

North State Cooperative Library System's Book Club in a Box Program List of Titles- November 2009

All Over but the Shoutin' by Rick Bragg

Rick Bragg grew up in poverty, the second of three sons of an alcoholic, abusive father and a loving mother. The early chapters give a beautiful description of warm and happy moments he enjoyed with her and his family even as she struggled to provide for them after they'd been abandoned. Teens will enjoy reading about the resourceful, talented, and lucky young man's career as he moved from local reporter to working for regional and national papers. A book for students with an interest in writing, journalism, or the South and of use for autobiography assignments. Patricia Noonan, Prince William Public Library, VA
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American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang

Gene Yang's intelligent and emotionally challenging *American Born Chinese* is made up of three individual plotlines: the determined efforts of the Chinese folk hero Monkey King to shed his humble roots and be revered as a god; the struggles faced by Jin Wang, a lonely Asian American middle school student who would do anything to fit in with his white classmates; and the sitcom plight of Danny, an All-American teen so shamed by his Chinese cousin Chin-Kee that he is forced to change schools. Each story works well on its own, but Yang engineers a clever convergence of these parallel tales into a powerful climax that destroys the hateful stereotype of Chin-Kee, while leaving both Jin Wang and the Monkey King satisfied and happy to be who they are. (Compliments of Amazon.com)

Barrio Boy-by Ernesto Galarza and Julian Samora

Barrio Boy is the remarkable story of one boy's journey from a Mexican village to the barrio of Sacramento, California, bustling and thriving in the early decades of the twentieth century. When the turmoil precipitated by the Mexican Revolution begins to escalate, the family leaves their tiny village in search of safety and work in a nearby city. Subsequent moves introduce the boy to the growing turbulence of the Revolution and the uncertainties of city life. With vivid imagery and a rare gift for re-creating a child's sense of time and place, Galarza gives an account of the early experiences of his extraordinary life that will continue to delight readers for decades to come. (Compliments *New York Review of Books*)

Bee Season by Myla Goldberg

An eccentric family falls apart at the seams in an absorbing debut that finds congruencies between the elementary school spelling-bee circuit, Jewish mysticism, Eastern religious cults and compulsive behavior. Saul shifts his focus from Aaron to Eliza, devoting his afternoons to their practice sessions, while neglected Aaron joins the Hare Krishnas. Goldberg's insights into religious devotion, guilt, love, obsessive personalities and family dynamics ring true, and her use of spelling-as-metaphor makes a clever trope in a novel populated by literate scholars and

voracious readers. Her quiet wit, balanced by an empathetic understanding of human foibles, animates every page. Goldberg's attentive ear makes accounts of fast-paced spelling competitions or descriptions of Miriam's struggles to resist her own compulsions riveting, and her unerring knack for telling details (as when Eliza twitches through a spelling bee in itchy tights) captures a child's perceptions with touching acuity. While coming-of-age stories all bear a certain similarity, Goldberg strikes new ground here, and displays a fresh, distinctive and totally winning voice. *(Compliments of Publisher's Weekly)*

Bel Canto - by Ann Patchett

Readers curious about the emotional flow between hostages and their takers should cotton to this novel based on the 1996 Tupac Amaru takeover of the Japanese ambassadorial residence in Lima, Peru. It traces the hostages' adjusting attitudes during the torpor of a months-long siege. Relief from their tedium takes the form of luscious world-class soprano Roxane Coss, who had been entertaining an international assortment of diplomats and businesspersons when the terrorists took the Peruvian vice president's house. Unhurriedly, even languorously, Patchett brings readers into the minds of the characters. *(Booklist - Reviewed June 1, 2001)*

Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature, and Fowl Obsession, The - by Mark Obmascik

In one of the wackiest competitions around, every year hundreds of obsessed bird watchers participate in a contest known as the North American Big Year. Hoping to be the one to spot the most species during the course of the year, each birder spends 365 days racing around the continental U.S. and Canada compiling lists of birds, all for the glory of being recognized by the American Birding Association as the Big Year birding champion of North America. In this entertaining book, Obmascik, a journalist with the Denver Post, tells the stories of the three top contenders in the 1998 American Big Year: a wisecracking industrial roofing contractor from New Jersey who aims to break his previous record and win for a second time; a suave corporate chief executive from Colorado; and a 225-pound nuclear power plant software engineer from Maryland. *(Compliments of Amazon.com)*

Black Dog of Fate by Peter Balakian

The author of four volumes of verse, Peter Balakian writes with the precision of a poet and the lyricism of a privileged suburban child in 1950s New Jersey. He is shadowed by his relatives' carefully guarded memories of past trauma: the brutal Turkish extermination in 1915 of more than a million Armenians, including most of his maternal grandmother's family. Balakian seamlessly interweaves personal and historical material to depict one young man's reclamation of his heritage and to scathingly indict the political forces that conspired to sweep under the rug the 20th century's first genocide. *(Compliments of Amazon.com)*

California Uncovered- by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni & others

Hear and feel this dynamic California in the words of established writers like John Steinbeck, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Joan Didion, as well as compelling new voices that reveal California in all its complexity. California Uncovered is a central component of the California Stories Uncovered campaign—a statewide program sponsored by the California Council for the Humanities designed to inspire people to tell and listen to stories that get at the reality beneath the headlines, statistics, and stereotypes about the state and its people. *(Compliments of Amazon.com)*

Coffee Trader, The - by David Liss

Price-fixing and stock market manipulation may sound like the makings of a modern Wall Street thriller. But in the case of David Liss's second novel, the setting is the Amsterdam stock exchange in 1659, where Miguel Lienzo, a Jew recently resettled from Portugal, struggles to save his name and fortune in the face of unscrupulous commodity traders, family rivalries, tension between Jews and Christians, and infighting within the community of Portuguese Jews escaping the Inquisition. The story is fascinating for its account of seventeenth-century Dutch society and coffee's introduction to Europe. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night- Time, The - by Mark Haddon

Mark Haddon's bitterly funny debut novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, is a murder mystery of sorts--one told by an autistic version of Adrian Mole. Fifteen-year-old Christopher John Francis Boone is mathematically gifted and socially hopeless, raised in a working-class home by parents who can barely cope with their child's quirks. He takes everything that he sees (or is told) at face value, and is unable to sort out the strange behavior of his elders and peers. Late one night, Christopher comes across his neighbor's poodle, Wellington, impaled on a garden fork. Wellington's owner finds him cradling her dead dog in his arms, and has him arrested. After spending a night in jail, Christopher resolves--against the objection of his father and neighbors--to discover just who has murdered Wellington. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

The Dive from Clausen's Pier by Ann Packer

Packer's engrossing debut novel begins without ostentation. On Memorial Day, Carrie Bell and her fiancé, Mike Mayer, drive out to Clausen's Pier for their annual ritual, a picnic with their friends, a trip they make the way a middle-aged couple might, in grudging silence. Before their resentments can be aired, Mike dives into too shallow water, suffering injuries that change their lives. If Mike survives, he will survive as a quadriplegic, and Carrie faces unexpected responsibilities. Ultimately, Carrie does what is both understandable and unthinkable. She leaves her hometown of Madison, Wis., and shows up on the doorstep of a friend in New York City. There she discovers a different world, different friends and a different self. The hovering question--what will Carrie do? Abandon Mike or return to him?--generates genuine suspense. Packer portrays her characters--both New Yorkers and Madisonites--deftly, and her scenes unfold with uncommon clarity. But if Packer has a keen eye, she has an even keener ear. The dialogue is usually witty; more important, it is always surprising, as if the characters were actually thinking--one of the reasons they become as familiar to the reader as childhood friends. This is the sort of book one reads dying to know what happens to the characters, but loves for its wisdom: it sees the world with more clarity than you do. (*Compliments of Publisher's Weekly*)

▶ Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight-by Alexandra Fuller

A classic is born in this tender, intensely moving and even delightful journey through a white African girl's childhood. Born in England and now living in Wyoming, Fuller was conceived and bred on African soil during the Rhodesian civil war (1971-1979), a world where children over five "learn[ed] how to load an FN rifle magazine, strip and clean all the guns in the house, and ultimately, shoot-to-kill." With a unique and subtle sensitivity to racial issues, Fuller describes her parents' racism and the

wartime relationships between blacks and whites through a child's watchful eyes. Fuller's remarkable affection for her parents (who are racists) and her homeland (brutal under white and black rule) shines through. This affection, in spite of its subjects' prominent flaws, reveals their humanity and allows the reader direct entry into her world. Fuller's book has the promise of being widely read and remaining of interest for years to come. (*Compliments of Publisher's Weekly*)

Dreaming in Cuban – by Cristina Garcia

Poignant and perceptive... it tells of a family divided politically and geographically by the Cuban revolution...and of the generational fissures that open on each side. In Cuba, between a grandmother who is a fervent Castro supporter and a daughter who retreats into an Afro-Cuban Santeria cult; in America, between another daughter, militantly anti-Castro, and her own rebellious punk-artist daughter, who mocks her obsession...The realism is exquisite. (Richard Eder – *Los Angeles Times*)

East of Eden by John Steinbeck

This sprawling and often brutal novel, set in the rich farmlands of California's Salinas Valley, follows the intertwined destinies of two families--the Trasks and the Hamiltons--whose generations helplessly reenact the fall of Adam and Eve and the poisonous rivalry of Cain and Abel. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Empire Falls by Richard Russo

In his biggest, boldest novel yet, the much-acclaimed author of *Nobody's Fool* and *Straight Man* subjects a full cross-section of a crumbling Maine mill town to piercing, compassionate scrutiny, capturing misfits, malefactors and misguided honest citizens alike in the steady beam of his prose. Wealthy, controlling matriarch Francine Whiting lives in an incongruous Spanish-style mansion across the river from smalltown Empire Falls, dominated by a long-vacant textile mill and shirt factory, once the center of her husband's family's thriving manufacturing dominion. Even the minor members of Russo's large cast are fully fleshed, and forays into the past lend the narrative an extra depth and resonance. (*Compliments of Publisher's Weekly*)

English Creek by Ivan Doig

The summer of his 14th year brings challenges and changes to Jick McCaskill and his family, in this book which echoes with "the pioneering and human spirit," observed PW. Jick's older brother decides not to attend college, becoming a cowboy instead; a fire in Two Medicine National Forest threatens to destroy the community; and, "by summer's end, Jick has learned the secret his father and an old campjack have kept from the rest of the community," (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Epitaph for a Peach - by David Mas Masumoto

Tells the passionate story of one farmer's attempt to rescue one of the last truly sweet and juicy fruits from becoming obsolete in a world that increasingly values commerciality over quality. The story of Mas Masumoto's Sun Crest peaches begins on the day he turns the bulldozers away from his orchards and vows to give himself four seasons to find a home for the fruits of his labor. At once a deeply personal story, a sharp commentary about the state of American agriculture, a lighthearted rhapsody of nature, and an intimate glimpse into the Asian American experience, *Epitaph for a Peach* is about saving a peach, saving a farm, saving a family, saving a way of life--it is a story about finding "home." (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Ethics for the New Millennium by His Holiness the Dalai Lama

"This is not a religious book," asserts the Dalai Lama about a volume that's his most outspoken to date on moral and social issues. "My aim has been to appeal for an approach to ethics based on universal rather than religious principles." The Dalai Lama adopts this approach because, he notes, the majority of humanity ignores religion, the traditional vehicle for ethics, yet observation shows him that happiness, which he discerns as the prime human goal, depends upon "positive ethical conduct." The entire book, written in simple, direct prose, reflects this sort of step-by-step reasoning, taking on color and drama with numerous anecdotes drawn from the Tibetan leader's personal experience. Methodically, the Dalai Lama explores the foundation of ethics, how ethics affects the individual and the role of ethics in society. The Dalai Lama refers, for instance, to his unwillingness to sell his watch collection for money to feed the poor as an example of ethical limitation. With its disarmingly frank, kindly manner and authoritative air, the book is what one would expect from a Nobel Peace Prize winner, and could appeal as widely as the Dalai Lama's current bestseller, *The Art of Happiness*. From Publishers Weekly

Field Notes from a Catastrophe: man, nature, and climate change by Elizabeth Kolbert

On the burgeoning shelf of cautionary but occasionally alarmist books warning about the consequences of dramatic climate change, Kolbert's calmly persuasive reporting stands out for its sobering clarity. Expanding on a three-part series for the *New Yorker*, Kolbert (*The Prophet of Love*) lets facts rather than polemics tell the story: in essence, it's that Earth is now nearly as warm as it has been at any time in the last 420,000 years and is on the precipice of an unprecedented "climate regime, one with which modern humans have had no prior experience." An inexorable increase in the world's average temperature means that butterflies, which typically restrict themselves to well-defined climate zones, are now flitting where they've never been found before; that nearly every major glacier in the world is melting rapidly; and that the prescient Dutch are already preparing to let rising oceans reclaim some of their land. In her most pointed chapter, Kolbert chides the U.S. for refusing to sign on to the Kyoto Accord. In her most upbeat chapter, Kolbert singles out Burlington, Vt., for its impressive energy-saving campaign, which ought to be a model for the rest of the nation—just as this unbiased overview is a model for writing about an urgent environmental crisis. From Publishers Weekly

French Lessons: Adventures with Knife, Fork and Corkscrew by Peter Mayle

In this books Mayle travels throughout France. *French Lessons* is a celebration of many of France's gastronomic joys. Mayle takes his readers in hand and shows all, wide-eyed yet knowing, ever affable but with a touch of mischief, he's an ideal companion, the best possible narrator of his lively food adventures. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Galileo's Daughter by Dava Sobel

Everyone knows that Galileo Galilei dropped cannonballs off the leaning tower of Pisa, developed the first reliable telescope, and was convicted by the Inquisition for holding a heretical belief--that the earth revolved around the sun. But did you know he had a daughter? In *Galileo's Daughter*, Dava Sobel tells the story of the famous scientist and his illegitimate daughter, Sister Maria Celeste. Sobel bases her book on 124 surviving letters to the scientist from the nun. As Sobel notes, "It is difficult today ... to see the Earth at the center of the Universe. Yet that is where Galileo found it." With her fluid prose and graceful turn of phrase, Sobel breathes life into Galileo, his daughter, and the earth-centered world in which they lived. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy

With sensuous prose, a dreamlike style infused with breathtakingly beautiful images and keen insight into human nature, Roy's debut novel charts fresh territory in the genre of magical, prismatic literature. Set in Kerala, India, during the late 1960s when Communism rattled the age-old caste system, the story begins with the funeral of young Sophie Mol, the cousin of the novel's protagonists, Rahel and her fraternal twin brother, Estha. In a circuitous and suspenseful narrative, Roy reveals the family tensions that led to the twins' behavior on the fateful night that Sophie drowned. Beneath the drama of a family tragedy lies a background of local politics, social taboos and the tide of history?all of which come together in a slip of fate, after which a family is irreparably shattered. Roy captures the children's candid observations but clouded understanding of adults' complex emotional lives. Roy's clarity of vision is remarkable, her voice original. (*Compliments of Publisher's Weekly*)

Golden Compass, The – by Phillip Pullman

In *The Golden Compass*, readers meet for the first time 11-year-old Lyra Belacqua, a precocious orphan growing up within the precincts of Jordan College in Oxford, England. It quickly becomes clear that Lyra's Oxford is not precisely like our own - nor is her world. In Lyra's world, everyone has a personal dæmon, a lifelong animal familiar. This is a world in which science, theology and magic are closely intertwined. These ideas are of little concern to Lyra who, at the outset of the story, spends most of her time with her friend Roger, a kitchen boy. Together, they share a carefree existence scampering across the roofs of the college, racing through the streets of Oxford, or waging war with the other children in town. But that life changes forever when Lyra and her dæmon, Pantalaimon, prevent an assassination attempt on her uncle, the powerful Lord Asriel, and then overhear a secret discussion about a mysterious entity known as Dust. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Growing Seasons by Annie Spiegelman

In journal entries written to her young son, Jack, Spiegelman characterizes the balancing act that is daily life for a thoughtful, caring, contemporary woman. Although her toddler won't be able to read the book for years to come, readers will find the refreshingly zany writing to be compelling as Spiegelman muses on becoming a master gardener, and rides the turbulent yet joyful waves of first-time motherhood. Spiegelman presents a covey of kooky sisters getting together to deal with their mother's illness, not to mention the commotion a marriage undergoes after a child arrives. Booklist

A House for Mr. Biswas by V.S. Naipaul

The early masterpiece of V. S. Naipaul's brilliant career, **A House for Mr. Biswas** is an unforgettable story inspired by Naipaul's father that has been hailed as one of the twentieth century's finest novels. In his forty-six short years, Mr. Mohun Biswas has been fighting against destiny to achieve some semblance of independence, only to face a lifetime of calamity. Shuttled from one residence to another after the drowning death of his father, for which he is inadvertently responsible, Mr. Biswas yearns for a place he can call home. But when he marries into the domineering Tulsi family on whom he indignantly becomes dependent, Mr. Biswas embarks on an arduous—and endless—struggle to weaken their hold over him and purchase a house of his own. A heartrending, dark comedy of manners, **A House for Mr. Biswas** masterfully evokes a man's quest for autonomy against an emblematic post-colonial canvas. (Compliments of Amazon.com)

Housekeeping by Marilynne Robinson

Housekeeping is the story of Ruth and her younger sister, Lucille, who grow up haphazardly, first under the care of their competent grandmother, then of two comically bumbling great-aunts, and finally Syl;vie, their eccentric and remote aubt. Their lives spun off the tilting world like thread off a spindle," says Ruthie, the novel's narrator. The interwoven themes of loss and love, longing and loneliness—"the wanting never subsided"—require a cool, almost impersonal touch. Originally published in 1980 and filmed in 1987. Winner of the Pen/Hemingway Award.

In the Time of the Butterflies-by Julia Alvarez

During the last days of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic, three young women, were ambushed and assassinated as they drove back from visiting their jailed husbands. Thus martyred, the Mirabal sisters have become mythical figures in their country, where they are known as las mariposas (the butterflies), from their underground code names. Herself a native of the Dominican Republic, Alvarez (*How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*) has fictionalized their story in a narrative that starts slowly but builds to a gripping intensity. Each of the girls--Patria, Minerva and Maria Terese (Mate) Mirabal--speaks in her own voice, beginning in their girlhood in the 1940s; their surviving sister, Dede, frames the narrative with her own tale of suffering and dedication to their memory. Alvarez captures the terrorized atmosphere of a police state, in which people live under the sword of terrible fear and atrocities cannot be acknowledged. As the sisters' energetic fervor turns to anguish, Alvarez conveys their courage and their desperation, and the full import of their tragedy. (Compliments of Amazon.com)

Into the Forest by Jean Hegland

Hegland's powerfully imagined first novel will make readers thankful for telephones and CD players while it underscores the vulnerability of lives dependent on technology. The tale is set in the near future: electricity has failed, mail delivery has stopped and looting and violence have destroyed civil order. In Northern California, 32 miles from the closest town, two orphaned teenage sisters ration a dwindling supply of tea bags and infested cornmeal. They remember their mother's warnings about the nearby forest, but as the crisis deepens, bears and wild pigs start to seem less dangerous than humans. From the first page, the sense of crisis and the lucid, honest voice of the 17-year-old narrator pull the reader in, and the fight for survival adds an urgent edge to her coming-of-age story. Flashbacks smartly create a portrait of the lost family:

an iconoclastic father, artistic mother and two independent daughters. (Compliments of Publisher's Weekly)

The Jane Austen Book Club by Karen Joy Fowler

Fowler's fifth novel (after PEN/Faulkner award finalist *Sister Noon*) features her trademark sly wit, quirky characters and digressive storytelling, but with a difference: this one is book club-ready, complete with mock-serious "questions for discussion" posed by the characters themselves. The plot here is deceptively slim: five women and one enigmatic man meet on a monthly basis to discuss the novels of Jane Austen, one at a time. As they debate Marianne's marriage to Brandon and whether or not Charlotte Lucas is gay, they reveal nothing so much as their own "private Austen(s)": to Jocelyn, an unmarried "control freak," the author is the consummate matchmaker; to solitary Prudie, she's the supreme ironist; to the lesbian Allegra, she's the disingenuous defender of the social caste system, etc. From Publishers Weekly

Joy Luck Club, The -by Amy Tan

The book opens with the story of a Chinese woman who bought a swan because she believed it was born a duck then stretched its neck to become more. The woman wished to do the same. When she arrived in America, however, they took her swan away and she was left with nothing but a feather, and a few broken dreams. Amy Tan's "The Joy Luck Club" is the story of four women and their daughters. In a series of flashbacks we see how each woman came to America, fleeing their Chinese past of oppression and fear to build a better life for their children. Their stories are of war and ancestral pride, marriage and never losing hope. Theirs is the story of the women of China and how they rose above their place in the world, teaching their daughters to do likewise. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Kite Runner-by Khaled Hosseini.

Two motherless boys, Amir and Hassan, grow up together in Kabul, Afghanistan. A crime of violence changes their friendship. Later, as an adult, the cowardly Amir tries to learn the fate of Hassan's son. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Lexus and the Olive Tree, The - by Thomas L. Friedman

Friedman, the well-traveled *New York Times* foreign-affairs columnist, peppers *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* with stories that illustrate his central theme: that globalization--the Lexus--is the central organizing principle of the post-cold war world, even though many individuals and nations resist by holding onto what has traditionally mattered to them--the olive tree. Problem is, few of us understand what exactly globalization means. As Friedman sees it, the concept, at first glance, is all about American hegemony, about Disneyfication of all corners of the earth. But the reality, thank goodness, is far more complex than that, involving international relations, global markets, and the rise of the power of individuals (Bill Gates, Osama Bin Laden) relative to the power of nations. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Lydia Cassatt Reading the Morning Paper-by Harriet Scott Chessman

Elegantly conceived and tenderly written, this cameo of a novel ushers readers into a small, warmly lit corner of art history. Inspired by five Mary Cassatt paintings of Cassatt's older sister, Lydia, Chessman paints her own intimate portrait of the admirable Lydia, Chessman's prose can be obvious and overcareful "I think May's sadness, when she heard my diagnosis, was increased by her memory of earlier sorrows" but her instinctive understanding of the sisters' relationship and her thoughtful description of their studio collaborations elevate this understated effort. The five paintings, beautifully reproduced, appear at intervals and acquire new depth even as they enrich Chessman's story. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Life of Pi - by Yann Martel

The peripatetic Pi Patel spends a beguiling boyhood in Pondicherry, India, as the son of a zookeeper. Growing up beside the wild beasts, Pi gathers an encyclopedic knowledge of the animal world. His curious mind also makes the leap from his native Hinduism to Christianity and Islam, all three of which he practices with joyous abandon. In his 16th year, Pi sets sail with his family and some of their menagerie to start a new life in Canada. Halfway to Midway Island, the ship sinks into the Pacific, leaving Pi stranded on a life raft with a hyena, an orangutan, an injured zebra and a 450-pound Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. After the beast dispatches the others, Pi is left to survive for 227 days with his large feline companion on the 26-foot-long raft, using all his knowledge, wits and faith to keep himself alive. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Living to Tell the Tale - by Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Clearly, Garcia Marquez was born to write, and what a volatile and compelling world he was given to write about. Invaluable in its personal and cultural history, and triumphant in its compassion and artistry, Garcia Marquez's portrait of himself as a young writer is as revelatory and powerful as his fiction. Time is porous in Márquez's Colombia, flowing back and forth among the mythic moments of his personal history to accommodate his fascination for place. Similarly, Márquez toys with the boundaries of truth and fiction throughout his book. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

March – by Geraldine Brooks

In Brooks's well-researched interpretation of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, Mr. March also remains a shadowy figure for the girls who wait patiently for his letters. They keep a stiff upper lip, answering his stiff, evasive, flowery letters with cheering accounts of the plays they perform and the charity they provide, hiding their own civilian privations. Readers, however, are treated to the real March, based loosely upon the character of Alcott's own father. His high-minded ideals are continually thwarted not only by the culture of the times, but by his own ineptitude as well. When it appears that he has committed a sexual indiscretion with a nurse, a former slave and an old acquaintance, March is sent to a plantation where the recently freed slaves earn wages but continue to experience cruelty and indignities. Here his faith in himself and in his religious and political convictions are tested. Sick and discouraged, he returns to his little women, who have grown strong in his absence. March, on the other hand, has experienced the horrors of war, serious illness, guilt, regret, and utter disillusionment.-*Jackie Gropman, Chantilly Regional Library, VA*

Middlesex – by Jeffrey Eugenides

A dazzling triumph from the bestselling author of *The Virgin Suicides*, *Middlesex* is the astonishing tale of a gene that passes down through three generations of a Greek American family and flowers in the body of Calliope Stephanides. *Middlesex* is a story about what it means to occupy the complex and unnamed middle ground between male and female, Greek and American, past and present. For Cal, caught between these identities, the journey to adulthood is particularly fraught. Jeffrey Eugenides' epic portrayal of Cal's struggle is classical in its structure and scope and contemporary in its content; a tender and honest examination of a battle that is increasingly relevant to us all. (<http://www.readinggroupguides.com>)

The Milagro Beanfield War – by John Nichols

Joe Mondragon, a feisty hustler with a talent for trouble, slammed his battered pickup to a stop, tugged on his gumboots, and marched into the arid patch of ground. Carefully (and also illegally), he tapped into the main irrigation channel. And so began – though few knew it at the time – the Milagro beanfield war. Gradually, the small farmers and sheepmen begin to rally to Joe's beanfield as the symbol of their lost rights and their lost lands. And downstate in the capital, the Anglo water barons and power brokers huddle in urgent conference, intent on destroying that symbol before it destroys their multimillion-dollar land-development schemes. The tale of Milagro's rising is a vivid portrayal of a town that, half-stumbling and partly prodded, gropes its way toward its own stubborn salvation. (www.henryholt.com/readingguides/milagro)

Mountains Beyond Mountains by Tracy Kidder

In medical school, Paul Farmer found his life's calling: to cure infectious diseases and to bring the lifesaving tools of modern medicine to those who need them the most. Tracy Kidder's magnificent account shows how one person can make a difference in solving global health problems through a clear-eyed understanding of the interaction of politics, wealth, social systems, and disease. From book cover

Moviegoer - by Walker Percy

This elegantly written account of a young man's search for signs of purpose in the universe is one of the great existential texts of the postwar era and is really funny besides. Binx Bolling, inveterate cinemaphile, contemplative rake and man of the periphery, tries hedonism and tries doing the right thing, but ultimately finds redemption (or at least the prospect of it) by taking a leap of faith and quite literally embracing what only seems irrational. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

My California: journeys by great writers edited by Donna Wares

Fly-fish the pristine waters of the Owens River. Step up to the microphone in a California honky-tonk. Surf the biggest waves California has ever seen. Mingle with ducks in an urban oasis. Roller skate through L.A.'s Union Station. See California through the eyes of 27 of the state's finest writers in this delicious travel and adventure anthology. All of the contributors to MY CALIFORNIA donated their work so proceeds of this book can benefit the beleaguered California Arts Council. Join contributors Pico Iyer, Michael Chabon, Thomas Steinbeck, Dana Gioia, Matt Warshaw, Patt

Morrison, T. Jefferson Parker, Edward Humes, Mark Arax, Deanne Stillman, Rubén Martínez, Percival Everett, Kathi Kamen Goldmark, Mary Mackey, Gerald Haslam, Aimee Liu, D.J. Waldie, Héctor Tobar, Firoozeh Dumas, devorah major, Carolyn See, Chrissy Yost, Anh Do, Derek M. Powazek, Daniel Weintraub, David Kipen, and Veronique de Turenne in a good read for a good deed!! From Publishers Weekly

My Year of Meats by Ruth L. Ozeki

As a writer, Ozeki draws upon her knowledge in documentary filmmaking cleverly to bring the worlds of two women together by utilizing the U.S. meat industry as a central link. Alternating between the voices of Jane (in the United States) and Akiko Ueno, the wife of Jane's boss (in Japan), Ozeki draws parallels in the lives of these two women through beef, love, television, and their desire to have children. Ozeki skillfully tackles hard-pressing issues such as the use and effects of hormones in the beef industry and topics such as cultural differences, gender roles, and sexual exploitation. Her work is unique in presentation yet moving and entertaining. ▶ (Compliments of Library Journal)

Mystic River – by Dennis Lehane

Mystic River is a story about three friends who confront their past and their choices. When Dave, Sean, and Jimmy were eleven, two men posing as policemen lured Dave into a car. Although he escaped, the terrifying incident causes the three friends to grow apart. Finally, their paths cross again twenty-five years later when Sean Devine, a homicide detective, is assigned to investigate the death of Jimmy Marcus's daughter. Dave Boyle is a suspect. (Courtesy Massachusetts Center for the Book)

Namesake, The - by Jhumpa Lahiri

Ashima and Ashoke Ganguli are recent immigrants to Boston from India in 1968 when they give birth to their first child, a son. Their son ends up with the pet name of Gogol, when his "good name" never arrives from India. Gogol despises his name and grows up as American as he can while his parents cling to their Bengali past while living what appears to be a typical American suburban lifestyle. (Compliments of Amazon.com)

Omnivore's Dilemma by Michael Pollan

Pollan examines what he calls "our national eating disorder" in this remarkably clearheaded book. It's a fascinating journey up and down the food chain, one that might change the way you read the label on a frozen dinner, dig into a steak or decide whether to buy organic eggs. Pollan prepares a dinner with items from Whole Foods, investigating the flaws in the world of "big organic"; cooks a meal with ingredients from a small, utopian Virginia farm; and assembles a feast from things he's foraged and hunted. This may sound earnest, but Pollan isn't preachy. I'm not convinced I'd want to go hunting with Pollan, but I'm sure I'd enjoy having dinner with him. Just as long as we could eat at a table, not in a Toyota. (Compliments of Publisher's Weekly)

Persepolis by Mariane Satrapi

Descended from the last Emperor of Iran, Satrapi is nine when fundamentalist rebels overthrow the Shah. While Satrapi's radical parents and their community initially welcome the ouster, they soon learn a new brand of totalitarianism is taking over. Satrapi's art is minimal and stark yet often charming and humorous as it depicts the madness around her. Thanks to the Iran-Iraq war, neighbors' homes are bombed, playmates are killed and parties are forbidden. Satrapi's parents, who once lived in luxury despite their politics, struggle to educate their daughter. Skillfully presenting a child's view of war and her own shifting ideals, she also shows quotidian life in Tehran and her family's pride and love for their country despite the tumultuous times. (*Compliments of Publisher's Weekly*)

Pianist, The-by Wladyslaw Szpilman

Written immediately after the end of World War II, this morally complex Holocaust memoir is notable for its exact depiction of the grim details of life in Warsaw under the Nazi occupation. "Things you hardly noticed before took on enormous significance: a comfortable, solid armchair, the soothing look of a white-tiled stove," writes Wladyslaw Szpilman, a pianist for Polish radio when the Germans invaded. Arbitrarily removed from the transport that took his family to certain death, Szpilman does not deny the "animal fear" that led him to seize this chance for escape. Szpilman found compassion in unlikely people, including a German officer who brought food and warm clothing to his hiding place during the war's last days. Extracts from the officer's wartime diary, with their expressions of outrage at his fellow soldiers' behavior, remind us to be wary of general condemnation of any group. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Picture Bride – by Yoshiko Uchida

After Hana Omija arrives in San Francisco prior to World War II to marry Taro Takida, she betrays him with his best friend before realizing his qualities and before they are interned at Topaz.

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

Elizabeth Bennet is the perfect Austen heroine: intelligent, generous, sensible, incapable of jealousy or any other major sin. That makes her sound like an insufferable goody-goody, but the truth is she's a completely hip character, who if provoked is not above skewering her antagonist with a piece of her exceptionally sharp -- but always polite -- 18th century wit. The point is, you spend the whole book absolutely fixated on the critical question: will Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy hook up? (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

The Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio: How my Mother raised 10 kids on 25 Words or Less by Terry Ryan

In the 1950s, the Ryan family struggled to make ends meet. Ten kids and a father who spent most of his paycheck on booze drained the family's meager finances. But mom Evelyn Ryan, a former journalist, found an ingenious way to bring in extra income: entering contests on the backs of cereal boxes and the like. The author, Evelyn's daughter, tells the entertaining story of her childhood and her mother's contest career with humor and affection. She is not a professional narrator, but her love and admiration for her mother come through in every

sentence. Evelyn won supermarket shopping sprees that put much-needed food on the table, provided washing machines and other appliances the family couldn't afford, and delivered cash to pay the mounting pile of bills. This well-told, suspenseful tale is peppered with examples of Evelyn's winning poems and slogans, taken from the years of notebooks that she saved and passed on to her daughter, and has a fiction-worthy climax that will keep readers laughing even as they're glued to Ryan's tale. (Compliments of Publisher's Weekly)

The Reader by Bernhard Schlink

Oprah Book Club® Selection, February 1999: Originally published in Switzerland, and gracefully translated into English by Carol Brown Janeway, *The Reader* is a brief tale about sex, love, reading, and shame in postwar Germany. Michael Berg is 15 when he begins a long, obsessive affair with Hanna, an enigmatic older woman. He never learns very much about her, and when she disappears one day, he expects never to see her again. But, to his horror, he does. Hanna is a defendant in a trial related to Germany's Nazi past, and it soon becomes clear that she is guilty of an unspeakable crime. As Michael follows the trial, he struggles with an overwhelming question: What should his generation do with its knowledge of the Holocaust? "We should not believe we can comprehend the incomprehensible, we may not compare the incomparable.... Should we only fall silent in revulsion, shame, and guilt? To what purpose?"

The Reader, which won the *Boston Book Review's* Fisk Fiction Prize, wrestles with many more demons in its few, remarkably lucid pages. What does it mean to love those people--parents, grandparents, even lovers--who committed the worst atrocities the world has ever known? And is any atonement possible through literature? Schlink's prose is clean and pared down, stripped of unnecessary imagery, dialogue, and excess in any form. What remains is an austere beautiful narrative of the attempt to breach the gap between Germany's pre- and postwar generations, between the guilty and the innocent, and between words and silence. (Compliments of Amazon.com)

Reading Lolita in Tehran-by Azar Nafisi

Literature professor Nafisi returned to her native Iran after a long education abroad, remained there for some 18 years, and left in 1997 for the United States, where she now teaches at Johns Hopkins. Woven through her story are the books she has taught along the way, among them works by Nabokov, Fitzgerald, James and Austen. Lolita becomes a brilliant metaphor for life in the Islamic republic. The desperate truth of Lolita's story is... the confiscation of one individual's life by another, Nafisi writes. The parallel to women's lives is clear: we had become the figment of someone else's dreams. (Compliments of Publisher's Weekly)

River of Doubt-by Candice Millard

A year after Roosevelt lost a third-party bid for the White House in 1912, he decided to chase away his blues by accepting an invitation for a South American trip that quickly evolved into an ill-prepared journey down an unexplored tributary of the Amazon known as the River of Doubt. The small group, was hampered by the failure to pack enough supplies and the absence of canoes sturdy enough for the river's rapids. An injury Roosevelt sustained became infected with flesh-eating bacteria and left the ex-president so weak that, at his lowest moment, he told Kermit to leave him to die in the rainforest. Millard, nails the suspense element of this story perfectly, but equally important

to her success is the marvelous amount of detail she provides on the wildlife that Roosevelt and his fellow explorers encountered on their journey, as well as the cannibalistic indigenous tribe that stalked them much of the way. (*Compliments of Publisher's Weekly*)

Running with Scissors- by Augusten Burroughs

There is a passage early in Augusten Burroughs's harrowing and highly entertaining memoir, *Running with Scissors*, that speaks volumes about the author. While going to the garbage dump with his father, young Augusten spots a chipped, glass-top coffee table that he longs to bring home. There were certainly numerous chips in the childhood Burroughs describes: an alcoholic father, an unstable mother who gives him up for adoption to her therapist, and an adolescence spent as part of the therapist's eccentric extended family. But just as he dreamed of doing with that old table, Burroughs employs a vigorous program of decoration and fervent polishing to a life that many would have simply thrown in a landfill. Burroughs's perspective achieves a crucial balance for a memoir: emotional but not self-involved, observant but not clinical, funny but not deliberately comic. There's always a sense that Burroughs's survivor mentality will guide him through and that the coffee table will be salvaged after all. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Secret Life of Bees by Sue Kidd

It's 1964, the year of the Civil Rights Act, in Sylvan, S.C. Fourteen-year-old Lily is on the lam with motherly servant Rosaleen, fleeing both Lily's abusive father T. Ray and the police who battered Rosaleen for defending her new right to vote. Lily is also fleeing memories, particularly her jumbled recollection of how, as a frightened four-year-old, she accidentally shot and killed her mother during a fight with T. Ray. Among her mother's possessions, Lily finds a picture of a black Virgin Mary with "Tiburon, S.C." on the back. It turns out that the town is headquarters of Black Madonna Honey, produced by three middle-aged black sisters, August, June and May Boatwright. The "Calendar sisters" take in the fugitives, putting Lily to work in the honey house, where for the first time in years she's happy. Kidd's success at capturing the moody adolescent girl's voice makes her ambivalence comprehensible and charming. And it's deeply satisfying when August teaches Lily to "find the mother in (herself)" a soothing lesson that should charm female readers of all ages. (*Compliments of Publisher's Weekly*)

Snow Flower and the Secret Fan by Lisa See

See's engrossing novel set in remote 19th-century China details the deeply affecting story of lifelong, intimate friends (*laotong*, or "old sames") Lily and Snow Flower, their imprisonment by rigid codes of conduct for women and their betrayal by pride and love. Beginning with a detailed and heartbreaking description of Lily and her sisters' foot binding ("Only through pain will you have beauty. Only through suffering will you have peace"), the story widens to a vivid portrait of family and village life. As both a suspenseful and poignant story and an absorbing historical chronicle, this novel has bestseller potential and should become a reading group favorite as well. (*Compliments of Publisher's Weekly*)

Speckled Monster by Jennifer Carrell

Long before vaccination for smallpox was developed in Europe in the 1790s, people in the Middle East, the Caucasus and Africa knew that small amounts of live smallpox virus injected under the skin would induce a mild form of the disease that rendered a person immune from full-blown smallpox. In her intriguing book, Carrell switches between the stories of two courageous people in early 18th-century England and America who believed passionately in this procedure, called variolation. Most people who underwent the procedure didn't get full-blown cases of smallpox, and variolation was finally accepted as the only way to protect against the disease before vaccination was developed in the 1790s. Carrell's novelistic treatment of this story, is engaging in spite of an overabundance of fabricated conversations and scenes that slow the action. (*Compliments of Publisher's Weekly*)

Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down, The - by Ann Fadiman

Award-winning reporter Fadiman has turned what began as a magazine assignment into a riveting, cross-cultural medicine classic in this anthropological exploration of the Hmong population in Merced County, California. Following the case of Lia (a Hmong child with a progressive and unpredictable form of epilepsy), Fadiman maps out the controversies raised by the collision between Western medicine and holistic healing traditions of Hmong immigrants. Unable to enter the Laotian forest to find herbs for Lia that will "fix her spirit," her family becomes resigned to the Merced County emergency system, which has little understanding of Hmong animist traditions. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Sweet and Low- by Rich Cohen

Disinherited from the family fortune built by his maternal grandfather, Ben Eisenstadt, who invented the artificial sweetener Sweet'N Low, Cohen mines a wealth of family history in this funny, angry, digressive memoir. This story of the family-owned, Brooklyn-based company is, at its heart, a tale of immigrant strife and Cohen's fractious Jewish clan, including his grandmother Betty, and his hypochondriac, housebound Aunt Gladys, who connived to eliminate her sister (Cohen's mother) from Betty's will. The history of artificial sweeteners, the post-WWII weight-watching craze, etc.—the real grace of his writing lies in the merciless, comic characterizations of his relatives. (*Compliments of Publisher's Weekly*)

Sweet Hereafter by Russell Banks

With the cool logic of accreting snowflakes, Banks prose builds a world—a small U.S. town near Canada—and peoples it with four vivid, sensitive souls linked by a school-bus tragedy: the bus driver; the widowed Vietnam vet who was driving behind the bus, waving at his kids, when it went off the road; the perpetually peeved negligence lawyer who tries to shape the victims' heartaches into a winning case; and the beauty-queen cheerleader crippled by the crash, whose testimony will determine everyone's fate. We experience the story from inside the heads of the four characters in turn—each knowing things the others don't, each misunderstanding the facts in his or her own way.

Banks's book is haunting, and precise, making every revelation count. Banks's wit is pitiless--it's painful when we discover that the bus driver, who prides herself on interpreting for her stroke-impaired husband, is translating his wise but garbled observations all wrong. The crash turns out not to be the ultimate tragedy: in the cold northern light of its aftermath, we discover that we're all in this alone. (Compliments of Amazon.com)

Sweetest Dreams by Doris Lessing

In lieu of writing volume three of her autobiography, the grand dame of English letters delves into the 1960s and beyond. Frances Lennox and her two adolescent sons, and their motley friends have taken over the bottom floors of a rambling house in Hampstead, London. Lessing clearly relishes the recalcitrant '60s, yet she follows her characters through the women's movement of the '70s and a lengthy final digression in '90s Africa. While the last section lacks the intimate presence of long-suffering Frances, the novel is weightily molded by Lessing's rich life experience and comes to a momentous conclusion. (*Compliments of Publishers Weekly*)

The Talented Mr. Ripley by Patricia Highsmith

One of the great crime novels of the 20th century, Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* is a blend of the narrative subtlety of Henry James and the self-reflexive irony of Vladimir Nabokov. Like the best modernist fiction, *Ripley* works on two levels. First, it is the story of a young man, Tom Ripley, whose nihilistic tendencies lead him on a deadly passage across Europe. On another level, the novel is a commentary on fictionmaking and techniques of narrative persuasion. Tom Ripley seduces readers into empathizing with him even as his actions defy all moral standards.

The novel begins with a play on James's *The Ambassadors*. Tom Ripley is chosen by the wealthy Herbert Greenleaf to retrieve Greenleaf's son, Dickie, from his overlong sojourn in Italy. Dickie, it seems, is held captive both by the Mediterranean climate and the attractions of his female companion, but Mr. Greenleaf needs him back in New York to help with the family business. With an allowance and a new purpose, Tom leaves behind his dismal city apartment to begin his career as a return escort. But Tom, too, is captivated by Italy. He is also taken with the life and looks of Dickie Greenleaf. He insinuates himself into Dickie's world and soon finds that his passion for a lifestyle of wealth and sophistication transcends moral compunction. Tom will become Dickie Greenleaf--at all costs. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Tender at the Bone - by Ruth Reichl

At an early age, Ruth Reichl discovered that "food could be a way of making sense of the world. . . . If you watched people as they ate, you could find out who they were." Her deliciously crafted memoir, *Tender at the Bone*, is the story of a life determined, enhanced, and defined in equal measure by a passion for food, unforgettable people, and the love of tales well told. Beginning with Reichl's mother, the notorious food-poisoner known as the Queen of Mold, Reichl introduces us to the fascinating characters that shaped her world and her tastes, from the gourmand Monsieur du Croix, who served Reichl her first soufflé, to those at her politically correct table in Berkeley who championed the organic food revolution in the 1970s. Spiced with Reichl's infectious humor and sprinkled with her favorite recipes, *Tender at the Bone* is a witty and compelling chronicle of a culinary sensualist's coming-of-age. (*Courtesy Random House*)

Thread of Grace- By Mary Doria Russell

Busy, noisy and heartfelt, this sprawling novel by Russell chronicles the Italian resistance to the Germans during the last two years of WWII. Russell pursues numerous narrative threads, including the Blums' perilous flight over the mountains; Italian Jew Renzo Leoni's personal coming to terms with his participation in the Dolo hospital bombing during the Abyssinian campaign in 1935; the dangerous frenzy of the Italian partisans; and the bloody-mindedness of German officers resolved to carry out Hitler's murderous racial policy despite mounting evidence of its futility. The intensity and intimacy of Russell's storytelling, her sharp character writing and fierce sense of humor bring fresh immediacy to this riveting WWII saga. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to promote Peace...One School at a Time - by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin

Some failures lead to phenomenal successes, and this American nurse's unsuccessful attempt to climb K2, the world's second tallest mountain, is one of them. Dangerously ill when he finished the climb in 1993, Mortenson was sheltered for seven weeks by the small Pakistani village of Korphe; in return, he promised to build the impoverished town's first school, a project that grew into the Central Asia Institute, which since constructed more than 50 schools across rural Pakistan and Afghanistan. Captivating and suspenseful, with engrossing accounts of both hostilities and unlikely friendships, this book will win many readers' hearts. (Publishers Weekly)

Too Close to the Falls by Catherine Gildiner

Clinical psychologist Gildiner's well-crafted memoir describes her 1950s childhood in Lewiston, "a small town in western New York, a few miles north of Niagara Falls." Hers was no ordinary childhood but that of a precocious, headstrong, and intelligent girl whose parents provided a uniquely unconventional upbringing. Because of her lively temperament, her pediatrician recommended to her older and devoutly Catholic parents that she work in her father's pharmacy to channel her energies. Thus, at the age of four, she was teamed with a black male employee to deliver prescription drugs when not in school. She had a wide range of experiences with her co-worker, stopping in bars and making deliveries to both the wealthiest and the poorest members of the community. In each eventful chapter, Gildiner focuses on a particular adult who strongly influenced her understanding of the world. Often dangerous, her experiences, as related here, are also amusing, charming, and relevant. (*Compliments of Library Journal*)

Tortilla Curtain – by T. C. Boyle

In Southern California's Topanga Canyon, two couples live in close proximity and yet are worlds apart. Nature writer Delaney Mossbacher and his wife, real estate agent Kyra Menaker-Mossbacher, reside in an exclusive, secluded housing development with their son, Jordan. The Mossbachers are agnostic liberals with a passion for recycling and fitness. Camped out in a ravine at the bottom of the canyon are Cándido and América Rincón, a Mexican couple who have crossed the border illegally. On the edge of starvation, they search desperately for work in the hope of moving into an apartment before their baby is born. They cling to their vision of the American dream, which, no matter how hard they try to achieve it, manages to elude their grasp at every turn. A chance, violent encounter brings together Delaney and Cándido, instigating a chain of events that eventually culminates in a harrowing confrontation. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy: an economist examines the markets, power, and politics of world trade by Pietra Rivoli

During a 1999 protest of the World Trade Organization, Rivoli, an economics professor at Georgetown, looked on as an activist seized the microphone and demanded, "Who made your T-shirt?" Rivoli determined to find out. She interviewed cotton farmers in Texas, factory workers in China, labor champions in the American South and used-clothing vendors in Tanzania. Problems, Rivoli concludes, arise not with the market, but with the suppression of the market. Subsidized farmers, and manufacturers and importers with tax breaks, she argues, succeed because they avoid the risks and competition of unprotected global trade, which in turn forces poorer countries to lower their prices to below subsistence levels in order to compete. Her writing is at its best when it considers the social dimensions of a global economy, as in chapters on the social networks of African used-clothing entrepreneurs. From Publishers weekly

Undaunted Courage- by Stephen Ambrose

Ambrose has written prolifically about men who were larger than life: Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Colonel Custer. Here he takes on half of the two-headed hero of American exploration: Meriwether Lewis. Meriwether Lewis, as secretary to Thomas Jefferson and living in the White House for two years, got his education by being apprenticed to a great man. Their friendship is at the center of this account. Jefferson hand-picked Lewis for the great cross-country trek, and Lewis in turn picked William Clark to accompany him. The journals of the expedition, most written by Clark, are one of the treasures of American history. Without adding a great deal to existing accounts, Ambrose uses his skill with detail and atmosphere to dust off an icon and put him back on the trail west. (*Compliments of Publisher's Weekly*)

Water for Elephants by Sara Gruen.

As a young man, Jacob Jankowski was tossed by fate onto a rickety train that was home to the Benzini Brothers Most Spectacular Show on Earth. A veterinary student just shy of a degree, he was put in charge of caring for the circus menagerie. It was there that he met Marlina, the beautiful equestrian star married to August, the charismatic but twisted animal trainer. And he met Rosie, an untrainable elephant who was the great gray hope for this third-rate traveling show. The bond that grew among this unlikely trio was one of love and trust, and, ultimately, it was their only hope for survival. (*Compliments of Amazon.com*)

What we Keep- by Elizabeth Berg

Berg excels at writing novels about the close personal relationships between women. As this new work opens, Ginny is flying to California to join her sister in a meeting with their mother, whom neither daughter has seen for 35 years. Ginny uses her travel time to reflect upon her memories of the summer when her mother withdrew from the family and became an outsider in her daughters' lives.

Berg's precise, evocative descriptions create vivid images of Ginny's physical world, while Berg's understanding and perception are an eloquent testimony to Ginny's emotional turmoil. Berg cleverly examines the roles and relationships of mothers and daughters and reveals how truth, forgiveness, and understanding are possible in healing intergenerational rifts between women. (*From Library Journal*)

When the Emperor Was Divine – by Julie Otsuka

This heartbreaking, bracingly unsentimental debut describes in poetic detail the travails of a Japanese family living in an internment camp during World War II, raising the specter of wartime injustice in bone-chilling fashion. The novel never strays into melodrama – Otsuka describes the family's everyday life in Berkeley and the pitiful objects that define their world in the camp with admirable restraint and modesty. Events are viewed from numerous characters' points of view, and the different perspectives are defined by distinctive, lyrically simple observations. The novel's honesty and matter-of-fact tone in the face of inconceivable injustice are the source of its power.

OTHER RESOURCES:

Book Club Cookbook, The – by Judy Gelman and Vicki Levy Krupp

Featuring recipes and discussion ideas for one hundred popular book club selections, *The Book Club Cookbook* will guide you in selecting and preparing culinary masterpieces that blend perfectly with the literary masterpieces your club is reading. With contributions from many of the authors of these favorite books themselves, as well as profiles of book clubs all across the country that are creatively integrating food into their meetings, this singular cookbook includes such scrumptious pairings as Tandoori Shrimp with *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel and Spicy Pork with Orange Hoisin Sauce in Wonton Cups with *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* by Dai Sijie.”

Book Lust – by Nancy Pearl

“Pearl, a longtime reader, book reviewer and public librarian, presents a hundred or so of her favorites in this novel guide to finding the right book for the right mood. Presented in eclectic categories of people, places and themes (e.g. "Prose by Poets," "Dinosaur Hunting," "In Big Sky Country" and "Academia: The Joke"), each of her suggestions is accompanied by a few of her thoughts on it, a succinct plot summary and often information about the volume's prizes and print status. There's more than just novels, of course: she recommends, for instance, good "Techno-thrillers" ("nonfiction about science and technology") such as *The Thread Across the Ocean: The Heroic Story of the Transatlantic Cable* and *One Good Turn: A Natural History of the Screwdriver and the Screw*. Interestingly, Pearl urges readers to abandon books they dislike after 50 pages, though she does point out that frame of mind often determines one's opinion of a book. "When I begin reading a new book, I am embarking on a new, uncharted journey," Pearl declares in her brief introduction; with this guidebook in hand, readers can benefit from her experience as they travel their own ways.” From *Publishers Weekly*, Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc

More Book Lust – by Nancy Pearl

“In this sequel to the popular *Book Lust* (2003), Pearl, former Seattle librarian and a continuing national book-talk host, dips further into her repertoire of have-read books (both fiction and nonfiction) and offers up another batch she is only too happy to talk about. As in the previous volume, she creatively arranges her titles into unexpected but certainly tantalizing and even provocative

categories, this time presenting a whole new set of categories. From "Adapting to Adoption" to "Your Tax Dollars at Work: Good Reading from the Government (Really!)," and including "Nagging Mothers, Crying Children," "Science 101," and "Gender-Bending," Pearl suggests titles relevant to each category and gives a brief annotation for each. A self-confessed "readaholic," Pearl lets us benefit from her addiction. May she never seek recovery."

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