Joyce, Elizabeth, Ibrahim, and Ron—solving the murder, the only first-person POV is Joyce's via her diary. Why do you think the author chose to show her perspective in such a way?

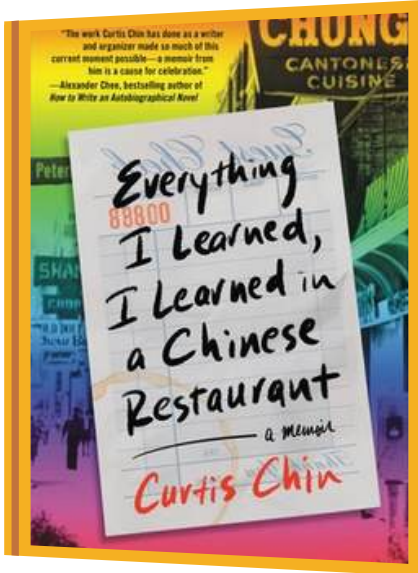
Joyce was a nurse, Elizabeth was in the secret service, Ibrahim was a psychiatrist, and Ron was a trade union leader. Who do you think was most helpful in solving the crime? What strengths did they each bring to the table? What were their weaknesses?

Society often writes off the abilities of the elderly—assuming both body and mind are deteriorating. At the heart of *The Thursday Murder Club* is a lesson to never to underestimate this population. Who misjudges the residents of Coopers Chase the most? What are the consequences of underestimating the four friends?

THE *Laid-Back* BOOK CLUB



July 2025 Book Selection: *Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant* by Curtis Chin



This memoir tells the story of Curtis Chin's time growing up as a gay Chinese American kid in 1980's Detroit. Nineteen eighties Detroit was a volatile place to live, but above the fray stood a safe Chung's Cantonese Cuisine, where anyone—from the city's first Black mayor to the local drag queens, from a big-time Hollywood star to elderly Jewish couples—could sit down for a warm, home-cooked meal. Here was where, beneath a bright-red awning and surrounded by his multigenerational family, filmmaker and activist Curtis Chin came of age; where he learned to embrace his identity as a gay ABC, or American-born Chinese; where he navigated the divided city's spiraling misfortunes; and where—between helpings of almond boneless chicken, sweet-and-sour pork, and some of his own, less-savory culinary concoctions—he realized just how much he had to offer to the world, to his beloved family, and to himself.

Served up by the cofounder of the Asian American Writers' Workshop and structured around the very menu that graced the tables of Chung's, *Everything I Learned, I Learned in a Chinese Restaurant* is both a memoir and an to step inside one boy's childhood oasis, scoot into a vinyl booth, and grow up with him—and perhaps even share something off the secret menu.

Published Oct 2023

Genres: Memoir

Setting: Detroit, Michigan

Tone: Amusing, Candid

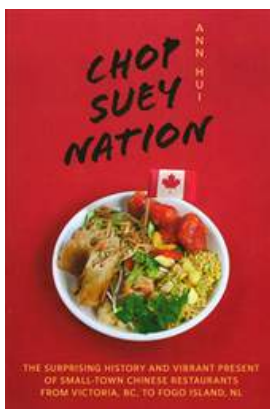
Theme: Asian-American Experiences

Pages: 291

"Seeing my dad talking so confidently with the different customers surprised me. Here was a man who had spent his entire life in Chinatown, yet he found something in common with everyone who walked in."

See back page for discussion questions

If you enjoyed this book, you might also enjoy:



Chop Suey Nation by Ann Hui

Ann Hui drives across Canada to write about small-town Chinese restaurants and the families behind them. Weaving together her own family history and her parent's restaurant, Ann explores the importance of these restaurants to this country's history.



Have You Eaten Yet? by Cheuk Kwan

Cheuk Kwan narrates a fascinating story of culture and place. The cultural outposts of far-flung settlers, Chinese restaurants are a microcosm of greater social forces--an insight into time, history and place. An intrepid travelogue of grand vistas, adventure and serendipity, *Have You Eaten Yet?* charts a living atlas of the global Chinese migration, revealing the synergies of politics, culture and family.



Things to ponder while you read...

Detroit is a character itself, in this memoir as well as throughout Curtis' life. What is Curtis' relationship with the city he grew up in? How does the last section of this book, "The Fortune Cookie," encapsulate this?

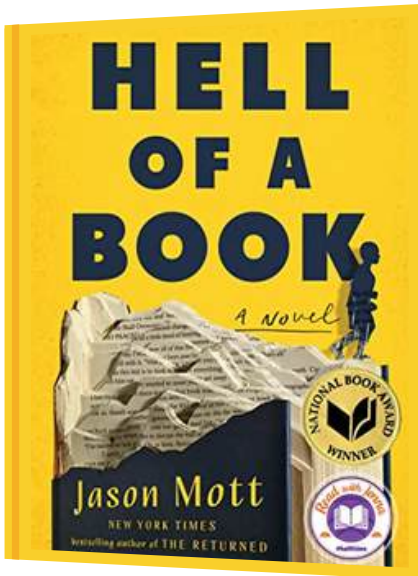
In the introduction, Curtis says, "For here or to go? As I got older, it was a question I asked myself." Why does this question feel significant to Curtis? How does it relate to his identity as an ABC, or an American-born Chinese?

Curtis has a complicated relationship with his grandmother, the fiery Ngin-Ngin, who helped raise him. Towards the end of the book, as Ngin-Ngin struggles with old age, Curtis decides to begin taking care of her, saying, "For once, I believed in karma, both the good and the bad." What do you think he means by this?

THE *Laid-Back* BOOK CLUB



Aug 2025 Book Selection: *Hell of a Book* by Jason Mott



A nameless Black author on his first book tour is reeling from his newfound fame and the success of his book, *Hell of a Book*. As he flies to promotional events, often in a drunken stupor, the author reveals that his vivid imagination makes it difficult for him to distinguish reality from fiction. So when he encounters “The Kid,” a 10-year-old boy with impossibly ebony skin, the author doubts the boy is real. The Kid, who uncannily resembles a recent victim of police violence, first appears at a hotel and continues to pop up during the book tour, leading the author to recall his own repressed trauma as a bullied Black boy in North Carolina.

Who has been killed? Who is The Kid? Will the author finish his book tour, and what kind of world will he leave behind?

Published June 2021

Genres: Literary Fiction

Setting: Cross-country United States

Tone: Moving

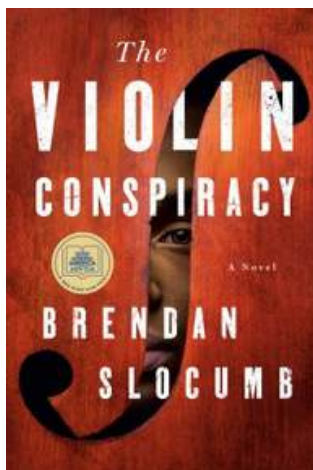
Theme: Black Identity

Pages: 323

“Laugh all you want, but I think learning to love yourself in a country where you're told that you're the plague on the economy, that you're nothing but a prisoner in the making, that your life can be taken away from you at any moment and there's nothing you can do about it - learning to love yourself in the middle of all that? Hell, that's a goddamn miracle.”

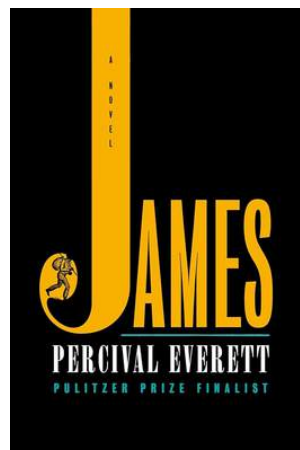
See back page for discussion questions

If you enjoyed this book, you might also enjoy:



The Violin Conspiracy by Brendan Slocumb

Nothing will stop Ray McMillian from pursuing his dream of becoming a professional musician. Not his discouraging mother, not money, not the racism inherent in the classical music world. When he makes the discovery that his great-grandfather's fiddle is actually a priceless Stradivarius, it is stolen before the international Tchaikovsky Competition. But now his family and the descendants of the man who once enslaved Ray's great-grandfather are each claiming that the violin belongs to them.



James by Percival Everett

When the enslaved Jim overhears that he is about to be sold to a man in New Orleans, separated from his wife and daughter forever, he decides to hide on nearby Jackson Island until he can formulate a plan. A new take on Jim's perspective from Mark Twain's classic novel *Huckleberry Finn*, his intelligence and compassion are shown in a radically new light.



Things to ponder while you read...

The Author says, “In this world that we live in, the fact of the matter is that it’s hard to think of anyone as being real” (98). Do you agree? How do social media and screens mediate our experiences of others? How do they affect our ability to empathize or make connections? Think about this in regards to when you’ve seen videos of anti-Black violence or violence against diverse communities go viral.

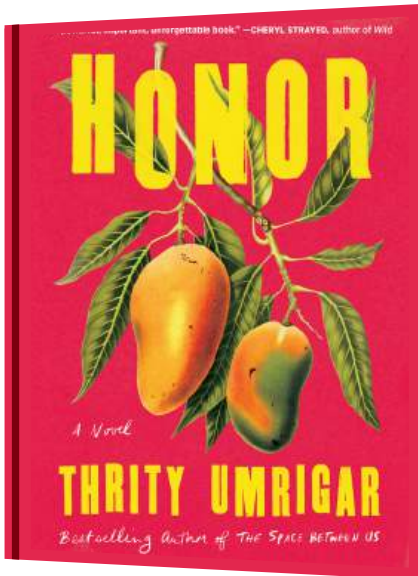
Why do you think Soot’s parents wanted him to be able to become invisible? What do you think they see as the relationship between being unseen and safe? What does that coping mechanism say about society in a broader sense?

When you first started reading, did you notice that Jason Mott didn’t name The Author? Why do you think he did that? Do you agree or disagree that naming something makes it more real?

THE *Laid-Back* BOOK CLUB



Sept 2025 Book Selection: *Honor* by Thrity Umrigar



Indian American journalist Smita has returned to India to cover a story, but reluctantly: long ago she and her family left the country with no intention of ever coming back. As she follows the case of Meena—a Hindu woman attacked by members of her own village and her own family for marrying a Muslim man—Smita comes face to face with a society where tradition carries more weight than one's own heart, and a story that threatens to unearth the painful secrets of Smita's own past. While Meena's fate hangs in the balance, Smita tries in every way she can to right the scales. She also finds herself increasingly drawn to Mohan, an Indian man she meets while on assignment. But the dual love stories of *Honor* are as different as the cultures of Meena and Smita themselves: Smita realizes she has the freedom to enter into a casual affair, knowing she can decide later how much it means to her.

In this tender and evocative novel about love, hope, familial devotion, betrayal, and sacrifice, Thrity Umrigar shows us two courageous women trying to navigate how to be true to their homelands and themselves at the same time.

Published January 2022

Genres: Literary Fiction

Setting: Mumbai, India

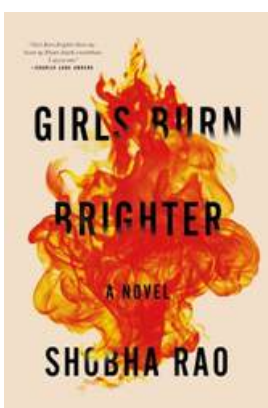
Style: Cinematic; Thought-Provoking

Pages: 326

“As children, we were taught to be afraid of tigers and lions. Nobody taught us what I know today - the most dangerous animal in this world is a man with wounded pride.”

See back page for discussion questions

If you enjoyed this book, you might also enjoy:



Girls Burn Brighter by Shobha Rao

Forging a deep friendship with impoverished but passionate fellow weaver Savitha, motherless Poornima begins to reconnect with the beauty of the world before a devastating act of cruelty drives her friend away, compelling her to leave behind everything she knows to search for her friend in the darkest corners of India's underworld and beyond.



The Unlikely Adventures of the Shergill Sisters by Balli Kaur Jaswal

Making an obligatory pilgrimage to the Golden Temple in Amritsar to carry out their mother's final rites, three estranged British-Punjabi sisters make unexpected discoveries about why their mother was forced to leave India.



Things to ponder while you read...

How is Meena's India different from Smita's? What explains the differences?

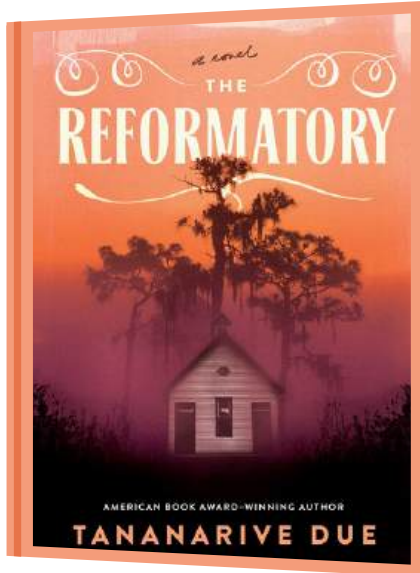
As strange as the customs and traditions described in this book may seem to an American reader, did you recognize any common touchpoints across the two cultures? What aspects of the novel reminded you of life in America?

There are many different levels of privilege described in this book. What are some of them and how do they affect the characters' behavior?

THE *Laid-Back* BOOK CLUB



October 2025 Book Selection: *The Reformatory* by Tananarive Due



Gracetown, Florida. June 1950. Twelve-year-old Robbie Stephens, Jr., is sentenced to six months at the Gracetown School for Boys, a reformatory, for kicking the son of the largest landowner in town in defense of his older sister, Gloria. So begins Robbie's journey further into the terrors of the Jim Crow South and the very real horror of the school they call The Reformatory.

Robbie has a talent for seeing ghosts, or haints. But what was once a comfort to him after the loss of his mother has become a window to the truth of what happens at the reformatory. Boys forced to work to remediate their so-called crimes have gone missing, but the haints Robbie sees hint at worse things. Through his friends Redbone and Blue, Robbie is learning not just the rules but how to survive. Meanwhile, Gloria is rallying every family member and connection in Florida to find a way to get Robbie out before it's too late.

The Reformatory is a haunting work of historical fiction written as only American Book Award-winning author Tananarive Due could, by piecing together the life of the relative her family never spoke of and bringing his tragedy and those of so many others at the infamous Dozier School for Boys to the light in this riveting novel.

Published Oct 2023

Genres: Horror; Historical Fiction

Setting: Florida, 1950

Tone: Bleak, Emotional, Moving

Pages: 576

Content Warning: Intense violence, abuse, hate crimes, & racism

“One thing I’ve learned,” Miz Lottie went on. “Everything seems fine until it ain’t. And then we come to see it wasn’t never ‘fine.’”

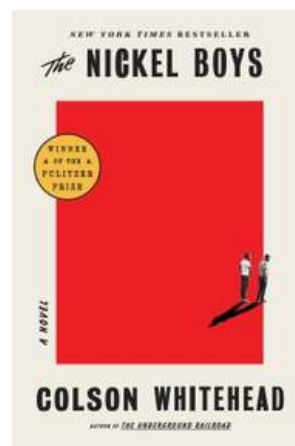
See back page for discussion questions

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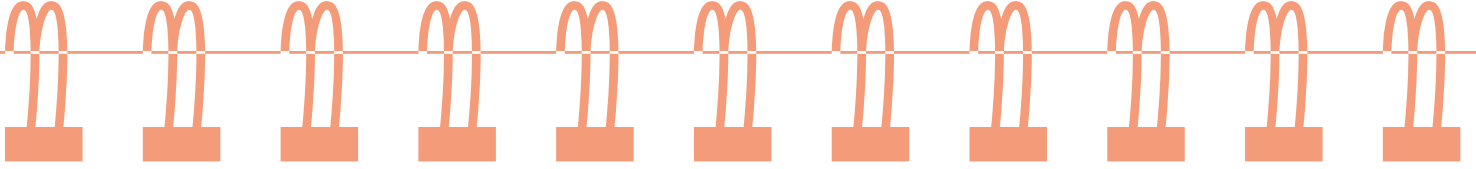
When the Reckoning Comes by LaTanya McQueen

Returning to her hometown for a plantation wedding, Mira is forced to acknowledge her history and save herself from what is to come as slaves who were tortured mercilessly roam the land seeking revenge on the descendants—the wedding guests—of those who tortured them.



The Nickel Boys by Colson Whitehead

Follows the harrowing experiences of two African-American teens at an abusive reform school in Jim Crow-era Florida.



Things to ponder while you read...

Robbie and Gloria have powers—Robbie sees haints, Gloria is clairvoyant. These gifts become incredibly useful tools in helping the siblings survive their situations, but they also bring with them a great weight. In what circumstances do their abilities become a burden?

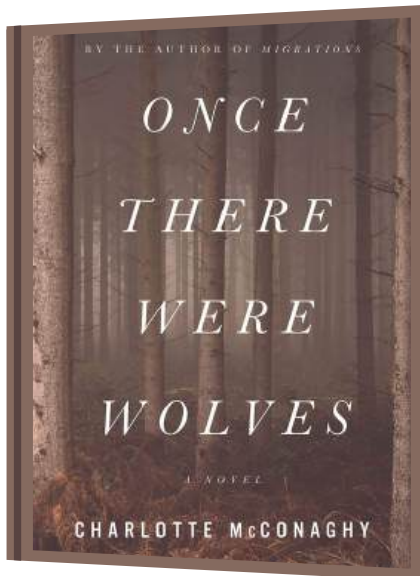
In what ways do gender and racism intersect in this story? Robbie and Gloria are both poor Black children, but are they viewed and oppressed differently? What about the experience of white women characters and Black women characters?

Throughout the novel we witness Gloria trying anything she can to save her brother, first taking the path of legal representation but then quickly realizing she is trying to fight fair in an unfair system. Why do you think Gloria tries so hard to abide by protocol at first? What are other examples of characters taking matters into their own hands when authority figures fail them?

THE *Laid-Back* BOOK CLUB



November 2025 Book Selection: *Once There Were Wolves* by Charlotte McConaghy



Inti Flynn arrives in Scotland with her twin sister, Aggie, to lead a team of biologists tasked with reintroducing fourteen gray wolves into the remote Highlands. She hopes to heal not only the dying landscape, but Aggie, too, unmade by the terrible secrets that drove the sisters out of Alaska.

Inti is not the woman she once was, either, changed by the harm she's witnessed—inflicted by humans on both the wild and each other. Yet as the wolves surprise everyone by thriving, Inti begins to let her guard down, even opening herself up to the possibility of love. But when a farmer is found dead, Inti knows where the town will lay blame. Unable to accept her wolves could be responsible, Inti makes a reckless decision to protect them. But if the wolves didn't make the kill, then who did? And what will Inti do when the man she is falling for seems to be the prime suspect?

Published Aug 2021

Genres: Thriller; Mystery

Setting: Scotland

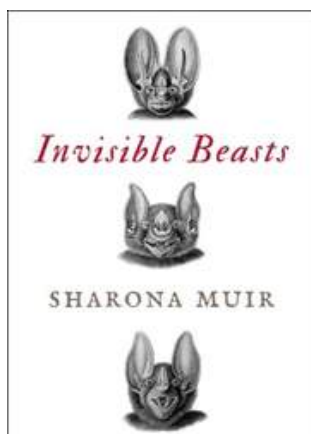
Tone: Melancholy; Character-Driven

Pages: 258

“My father used to say the world turned wrong when we started separating ourselves from the wild, when we stopped being one with the rest of nature, and sat apart.”

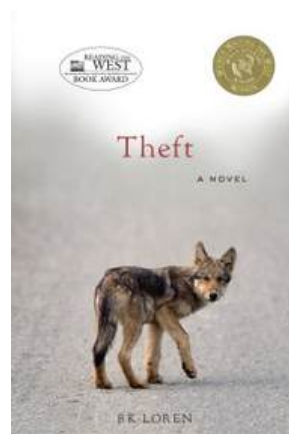
See back page for discussion questions

If you enjoyed this book, you might also enjoy:



Invisible Beasts by Sharona Muir

Naturalist Sophie is "odd-sighted," having inherited the rare trait of being able to see creatures invisible to everyone else. While Sophie hides her gift from the rest of the world, fearing that the species she discovers will be exploited and ultimately exterminated, she's too much of a scientist not to document the unusual fauna that she alone has observed.



Theft by B.K. Loren

Master tracker Willa Robbins is sidetracked while trying to reintroduce an endangered wolf into the American Southwest when the Colorado police recruit her to find her own brother who has confessed to murder.



Things to ponder while you read...

Theo and Jess are both obsessed with their rarefied fields of expertise. Does the author manage to convey why these unusual careers can be so compelling? If so, how?

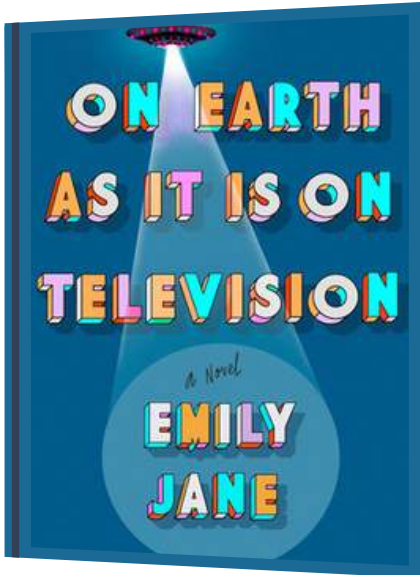
Jarret's connection with horses is presented as stronger than his bonds with people. How does his love for and dedication to Lexington help or hamper his coming of age and his transformation over the course of the novel?

Examine Jess's conversation with Daniel in the aftermath of what happens to Theo at the end of the novel. What did you make of Daniel's assessment of the situation? Do you share his point of view?

THE *Laid-Back* BOOK CLUB



December 2025 Book Selection: *On Earth as It Is on Television* by Emily Jane



Blaine has always been content to go along with whatever his supermom wife and television-addicted, half-feral children want. But when the kids blithely ponder skinning people to see if they're aliens, and his wife announces a surprise road trip to Disney World, even steady Blaine begins to crack.

Half a continent away, Heather, bored in a Malibu pool while the ships hover overhead, watches as the Arrival heralds the demise of her dead-end relationship and sets her on a quest to understand herself, her accomplished (and oh-so-annoying) stepfamily, and why she feels so alone in a universe teeming with life.

And Oliver, suddenly conscious and alert after twenty catatonic years, struggles to piece together broken memories and understand why he's following a strange cat on a westward journey and into the greatest adventure of his—or anyone's—lifetime.

Published June 2023

Genres: Science Fiction; Humor

Setting: United States

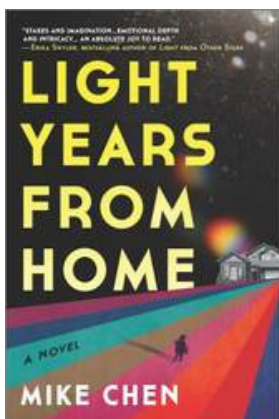
Tone: Funny; Offbeat

Pages: 352

"[...] aliens had traveled from distant galaxies, across the vast where-no-man-has-gone-before reaches of space, to visit their B-list Earth, where the wild animals became frequently extinct but the domesticated ones got their own special matching rain boots and slickers, and their own wall plaque"

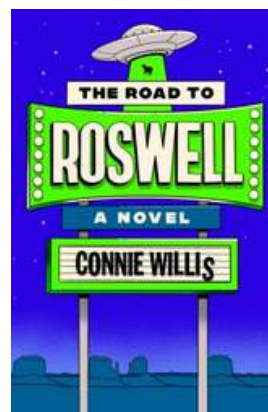
See back page for discussion questions

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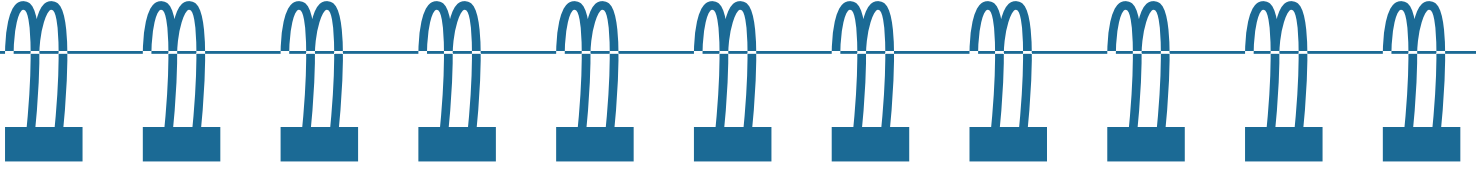
Light Years From Home by Mike Chen

When their brother who has been missing for years, suddenly returns, changed, Evie and Kass Shao must cast aside their differences to hide him from the FBI and an entire alien army who are in fast pursuit.



The Road to Roswell by Connie Willis

On the way to her college roommate's UFO-themed wedding, level-headed Francie is abducted by an alien, along with a charming con man, a casino-addicted little old lady, a Western-loving retiree and a UFO-chasing nutjob, discovers the alien is in trouble and she's the only one who can help.



Things to ponder while you read...

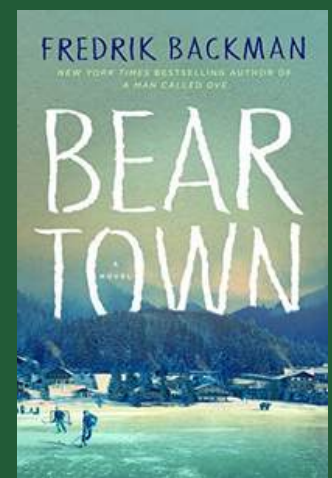
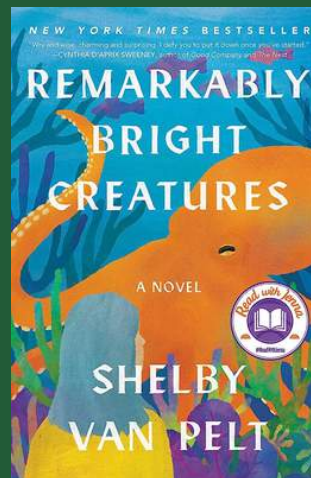
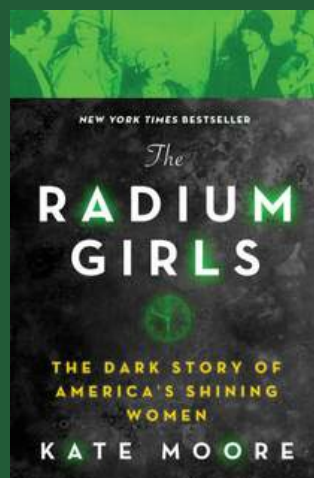
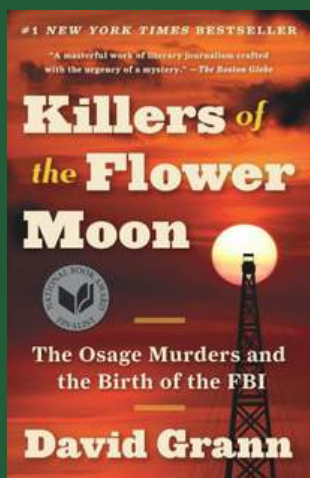
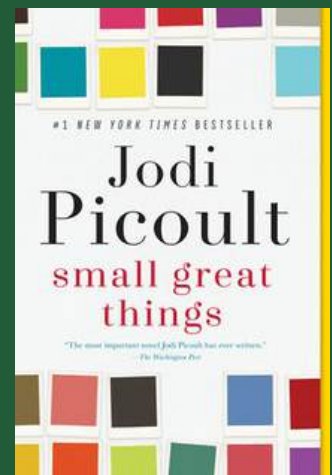
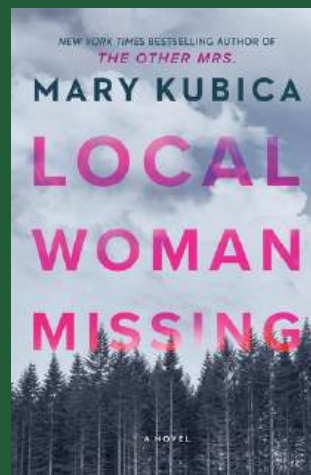
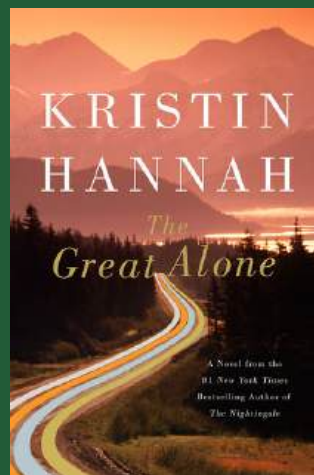
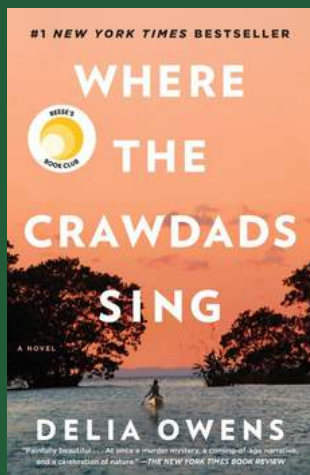
The main characters all start in different cities and their experiences differ vastly. How do the demographics of these characters influence their reaction to the existence of alien life?

How would the stories change if it were set in the 1950s or far into the future?

Why do you think the author chose a humorous tone in a book in a story about the human response to alien life?
Are you able to see the humor in human reactions after major events?



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