



Book Discussion Kit Titles

Atkinson, Kate. ***Case Histories***

“There is nothing fancy about the way Kate Atkinson’s...novel unfolds...she simply starts her story, grabs hold of the reader and doesn’t let go.” Case 1: Beloved youngest daughter disappears and is never seen again. Thirty years later, her sisters unearth shocking clues amid the clutter of their childhood home. Case 2: Lawyer delights in his daughter’s wit, effortless beauty and selfless love. Then his world is turned upside down. Case 3: Young wife trapped in a hell of her own making with needy baby and demanding husband...a fit of rage creates a grisly bloody escape. All three cases woven into a denouement “that taps into collective wishful thinking and suggests that warmth and safety may be found in the aftermath of blood and abandonment...author’s meaty, satisfying prose will attract many eager readers.”

Austen, Jane. ***Pride and Prejudice***

Wealthy Mr. Darcy and spirited Elizabeth Bennett dislike each other at first sight, and each must contend with their pride and prejudices while Elizabeth's mother plots economically advantageous marriages for all her daughters.

Bohjalian, Chris. ***Before You Know Kindness***

After a decade of spending the delightful summer week at their country house in New Hampshire, the members of the extended Seton family are confronted by a terrible accident when a loaded hunting rifle in the wrong hands leads to tragedy, testing the values, convictions, and relationships that hold the family together.

Boyle, T. C (Coraghessan). ***Tortilla Curtain***

A “timely and provocative” account of immigration in California where men and women risk everything to cross the Mexican border to take part in the American Dream. This is a novel about two families reflecting the intersection of the opposing worlds of starving illegal immigrants and wealthy Americans which subsequently reveals a tragicomedy of error and misunderstanding.

Brooks, Geraldine. ***March***

An extraordinary novel woven out of the lore of American history and winner of the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. This novel is an exploration of the devastation and moral complexities of the Civil War through the persona of Mr. March, the absent father from Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*. Mr. March struggles to reconcile duty to his fellow man with duty to his family during one of the most grim periods in American history.

Brooks, Geraldine. ***People of the Book***

Offered a coveted job to analyze and conserve a priceless Sarajevo Haggadah, Australian rare-book expert Hanna Heath discovers a series of tiny artifacts in the volume's ancient binding that reveal its historically significant origins. The author fictionalizes the history of an actual book: the Hebrew codex known as the Sarajevo Haggadah, an extremely precious illuminated manuscript originally from medieval Spain. In 1996, a ceasefire is effected to quell the bloody violence in Bosnia and Australian

book conservator Hanna Heath is called to restore the famous Sarajevo Haggadah. The condition of the manuscript leads her on a search for answers to where the Haggadah has been throughout its existence. This leads to a journey backward in time, to periods of major religious strife and persecution, from the 1940 German occupation of Yugoslavia, to 1894 and 1609 Venice, to 1492 Barcelona, and, finally, 1480 Seville. The Sarajevo Haggadah remains an artistic treasure despite being caught between opposing sides in battles of greed, intolerance, and bloodlust. [*The Sarajevo Haggadah is an illuminated manuscript that contains the illustrated traditional text of the Passover Haggadah which accompanies the Passover Seder. It is one of the oldest Sephardic works in the world, originating in Barcelona around 1350. It is presently owned by the National Museum of Bosnia in Sarajevo where it is on display. Its monetary value is undetermined, but a museum in Spain required that it be insured for \$700 million before it could be transported to an exhibition there in 1992*].

Dallas, Sandra. ***Prayers for Sale***

Set in the high country of Colorado during the Depression, this is the story of an unforgettable friendship between two women--eighty-six-year-old Hennie Comfort and seventeen-year-old Nit Spindle--and the deepest hardships and darkest secrets they shared with each other.

Dean, Debra. ***Madonnas of Leningrad***

This novel moves back and forth between the Soviet Union during World War II and modern-day America where Marina, an elderly Russian woman, recalls vivid images of her youth during the height of the siege of Leningrad. Russian émigré Marina Buriakov, 82, is preparing for her granddaughter's wedding while fighting a losing battle against Alzheimer's; she is able to remember her youth as a docent at the Hermitage Museum during the siege of Leningrad- in fact, she disappears into these memories. The museum staff and their families remain, wintering in the Hermitage basement to avoid bombs and marauding soldiers. During this period, Maria memorizes her favorite Hermitage works; these memories, beautifully interspersed, are especially vibrant. In her debut novel, the author seamlessly weaves Marina's past and present together. This novel and subsequent discussion will provide a fascinating way to learn about historical events about which the reader probably knew little.

Conway, Jill Ker. ***The Road from Coorain***

One woman's journey from a childhood in Australia's outback to adulthood as a successful American career woman. *The Road from Coorain* is about Everywoman, for it is about childhood loneliness, anguished parent-child relationships, dawning sensibility, discovering a vocation, and finding one's own sense of self.

Edwards, Kim. ***The Memory Keeper's Daughter***

In a tale spanning twenty-five years, a doctor delivers his newborn twins during a snowstorm and, rashly deciding to protect his wife from their baby daughter's affliction with Down Syndrome, turns her over to a nurse, who secretly raises the child.

Enger, Leif. ***Peace Like a River***

The quiet 1960s midwestern life of the Land family--father Jeremiah, and children, Reuben, Davy and Swede--is upended when Davy kills two teenage boys who have come to harm the family. On the morning of his sentencing, Davy escapes from his cell and the Lands set out in search of him. Their search is at once a heroic quest, a tragedy, a love story, and a haunting meditation on the possibility of magic in the everyday world.

Ferris, Joshua. **Then We Came to the End**

Riot of a novel about characters caught in the office politics of the modern world as the remaining employees at an office affected by a business downturn spend their time indulging in secret romances, elaborate pranks and frequent coffee breaks while trying to make sense of their only remaining 'work,' a mysterious pro-bono ad campaign. "Wildly funny debut...delightfully freakish and entirely credible...a large generous book about work." (The Office meets Kafka).

Fforde, Jasper. **The Eyre Affair**

This is a unique detective novel by a Welsh author. Thursday Next is a book-loving, gun-toting, wit-sliding heroine detective with the Literate Division charged with solving crimes related to literature. Acheron Hades is a one-time college professor turned criminal evil genius. This novel has been described as "Masterpiece Theater meets James Bond." With witty wordplay and a colorful cast of characters, Fforde pokes fun at literature's highbrow status and reminds readers that the classics are not just regal old chestnuts for decorating the bookshelves; they are living, breathing tales that remain as exhilarating and vibrant as they were when first written.

Ford, Jamie. **Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet**

When artifacts from Japanese families sent to internment camps during World War II are uncovered during renovations at a Seattle hotel, Henry Lee embarks on a quest that leads to memories of growing up Chinese in a city rife with anti-Japanese sentiment. This sentimental and heartfelt novel portrays two children separated during the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. In 1940s Seattle, ethnicities do not mix. Whites, blacks, Chinese and Japanese live in separate neighborhoods, and their children attend different schools. When Henry Lee's staunchly nationalistic father pins an "I am Chinese" button to his 12-year-old son's shirt and enrolls him in an all-white prep school, Henry finds himself friendless and at the mercy of schoolyard bullies. His salvation arrives in the form of Keiko, a Japanese girl with whom Henry forms an instant—and forbidden—bond. 40+ years later, the older Henry, a recent widower living in 1980s Seattle, reflects in a series of flashbacks on his burgeoning romance with Keiko and its abrupt ending when her family was evacuated. A chance discovery of items left behind by Japanese-Americans during the evacuation inspires Henry to share his and Keiko's story with his own son, in hopes of preventing the dysfunctional parent-child relationship he experienced with his own father. This is a novel that not only reminds readers of a shameful episode in American history, but cautions us to examine the present and take heed we don't repeat those injustices.

Franklin, Ariana . **Mistress of the Art of Death**

#1 of the Adelia Aguilar series, an original historical thriller. Adelia is an extraordinary woman for the times: a University of Salerno medical forensic expert when women were not permitted to study medicine in England, and, most importantly, an independent thinker. She is sent to medieval Cambridge at the request of Henry II because the Jewish community has been accused of ritual child murder. It is up to Vesuvia Adelia Rachel Ortese Aguilar to reveal the secrets of the dead; her lack of religious prejudice and skill at detective pathology make her a 'mistress of the art of death.'

Gilbert, Elizabeth. Eat, Pray, Love: ***One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India, and Indonesia***

Memoir detailing three distinct journeys taken by the author following a rough divorce in her quest to find spiritual and personal happiness. Wildly popular, the readership has adopted a "love it or loathe it" attitude toward the book: be prepared for a lively discussion!

Goldberg, Myla. ***Bee Season***

Powerful first novel about a troubled family's unraveling. With courage and all-consuming love, 9 year old Eliza attempts to pull her family back together by an act of will, yet each character in the book makes a choice that will eventually rend the fabric of the entire family. It is a complex novel dealing with family relationships, secrets, selfishness, competition, guilt, cults, mysticism and mental health.

Please do not consider the feature film of the same title as representative of the novel.

Gruen, Sara. ***Riding Lessons***

This first novel tells of a world class equestrienne and Olympic contender whose riding career and beloved horse are destroyed by a tragic accident. Twenty years later, jobless and abandoned by her husband, she brings her troubled teenage daughter back to her father's New Hampshire horse farm. This is a novel of human triumph and defeat as well as mistakes made and corrected.

Gruen, Sara. ***Water for Elephants***

A ninety-year-old veterinarian reminisces about his time with the Benzini Brothers Most Spectacular Show on Earth during the Great Depression. Memories of a circus world filled with "freaks and clowns and wonder and pain and anger and passion; a world with its own narrow irrational rules, its own way of life and its own way of death...a salvation and a living hell."

Haddon, Mark. ***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time***

Despite his overwhelming fear of interacting with people, Christopher, a mathematically-gifted, autistic fifteen-year-old boy, decides to investigate the murder of a neighbor's dog and uncovers secret information about his mother.

Hamilton, Steve. ***A Cold Day in Paradise***

Fourteen years after being shot by a psychopath named Rose, former police detective Alex McKnight learns that she has been released from prison.

Hart, Erin. ***Haunted Ground***

The Irish landscape holds secrets past and present as archaeologist Cormac O'Callaghan and pathologist Nora Gavin encounter a mystery when a decapitated woman is found in the bogs who may be related to a recent mother/child disappearance.

Hill, Lawrence. ***Someone Knows My Name***

Dreaming of escaping her life of slavery in South Carolina and returning to her African home, slave Aminata Diallo is thrown into the chaos of the Revolutionary War, during which she helps create a list of black people who have been honored for their service to the king.

Horan, Nancy. ***Loving Frank***

Fact and fiction blend in a historical novel that chronicles the relationship between seminal architect Frank Lloyd Wright and Mamah Cheney, from their meeting, when they were each married to another, to the clandestine affair that shocked Chicago society.

Hosseini, Khaled. ***The Kite Runner***

Traces the unlikely friendship of a wealthy Afghan youth and a servant's son, in a tale that spans the final days of Afghanistan's monarchy through the atrocities of the present day.

Hosseini, Khaled. ***A Thousand Splendid Suns***

Two women born a generation apart witness the destruction of their home and family in wartorn Kabul, losses incurred over the course of thirty years that test the limits of their strength and courage.

Jones, Edward P. ***The Known World***

"Transforming a little-known historical footnote into an epic novel with few certified villains or heroes, this Pulitzer Prize-winning novel goes right to the heart of slavery as it tells of a black slave owner in 1850's Virginia and others who survive by negotiating mazes of moral contradiction...The book illustrates how slavery corrupts good intentions and underwrites bad ones, yet allows for the odd act of decency...Jones has an exceptional ear for speech now buried in the past...and the freshness of his story lies in its very incongruity and strangeness."

Kallos, Stephanie. ***Broken for You***

Margaret Hughes, a septuagenarian living in Seattle, takes in a series of boarders who help her cope with her illness, and whose lives become unexpectedly connected to each other.

Kingsolver, Barbara. ***The Poisonwood Bible: a novel***

The family of a fierce evangelical Baptist missionary--Nathan Price, his wife, and his four daughters--begins to unravel after they embark on a 1959 mission to the Belgian Congo, where they find their lives transformed over the course of three decades.

Krauss, Nicole. ***The History of Love***

"There are two types of people in the world, one of Nicole Krauss' characters decides, those who prefer to be sad among others and those who prefer to be sad alone. A lost book reappears, drawing together the lives of the irrepressible Leo Gursky who has arrived at the end of this life, a locksmith searching for the son who's never known him, and young Alma Singer, desperate to find her namesake and a cure for her mother's loneliness. Gradually their stories merge into a single triumph of the imagination over loss.

Larson, Erik. ***The Devil in the White City: murder, magic, and madness at the fair that changed America***

A fascinating example of popular history, this is a parallel recounting of the white city, constructed for the 1892 World's Fair in Chicago, and the serial killer preying on young female fair goers.

Lee, Janice Y. K. ***The Piano Teacher***

Hired by the wealthy Chen family as a piano instructor, Claire Pendleton is seduced by the social life of Hong Kong's expatriate community and begins an affair with Will Truesdale, an enigmatic Englishman with a devastating past.

Lipman, Elinor. ***The Inn at Lake Devine***

A young Jewish woman finagles an invite to a "Gentiles-only" inn and through this humorous book, succeeds in entering the world that has tried to exclude her.

Martel, Yann. ***Life of Pi: a novel***

Possessing encyclopedia-like intelligence, unusual zookeeper's son Pi Patel sets sail for America, but when the ship sinks, he escapes on a life boat and is lost at sea with a dwindling number of animals until only he and a hungry Bengal tiger remain.

McBride, James. ***The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother (memoir)***

This national bestseller tells the story of James McBride and his mother – a rabbi's daughter, born in Poland and raised in the South, who fled to Harlem, married a black man, founded a church and put 12 children through college. Around the narrative of Ruth McBride Jordan, a.k.a. Rachel Deborah Shilsky, the daughter of an angry, failed Orthodox Jewish rabbi in the South, her son James writes of the inner confusions he felt as a black child of a white mother and the love and faith with which his mother surrounded their large family. The result is a powerful portrait of growing up, a meditation on race and identity, and a poignant beautifully crafted hymn from a son to his mother.

McCall Smith, R. A. ***The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency***

The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, located in Gaborone, Botswana, consists of one woman, the engaging Precious Ramotswe. A cross between Kinsey Milhone and Miss Marple, this unlikely heroine specializes in missing husbands, wayward daughters, con men and imposters.

McCann, Colum. ***Let the Great World Spin***

A rich vision of the pain, mystery and promise of NYV in the 1970s: A radical Irish monk struggles with his own demons as he lives among the prostitutes in the ravaged Bronx; a group of mothers gather to mourn their sons who died in Vietnam; a young artist witnesses a hit and run that sends her life careening sideways and a 38 year old grandmother turns trick alongside her teenaged daughter. All are unexpectedly drawn together by hope, beauty and the "artistic crime of the century" when a mysterious tightrope walker dances between the twin towers.

McEwan, Ian. ***Atonement : a novel***

Briony Tallis, at three stages of her life, narrates this searing account of lives ruined and salvaged. Told with an exquisite detail that captures the heat of an English day, the passion of young lovers, the chaos of war and retreat, and a conscience that tries to right past wrongs, McEwan is at his best as he recreates Briony's life and her struggle to tell the truth about a childhood error that ruined many lives.

Moon, Elizabeth. ***The Speed of Dark***

"A compelling exploration of the concept of normalcy," this novel creates a near-future where technology has caught up with autism. Lou Arrendale, high-functioning and gainfully employed, faces the profound dilemma of whether to be cured or to remain a unique individual, however 'different,' he

is. The controversial concepts presented in the novel provide excellent opportunities for stimulating discussions, such as 'how far from the norm is it comfortable or possible to be?'

Nafisi, Azar. ***Reading Lolita in Tehran***

This is a biography that follows the lives of seven girls in a secret reading group in 1995 Iran; an inspired blend of memory and literary criticism.

Oates, Joyce Carol. ***The Falls***

Oates, considered one of the most prolific of contemporary authors writing today, has set this saga in Niagara Falls beginning in the 1950s when Ariah Little is widowed on her wedding night after her new husband throws himself into the falls. She is immediately dubbed the "Widow-Bride" by the press - her life contains family and happiness, but she has an inability to trust herself or anyone else. The novel is a huge literary melodrama and follows Ariah's family as well as involvement with the poisonous Love Canal.

Rakha, Naseem. ***The Crying Tree***

When her fifteen-year-old son is killed shortly after their family relocates to Oregon, a grieving mother secretly exchanges letters with the killer in a desperate hope to forgive him and move on. This is a complex story of a family's journey toward justice and forgiveness. After a recent move to Oregon, a father, returns home to find his 15-year-old son beaten and shot to death. Following the son's death, the family seeks vengeance against the young man, accused of his murder. In the 19 years between the murder and the execution date, the daughter assumes a caretaker role for her damaged parents. Finally, a crisis pushes the mother toward the truth about what happened to her son. The author has created wonderfully realized characters and the narrative retains its tension to the end.

Rosnay, Tatiana de. ***Sarah's Key***

On the sixtieth anniversary of the 1942 roundup of Jews by the French police in the Vel d'Hiv section of Paris, American journalist Julia Jarmond is asked to write an article on this dark episode during World War II and embarks on investigation that leads her to long-hidden family secrets and to the ordeal of Sarah, a young girl caught up in the raid.

Patchett, Ann. ***Bel Canto : a novel***

In an unnamed South American country, what begins as an elegant dinner party turns into a kidnapping. When the government refuses to give in to the terrorists' demands, the hostage situation continues for a number of weeks during which a pleasant domesticity, enlivened by opera singing, begins to blur the lines between captive and captor.

Radish, Kris. ***Annie Freeman's Fabulous Traveling Funeral***

An attorney and divorced mother finds her uneventful life turned upside down when she receives an unexpected bequest which takes her and four friends on a wild and life-transforming road trip from the deserts of New Mexico to the shores of Lake Superior as they celebrate the bonds of female friendship.

Rodriguez, Deborah and Kristen Ohlson. ***Kabul Beauty School: An American Woman Goes Behind the Veil***

Soon after the fall of the Taliban, in 2001, Deborah Rodriguez went to Afghanistan as part of a group offering humanitarian aid to this war-torn nation. Surrounded by men and women whose skills – as doctors, nurses, and therapists – seemed eminently more practical than her own, Rodriguez, a hairdresser and mother of two from Michigan, despaired of being of any real use. Yet she soon found she had a gift for befriending Afghans, and once her profession became known she was eagerly sought out by Westerners desperate for a good haircut and by Afghan women, who have a long and proud tradition of running their own beauty salons. Thus an idea was born.

See, Lisa. ***Snow Flower and the Secret Fan***

A story of friendship set in nineteenth-century China follows an elderly woman and her companion as they communicate their hopes, dreams, joys and tragedies through a unique secret language.

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

In 1946, writer Juliet Ashton finds inspiration for her next book in her correspondence with a native of Guernsey, who tells her about the Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society, a book club born as an alibi during German occupation.

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

Major Ernest Pettigrew (retired) leads a quiet life in the village of St. Mary, England, until his brother's death sparks an unexpected friendship with Mrs. Jasmina Ali, the Pakistani shopkeeper from the village. Drawn together by their shared love of literature and the loss of their respective spouses, the Major and Mrs. Ali soon find their friendship blossoming into something more. The Major finds his careful efforts to court Mrs. Ali constantly nudged off-course by his callow son, Roger; a handful of socialite ladies planning a dinner/dance at the Major's club; and the not-so-subtle racist attitudes his interest in Mrs. Ali engender. Unexpectedly entertaining, with a stiff-upper-lip hero who transcends stereotype, this good-hearted debut doesn't shy away from modern cultural and religious issues. This is a vastly enjoyable trapeze through the English countryside and the long-held traditions of the British aristocracy.

Spragg, Mark. ***An Unfinished Life***

Seeking to escape her brutal boyfriend and hoping to introduce her daughter to the grandfather she has never met, a widow seeks refuge in her late husband's Wyoming hometown with her estranged father-in-law. "Complex, prodigal homecoming...a tale of love and loss...rich in character, landscape and compassion."

Strout, Elizabeth. ***Olive Kitteridge***

At the edge of the continent, in the small town of Crosby, Maine, lives Olive Kitteridge, a retired schoolteacher who deplores the changes in her town and in the world at large but doesn't always recognize the changes in those around her.

Verghese, Abraham. ***Cutting for Stone***

Marion, fresh out of medical school, flees Ethiopia and makes his way to America, finding refuge in his work as an intern at an underfunded, overcrowded New York City hospital. When the past catches up

to him--nearly destroying him--Marion must entrust his life to the two men he thought he trusted least in the world: the surgeon father who abandoned him and the brother who betrayed him.

Vreeland, Susan. ***Luncheon of the Boating Party***

French Impressionist painter Renoir is inspired to paint “Luncheon of the Boating Party” when his other works of art are criticized by the author, Emile Zola. Renoir desires to do breakout work instead of society portraits and while casting about for an original concept for his art, he is drawn into the lives of 13 people as they enjoy a Parisian summer in the late 1880s. This novel illuminates the gusto, hedonism and art of the era.

Young, Paul. ***The Shack***

Four years after his daughter is abducted and evidence of her murder is found in an abandoned shack, Mackenzie Allen Philips returns to the shack in response to a note claiming to be from God, and has a life-changing experience.

Zusak, Markus. ***The Book Thief***

Set during World War II in Germany, this groundbreaking novel is the story of Liesel Meminger, a foster child living outside of Munich. Liesel scratches out a meager existence for herself by stealing...she steals books and learns to read and shares her stolen books with neighbors during bombing raids as well as with the Jewish man hidden in the basement of the house in which she lives. This is an important novel about the ability of books to feed the soul. Although this is considered a YA novel, many believe it to be best suited to ‘sophisticated older readers,’ as the narrator his Death, himself.