

2015 Book Club Ballot

Non-Fiction (choose 1)

The Astronaut Wives Club, by Lily Koppel (2013)

As America's Mercury Seven astronauts were launched on death-defying missions, television cameras focused on the brave smiles of their young wives. Overnight, these women were transformed from military spouses into American royalty. They had tea with Jackie Kennedy, appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine, and quickly grew into fashion icons.

Annie Glenn, with her picture-perfect marriage, was the envy of the other wives; platinum-blondé Rene Carpenter was proclaimed JFK's favorite; and licensed pilot Trudy Cooper arrived on base with a secret. Together with the other wives they formed the Astronaut Wives Club, meeting regularly to provide support and friendship. Many became next-door neighbors and helped to raise each other's children by day, while going to glam parties at night as the country raced to land a man on the Moon.

As their celebrity rose—and as divorce and tragic death began to touch their lives—they continued to rally together, and the wives have now been friends for more than fifty years. *The Astronaut Wives Club* tells the real story of the women who stood beside some of the biggest heroes in American history.

I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban, by Malala Yousafzai (2013)

When the Taliban took control of the Swat Valley in Pakistan, one girl spoke out. Malala Yousafzai refused to be silenced and fought for her right to an education.

On Tuesday, October 9, 2012, when she was fifteen, she almost paid the ultimate price. She was shot in the head at point-blank range while riding the bus home from school, and few expected her to survive.

Instead, Malala's miraculous recovery has taken her on an extraordinary journey from a remote valley in northern Pakistan to the halls of the United Nations in New York. At sixteen, she has become a global symbol of peaceful protest and the youngest nominee ever for the Nobel Peace Prize.

I Am Malala is the remarkable tale of a family uprooted by global terrorism, of the fight for girls' education, of a father who, himself a school owner, championed and encouraged his daughter to write and attend school, and of brave parents who have a fierce love for their daughter in a society that prizes sons.

Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil, by John Berendt (1994)

Shots rang out in Savannah's grandest mansion in the misty, early morning hours of May 2, 1981. Was it murder or self-defense? For nearly a decade, the shooting and its aftermath reverberated throughout this hauntingly beautiful city of moss-hung oaks and shaded squares. John Berendt's sharply observed, suspenseful, and witty narrative reads like a thoroughly engrossing novel, and yet it is a work of nonfiction. Berendt skillfully interweaves a hugely entertaining first-person account of life in this isolated remnant of the Old South with the unpredictable twists and turns of a landmark murder case.

It is a spellbinding story peopled by a gallery of remarkable characters: the well-bred society ladies of the Married Woman's Card Club; the turbulent young redneck gigolo; the hapless recluse who owns a bottle of poison so powerful it could kill every man, woman, and child in Savannah; the aging and profane Southern belle who is the "soul of pampered self-absorption"; the uproariously funny black drag queen; the acerbic and arrogant antiques dealer; the sweet-talking, piano-playing con artist; young blacks dancing the minuet at the black debutante ball; and Minerva, the voodoo priestess who works her magic in the graveyard at midnight. These and other Savannahians act as a Greek chorus, with Berendt revealing the alliances, hostilities, and intrigues that thrive in a town where everyone knows everyone else.

The River of Doubt: Theodore Roosevelt's Darkest Journey, by Candice Millard (2005)

At once an incredible adventure narrative and a penetrating biographical portrait, *The River of Doubt* is the true story of Theodore Roosevelt's harrowing exploration of one of the most dangerous rivers on earth.

The River of Doubt is a black, uncharted tributary of the Amazon that snakes through one of the most treacherous jungles in the world. Indians armed with poison-tipped arrows haunt its shadows; piranhas glide through its waters; boulder-strewn rapids turn the river into a roiling cauldron. After his humiliating election defeat in 1912, Roosevelt set his sights on the most punishing physical challenge he could find, the first descent of an unmapped, rapids-choked tributary of the Amazon. Together with his son Kermit and Brazil's most famous explorer, Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon, Roosevelt accomplished a feat so great that many at the time refused to believe it.

In the process, Roosevelt changed the map of the western hemisphere forever. Along the way, he and his men faced an unbelievable series of hardships, losing their canoes and supplies to punishing whitewater rapids, and enduring starvation, Indian attack, disease, drowning, and a murder within their own ranks. Three men died, and Roosevelt was brought to the brink of suicide.

The River of Doubt brings alive these extraordinary events in a powerful nonfiction narrative thriller that happens to feature one of the most famous Americans who ever lived. From the soaring beauty of the Amazon rain forest to the darkest night of Theodore Roosevelt's life, here is Candice Millard's dazzling debut.

Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead, by Brene Brown (2012)

In *Daring Greatly*, Brené Brown walks us through twelve years of research on shame and vulnerability, leading us to the principals of wholehearted living and the power to dare greatly in our lives and work – the secret is in our vulnerability.

We are human, and our deepest needs are connection, love, and belonging. Our fear of not having these inherent needs met, the fear of showing our vulnerability and being rejected, results in a cascading system of shame that disconnects us from our families, our communities, and our work. Dr. Brown outlines the common masks that we use to hide our vulnerabilities and provides practical tools for removing the barriers and engaging with others to live wholehearted, connected lives.

Poetry (choose 1)

Maya Angelou

Born on April 4, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri, writer and civil rights activist Maya Angelou is known for her 1969 memoir, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, which made literary history as the first nonfiction best-seller by an African-American woman. In 1971, Angelou published the Pulitzer Prize-nominated poetry collection *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'Fore I Die*. She later wrote the poem "On the Pulse of Morning"—one of her most famous works—which she recited at President Bill Clinton's inauguration in 1993. Angelou received several honors throughout her career, including two NAACP Image Awards in the outstanding literary work (nonfiction) category, in 2005 and 2009. She died on May 28, 2014.

Edgar Allen Poe

Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Raven" is one of the most famous poems ever written in English. His dark writing, coupled with his mysterious death, has made him one of the most famous macabre figures in history.

Shel Silverstein

Shel Silverstein was born on September 25, 1930, in Chicago. Silverstein studied music and established himself as a musician and composer, writing songs including "A Boy Named Sue," popularized by Johnny Cash, and Loretta Lynn's "One's on the Way." Silverstein also wrote children's literature, including *The Giving Tree* and the poetry collection *A Light in the Attic*. He died in 1999.

Judith Viorst

Judith Viorst, born in 1931, is a journalist, psychoanalysis researcher and the author of several works of fiction and non-fiction for children as well as adults. *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, her most famous children's book, was first published in 1972 and has since sold over two million copies.

She received a B.A. in History from Rutgers University, and is also a graduate of the Washington Psychoanalytic Institute. She began her career as a poet and has since completed at least six collections of poems for adults. In the latter part of the 1970s, after two decades as an author, Viorst turned to the study of Freudian psychology. After six years of study at Washington Psychoanalytic Institute, in 1981 she became a research graduate affiliated with the institute.

Fiction (choose 10)

Americanah, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2013)

From the award-winning author of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a dazzling new novel: a story of love and race centered around a young man and woman from Nigeria who face difficult choices and challenges in the countries they come to call home.

As teenagers in a Lagos secondary school, Ifemelu and Obinze fall in love. Their Nigeria is under military dictatorship, and people are leaving the country if they can. Ifemelu—beautiful, self-assured—departs for America to study. She suffers defeats and triumphs, finds and loses relationships and friendships, all the while feeling the weight of something she never thought of back home: race. Obinze—the quiet, thoughtful son of a professor—had hoped to join her, but post-9/11 America will not let him in, and he plunges into a dangerous, undocumented life in London.

Years later, Obinze is a wealthy man in a newly democratic Nigeria, while Ifemelu has achieved success as a writer of an eye-opening blog about race in America. But when Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, and she and Obinze reignite their shared passion—for their homeland and for each other—they will face the toughest decisions of their lives.

The Arsonist, by Sue Miller (2014)

A family and a community tested when an arsonist begins setting fire to the homes of the summer people in a small New England town.

Troubled by the feeling that she belongs nowhere after working in East Africa for fifteen years, Frankie Rowley has come home—home to the small New Hampshire village of Pomeroy and the farmhouse where her family has always summered. On her first night back, a house up the road burns to the ground. Then another house burns, and another, always the houses of the summer people.

In a town where people have never bothered to lock their doors, social fault lines are opened, and neighbors begin to regard one another with suspicion. Against this backdrop of menace and fear, Frankie begins a passionate, unexpected affair with the editor of the local paper, a romance that progresses with exquisite tenderness and heat toward its own remarkable risks and revelations.

Suspenseful, sophisticated, rich in psychological nuance and emotional insight, *The Arsonist* is vintage Sue Miller—a finely wrought novel about belonging and community, about how and where one ought to live, about what it means to lead a fulfilling life. One of our most elegant and engrossing novelists at her inimitable best.

As I Lay Dying, by William Faulkner (1930)

At the heart of this 1930 novel is harrowing, darkly comic tale of the Bundren family's bizarre journey to Jefferson to bury Addie, their wife and mother. Faulkner lets each family member—including Addie herself— and others along the way tell their private responses to Addie's life. Faulkner's use of multiple viewpoints to reveal the inner psychological make-up of the characters is one of the novel's chief charms.

***Benediction*, by Kent Haruf (2013)**

From the beloved and best-selling author of *Plainsong* and *Eventide* comes a story of life and death, and the ties that bind, once again set out on the High Plains in Holt, Colorado.

When Dad Lewis is diagnosed with terminal cancer, he and his wife, Mary, must work together to make his final days as comfortable as possible. Their daughter, Lorraine, hastens back from Denver to help look after him; her devotion softens the bitter absence of their estranged son, Frank, but this cannot be willed away and remains a palpable presence for all three of them.

Next door, a young girl named Alice moves in with her grandmother and contends with the painful memories that Dad's condition stirs up of her own mother's death. Meanwhile, the town's newly arrived preacher attempts to mend his strained relationships with his wife and teenaged son, a task that proves all the more challenging when he faces the disdain of his congregation after offering more than they are accustomed to getting on a Sunday morning. And throughout, an elderly widow and her middle-aged daughter do everything they can to ease the pain of their friends and neighbors.

Despite the travails that each of these families faces, together they form bonds strong enough to carry them through the most difficult of times. Bracing, sad and deeply illuminating, *Benediction* captures the fullness of life by representing every stage of it, including its extinction, as well as the hopes and dreams that sustain us along the way. Here Kent Haruf gives us his most indelible portrait yet of this small town and reveals, with grace and insight, the compassion, the suffering and, above all, the humanity of its inhabitants.

***Bread and Butter*, by Michelle Wildgen (2013)**

Britt and Leo have spent ten years running Winesap, the best restaurant in their small town. They cater to their loyal customers, they don't sleep with the staff, and business is good. When their younger brother opens his own restaurant, Britt and Leo find their own restaurant thrown off-kilter. Britt is fascinated by a customer who arrives night after night, each time with a new dinner companion. Leo finds himself falling for his chef; can he break the cardinal rule of restaurant ownership?

***The Death of Bees*, by Lisa O'Donnell (2013)**

Marnie and her little sister, Nelly, are on their own now. Only they know what happened to their parents, Izzy and Gene, and they aren't telling. While life in Glasgow's Maryhill housing estate isn't grand, the girls do have each other. Besides, it's only a year until Marnie will be considered an adult and can legally take care of them both.

As the New Year comes and goes, Lennie, the old man next door, realizes that his young neighbors are alone and need his help. Or does he need theirs? Lennie takes them in—feeds them, clothes them, protects them—and something like a family forms. But soon enough, the sisters' friends, their teachers, and the authorities start asking tougher questions. As one lie leads to another, dark secrets about the girls' family surface, creating complications that threaten to tear them apart.

Written with fierce sympathy and beautiful precision, told in alternating voices, *The Death of Bees* is an enchanting, grimly comic tale of three lost souls who, unable to answer for themselves, can answer only for one another.

Divergent, by Veronica Roth (2011)

In Beatrice Prior's dystopian Chicago, society is divided into five factions, each dedicated to the cultivation of a particular virtue—

- ♦ Candor (*the honest*)
- ♦ Abnegation (*the selfless*)
- ♦ Dauntless (*the brave*)
- ♦ Amity (*the peaceful*)
- ♦ Erudite (*the intelligent*)

On an appointed day of every year, all sixteen-year-olds must select the faction to which they will devote the rest of their lives. For Beatrice, the decision is between staying with her family and being who she really is—she can't have both. So she makes a choice that surprises everyone, including herself.

During the highly competitive initiation that follows, Beatrice renames herself Tris and struggles to determine who her friends really are. But Tris also has a secret, one she's kept hidden from everyone because she's been warned it can mean death.

And as she discovers a growing conflict that threatens to unravel her seemingly perfect society, she also learns that her secret might help her save those she loves... or it might destroy her.

The Eyre Affair, by Jasper Fforde (2002)

The Eyre Affair is a unique detective novel by Welsh writer, Jasper Fforde. In this novel, Thursday Next is a detective with SO-27, the LiteraTec division. Thursday's job is to solve crimes related to literature. When the original manuscript of *Martin Chuzzlewit* by Charles Dickens disappears under impossible circumstances, Thursday finds herself drawn into an investigation that is more deadly than anything she has experienced thus far in her career. Thursday finds herself on the track of Acheron Hades, a one-time college professor who is now a criminal with powers beyond even Thursday's experiences. When the investigation brings Thursday home, she must face not only the nightmares of Hades, but the nightmares of her own past as well. *The Eyre Affair* is a detective novel that is both fantastical in its altered reality and all too real in its heroine's struggles.

The Giver, by Lois Lowry (1993)

December is the time of the annual Ceremony at which each twelve-year-old receives a life assignment determined by the Elders. Jonas watches his friend Fiona named Caretaker of the Old and his cheerful pal Asher labeled the Assistant Director of Recreation. But Jonas has been chosen for something special. When his selection leads him to an unnamed man—the man called only the Giver—he begins to sense the dark secrets that underlie the fragile perfection of his world.

Given his lifetime assignment at the Ceremony of Twelve, Jonas becomes the receiver of memories shared by only one other in his community and discovers the terrible truth about the society in which he lives.

***The Invention of Wings*, by Sue Monk Kidd (2014)**

Hetty “Handful” Grimke, an urban slave in early nineteenth century Charleston, yearns for life beyond the suffocating walls that enclose her within the wealthy Grimke household. The Grimke’s daughter, Sarah, has known from an early age she is meant to do something large in the world, but she is hemmed in by the limits imposed on women.

Kidd’s sweeping novel is set in motion on Sarah’s eleventh birthday, when she is given ownership of ten year old Handful, who is to be her handmaid. We follow their remarkable journeys over the next thirty five years, as both strive for a life of their own, dramatically shaping each other’s destinies and forming a complex relationship marked by guilt, defiance, estrangement and the uneasy ways of love.

As the stories build to a riveting climax, Handful will endure loss and sorrow, finding courage and a sense of self in the process. Sarah will experience crushed hopes, betrayal, unrequited love, and ostracism before leaving Charleston to find her place alongside her fearless younger sister, Angelina, as one of the early pioneers in the abolition and women’s rights movements.

***Mr. Penumbra’s 24-Hour Bookstore*, by Robin Sloan (2012)**

A gleeful and exhilarating tale of global conspiracy, complex code-breaking, high-tech data visualization, young love, rollicking adventure, and the secret to eternal life—mostly set in a hole-in-the-wall San Francisco bookstore

The Great Recession has shuffled Clay Jannon out of his life as a San Francisco Web-design drone—and serendipity, sheer curiosity, and the ability to climb a ladder like a monkey has landed him a new gig working the night shift at Mr. Penumbra’s 24-Hour Bookstore. But after just a few days on the job, Clay begins to realize that this store is even more curious than the name suggests. There are only a few customers, but they come in repeatedly and never seem to actually buy anything, instead “checking out” impossibly obscure volumes from strange corners of the store, all according to some elaborate, long-standing arrangement with the gnomic Mr. Penumbra. The store must be a front for something larger, Clay concludes, and soon he’s embarked on a complex analysis of the customers’ behavior and roped his friends into helping to figure out just what’s going on. But once they bring their findings to Mr. Penumbra, it turns out the secrets extend far outside the walls of the bookstore.

***The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, by Neil Gaiman (2014)**

Sussex, England. A middle-aged man returns to his childhood home to attend a funeral. He is drawn to the farm at the end of the road, where, when he was seven, he encountered a most remarkable girl, Lettie Hempstock. He hasn’t thought of Lettie in decades, and yet sitting by the pond (a pond that she’d claimed was an ocean), the unremembered past comes flooding back.

Forty years earlier, a man committed suicide in a stolen car at this farm at the end of the road. Like a fuse on a firework, his death lit a touchpaper and resonated in unimaginable ways. The darkness was unleashed, something scary and thoroughly incomprehensible to a little boy. And Lettie—magical, comforting, wise beyond her years—promised to protect him, no matter what.

A Prayer for Owen Meany, by John Irving (1989)

In the summer of 1953, two eleven-year-old boys—best friends—are playing in a Little League baseball game in Gravesend, New Hampshire.

One of the boys hits a foul ball that kills the other boy's mother. The boy who hits the ball doesn't believe in accidents; Owen Meany believes he is God's instrument. What happens to Owen, after that 1953 foul ball, is extraordinary and terrifying.

Sea Creatures, by Susanna Daniels (2013)

When Georgia returns to her hometown of Miami, her toddler son and husband in tow, she is hoping for a fresh start. They have left Illinois trailing scandal and disappointment in their wake: Graham's sleep disorder has cost him his tenure at Northwestern; Georgia's college advising business has gone belly up; and three-year old Frankie is no longer speaking. Miami feels emptier without Georgia's mother, who died five years earlier, but her father and stepmother offer a warm welcome—as well as a slip for the dilapidated houseboat Georgia and Graham have chosen to call home. And a position studying extreme weather patterns at a prestigious marine research facility offers Graham a professional second chance.

When Georgia takes a job as an errand runner for an artist who lives alone in the middle of Biscayne Bay, she's surprised to find her life changes dramatically. Time spent with the intense hermit at his isolated home might help Frankie gain the courage to speak, it seems. And it might help Georgia reconcile the woman she was with the woman she has become.

But when Graham leaves to work on a ship in Hurricane Alley and the truth behind Frankie's mutism is uncovered, the family's challenges return, more complicated than before. Late that summer, as a hurricane bears down on South Florida, Georgia must face the fact that her choices have put her only child in grave danger.

Secret History, by Donna Tartt (1992)

Truly deserving of the accolade a modern classic, Donna Tartt's novel is a remarkable achievement—both compelling and elegant, dramatic and playful.

Richard Pape arrives at Hampden College in New England and is quickly seduced by an elite group of five students, all Greek scholars, all worldly, self-assured, and, at first glance, all highly unapproachable. As Richard is drawn into their inner circle, he learns a terrifying secret that binds them to one another...a secret about an incident in the woods in the dead of night where an ancient rite was brought to brutal life...and led to a gruesome death. And that was just the beginning....

Shotgun Lovesongs, by Nickolas Butler (2014)

Welcome to Little Wing. It's a place like hundreds of others, nothing special, really. But for four friends—all born and raised in this small Wisconsin town—it is home. And now they are men, coming into their own, or struggling to do so.

One of them never left, still working the family farm that has been tilled for generations. But others felt the need to move on, with varying degrees of success. One trades commodities, another took to the rodeo circuit, and one of them even hit it big as a rock star. And then there's Beth, a woman who has meant something special in each of their lives.

Now all four are brought together for a wedding. Little Wing seems even smaller than before. While lifelong bonds are still strong, there are stresses—between the friends, between husbands and wives. There will be heartbreak, but there will also be hope, healing, even heroism as these memorable people learn the true meaning of adult friendship and love.

The Sun Also Rises, by Ernest Hemingway (1926)

The Sun Also Rises is one of Ernest Hemingway's masterpieces and a classic example of his spare but powerful style. A poignant look at the disillusionment and angst of the post-World War I generation, the story introduces two of Hemingway's most unforgettable characters: Jake Barnes and Lady Brett Ashley.

Jake Barnes, an American newspaperman emasculated by a wound suffered in Italy during World War I, is living and working in Paris in the expatriate community. He takes friends Bill Gorton, Lady Brett Ashley (whom Jake loves), her fiancé, Mike Campbell, and Robert Cohn (also in love with Brett) to Spain for trout fishing and bullfighting during the festival of San Fermin in Pamplona.

Tensions mount among Campbell, Cohn, and Barnes over Brett and intensify as she falls in love with Pedro Romero, a nineteen-year-old bullfighter. At the end of the festival, Brett leaves with Romero, Bill returns to Paris, Mike goes to St. Jean de Luz, and Jake goes to San Sebastian for a respite soon ended when he receives a telegram from Brett. Jake goes immediately to her aid in Madrid, where he finds her momentarily remorseful and evading truth about Romero and her relationship with Jake.

We Are Water, by Wally Lamb (2013)

In middle age, Annie Oh—wife, mother, and outsider artist—has shaken her family to its core. After twenty-seven years of marriage and three children, Annie has fallen in love with Viveca, the wealthy, cultured, confident Manhattan art dealer who orchestrated her professional success.

Annie and Viveca plan to wed in the Oh family's hometown of Three Rivers, Connecticut, where gay marriage has recently been legalized. But the impending wedding provokes some very mixed reactions and opens a Pandora's box of toxic secrets—dark and painful truths that have festered below the surface of the Ohs' lives.

We Are Water is an intricate and layered portrait of marriage, family, and the inexorable need for understanding and connection, told in the alternating voices of the Ohs—nonconformist Annie; her ex-husband, Orion, a psychologist; Ariane, the do-gooder daughter, and her twin, Andrew, the rebellious only son; and free-spirited Marissa, the youngest Oh. Set in New England and New York during the first years of the Obama presidency, it is also a portrait of modern America, exploring issues of class, changing social mores, the legacy of racial violence, and the nature of creativity and art.

Year of Wonders, by Geraldine Brooks (2002)

When an infected bolt of cloth carries plague from London to an isolated village, a housemaid named Anna Frith emerges as an unlikely heroine and healer. Through Anna's eyes we follow the story of the fateful year of 1666, as she and her fellow villagers confront the spread of disease and superstition.

As death reaches into every household and villagers turn from prayers to murderous witch-hunting, Anna must find the strength to confront the disintegration of her community and the lure of illicit love. As she struggles to survive and grow, a year of catastrophe becomes instead annus mirabilis, a "year of wonders."

Inspired by the true story of Eyam, a village in the rugged hill country of England, *Year of Wonders* is a richly detailed evocation of a singular moment in history.