

2020 Book Club Nominees

Non-Fiction (Choose 1 or 2)

***Becoming* by Michelle Obama**

In a life filled with meaning and accomplishment, Michelle Obama has emerged as one of the most iconic and compelling women of our era. As First Lady of the United States of America—the first African American to serve in that role—she helped create the most welcoming and inclusive White House in history, while also establishing herself as a powerful advocate for women and girls in the U.S. and around the world.

She dramatically changed the ways that families pursue healthier and more active lives, while standing with her husband as he led America through some of its most harrowing moments. Along the way, she showed us a few dance moves, crushed Carpool Karaoke, and raised two down-to-earth daughters under an unforgiving media glare.

In her memoir, a work of deep reflection and mesmerizing storytelling, Michelle Obama invites readers into her world, chronicling the experiences that have shaped her—from her childhood on the South Side of Chicago to her years as an executive balancing the demands of motherhood and work, to her time spent at the world's most famous address.

With unerring honesty and lively wit, she describes her triumphs and her disappointments, both public and private, telling her full story as she has lived it—in her own words and on her own terms. Warm, wise, and revelatory, *Becoming* is the deeply personal reckoning of a woman of soul and substance who has steadily defied expectations—and whose story inspires us to do the same.

***How to Change Your Mind* by Michael Pollan**

When Michael Pollan set out to research how LSD and psilocybin (the active ingredient in magic mushrooms) are being used to provide relief to people suffering from difficult-to-treat conditions such as depression, addiction and anxiety, he did not intend to write what is undoubtedly his most personal book. But upon discovering how these remarkable substances are improving the lives not only of the mentally ill but also of healthy people coming to grips with the challenges of everyday life, he decided to explore the landscape of the mind in the first person as well as the third.

Thus began a singular adventure into various altered states of consciousness, along with a dive deep into both the latest brain science and the thriving underground community of psychedelic therapists. Pollan sifts the historical record to separate the truth about these mysterious drugs from the myths that have surrounded them since the 1960s, when a handful of psychedelic evangelists inadvertently catalyzed a powerful backlash against what was then a promising field of research.

A unique and elegant blend of science, memoir, travel writing, history, and medicine, *How to Change Your Mind* is a triumph of participatory journalism. By turns dazzling and edifying, it is the gripping account of a journey to an exciting and unexpected new frontier in our understanding of the mind, the self, and our place in the world. The true subject of Pollan's "mental travelogue" is not just psychedelic drugs but also the eternal puzzle of human consciousness and how, in a world that offers us both suffering and joy, we can do our best to be fully present and find meaning in our lives.

Lab Girl by Hope Jahren

Acclaimed scientist Hope Jahren has built three laboratories in which she's studied trees, flowers, seeds, and soil. Her first book is a revelatory treatise on plant life—but it is also so much more. *Lab Girl* is a book about work, love, and the mountains that can be moved when those two things come together.

It is told through Jahren's remarkable stories: about her childhood in rural Minnesota with an uncompromising mother and a father who encouraged hours of play in his classroom's labs; about how she found a sanctuary in science, and learned to perform lab work done "with both the heart and the hands"; and about the inevitable disappointments, but also the triumphs and exhilarating discoveries, of scientific work.

Yet at the core of this book is the story of a relationship Jahren forged with a brilliant, wounded man named Bill, who becomes her lab partner and best friend. Their sometimes rogue adventures in science take them from the Midwest across the United States and back again, over the Atlantic to the ever-light skies of the North Pole and to tropical Hawaii, where she and her lab currently make their home.

Jahren's probing look at plants, her astonishing tenacity of spirit, and her acute insights on nature enliven every page of this extraordinary book. *Lab Girl* opens your eyes to the beautiful, sophisticated mechanisms within every leaf, blade of grass, and flower petal. Here is an eloquent demonstration of what can happen when you find the stamina, passion, and sense of sacrifice needed to make a life out of what you truly love, as you discover along the way the person you were meant to be.

The Lost City of Z by David Grann (2016 film)

In 1925, the legendary British explorer Percy Fawcett ventured into the Amazon jungle, in search of a fabled civilization. He never returned. Over the years countless perished trying to find evidence of his party and the place he called "The Lost City of Z."

In this masterpiece of narrative nonfiction, journalist David Grann interweaves the spellbinding stories of Fawcett's quest for "Z" and his own journey into the deadly jungle, as he unravels the greatest exploration mystery of the twentieth century.

Once More We Saw Stars by Jayson Greene

As the book opens: two-year-old Greta Greene is sitting with her grandmother on a park bench on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. A brick crumbles from a windowsill overhead, striking her unconscious, and she is immediately rushed to the hospital. But although it begins with this event and with the anguish Jayson and his wife, Stacy, confront in the wake of their daughter's trauma and the hours leading up to her death, *Once More We Saw Stars* quickly becomes a narrative that is as much about hope and healing as it is about grief and loss. Jayson recognizes, even in the midst of his ordeal, that there will be a life for him beyond it--that if only he can continue moving forward, from one moment to the next, he will survive what seems unsurvivable. With raw honesty, deep emotion, and exquisite tenderness, he captures both the fragility of life and absoluteness of death, and most important of all, the unconquerable power of love. This is an unforgettable memoir of courage and transformation--and a book that will change the way you look at the world.

***Say Nothing* by Patrick Keefe**

In December 1972, Jean McConville, a thirty-eight-year-old mother of ten, was dragged from her Belfast home by masked intruders, her children clinging to her legs. They never saw her again.

Her abduction was one of the most notorious episodes of the vicious conflict known as The Troubles. Everyone in the neighborhood knew the I.R.A. was responsible. But in a climate of fear and paranoia, no one would speak of it.

In 2003, five years after an accord brought an uneasy peace to Northern Ireland, a set of human bones was discovered on a beach. McConville's children knew it was their mother when they were told a blue safety pin was attached to the dress—with so many kids, she had always kept it handy for diapers or ripped clothes.

Patrick Radden Keefe's mesmerizing book on the bitter conflict in Northern Ireland and its aftermath uses the McConville case as a starting point for the tale of a society wracked by a violent guerrilla war, a war whose consequences have never been reckoned with.

The brutal violence seared not only people like the McConville children, but also I.R.A. members embittered by a peace that fell far short of the goal of a united Ireland, and left them wondering whether the killings they committed were not justified acts of war, but simple murders.

From radical and impetuous I.R.A. terrorists such as Dolours Price, who, when she was barely out of her teens, was already planting bombs in London and targeting informers for execution, to the ferocious I.R.A. mastermind known as The Dark, to the spy games and dirty schemes of the British Army, to Gerry Adams, who negotiated the peace but betrayed his hardcore comrades by denying his I.R.A. past.

***A Woman of No Importance* by Sonia Purnell**

In 1942, the Gestapo sent out an urgent transmission: "She is the most dangerous of all Allied spies. We must find and destroy her." The target in their sights was Virginia Hall, a Baltimore socialite who talked her way into Special Operations Executive, the spy organization dubbed Winston Churchill's "Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare." She became the first Allied woman deployed behind enemy lines and—despite her prosthetic leg—helped to light the flame of the French Resistance, revolutionizing secret warfare as we know it.

Virginia established vast spy networks throughout France, called weapons and explosives down from the skies, and became a linchpin for the Resistance. Even as her face covered wanted posters and a bounty was placed on her head, Virginia refused order after order to evacuate. She finally escaped through a death-defying hike over the Pyrenees into Spain, her cover blown. But she plunged back in, adamant that she had more lives to save, and led a victorious guerilla campaign, liberating swathes of France from the Nazis after D-Day.

Based on new and extensive research, Sonia Purnell has for the first time uncovered the full secret life of Virginia Hall—an astounding and inspiring story of heroism, spycraft, resistance, and personal triumph over shocking adversity. *A Woman of No Importance* is the breathtaking story of how one woman's fierce persistence helped win the war.

Fiction (Choose up to 11)

***American Spy* by Lauren Wilkinson**

It's 1986, the heart of the Cold War, and Marie Mitchell is an intelligence officer with the FBI. She's brilliant, but she's also a young black woman working in an old boys' club. Her career has stalled out, she's overlooked for every high-profile squad, and her days are filled with monotonous paperwork. So when she's given the opportunity to join a shadowy task force aimed at undermining Thomas Sankara, the charismatic revolutionary president of Burkina Faso whose Communist ideology has made him a target for American intervention, she says yes. Yes, even though she secretly admires the work Sankara is doing for his country. Yes, even though she is still grieving the mysterious death of her sister, whose example led Marie to this career path in the first place. Yes, even though a furious part of her suspects she's being offered the job because of her appearance and not her talent.

In the year that follows, Marie will observe Sankara, seduce him, and ultimately have a hand in the coup that will bring him down. But doing so will change everything she believes about what it means to be a spy, a lover, a sister, and a good American. Inspired by true events—Thomas Sankara is known as "Africa's Che Guevara"—*American Spy* knits together a gripping spy thriller, a heartbreaking family drama, and a passionate romance. This is a face of the Cold War you've never seen before, and it introduces a powerful new literary voice.

***American War* by Omar El Akkad**

Sarat Chestnut, born in Louisiana, is only six when the Second American Civil War breaks out in 2074. But even she knows that oil is outlawed, that Louisiana is half underwater, and that unmanned drones fill the sky. When her father is killed and her family is forced into Camp Patience for displaced persons, she begins to grow up shaped by her particular time and place. But not everyone at Camp Patience is who they claim to be.

Eventually Sarat is befriended by a mysterious functionary, under whose influence she is turned into a deadly instrument of war. The decisions that she makes will have tremendous consequences not just for Sarat but for her family and her country, rippling through generations of strangers and kin alike.

***Best Boy* by Eli Gottlieb**

A landmark novel about autism, memory, and, ultimately, redemption. Sent to a "therapeutic community" for autism at the age of eleven, Todd Aaron, now in his fifties, is the "Old Fox" of Payton LivingCenter. A joyous man who rereads the encyclopedia compulsively, he is unnerved by the sudden arrivals of a menacing new staffer and a disruptive, brain-injured roommate.

His equilibrium is further worsened by Martine, a one-eyed new resident who has romantic intentions and convinces him to go off his meds to feel "normal" again. Undone by these pressures, Todd attempts an escape to return "home" to his younger brother and to a childhood that now inhabits only his dreams.

Written astonishingly in the first-person voice of an autistic, adult man, *Best Boy*—with its unforgettable portraits of Todd's beloved mother, whose sweet voice still sings from the grave, and a staffer named Raykene, who says that Todd "reflects the beauty of His creation"—is a piercing, achingly funny, finally shattering novel no reader can ever forget.

***The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* by Kim Michele Richardson**

The hardscrabble folks of Troublesome Creek have to scarp for everything—everything except books, that is. Thanks to Roosevelt's Kentucky Pack Horse Library Project, Troublesome's got its very own traveling librarian, Cussy Mary Carter.

Cussy's not only a book woman, however, she's also the last of her kind, her skin a shade of blue unlike most anyone else. Not everyone is keen on Cussy's family or the Library Project, and a Blue is often blamed for any whiff of trouble. If Cussy wants to bring the joy of books to the hill folks, she's going to have to confront prejudice as old as the Appalachias and suspicion as deep as the holler.

Inspired by the true blue-skinned people of Kentucky and the brave and dedicated Kentucky Pack Horse library service of the 1930s, *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* is a story of raw courage, fierce strength, and one woman's belief that books can carry us anywhere—even back home.

***Doctor Sleep* by Stephen King (2019 film)**

Stephen King returns to the character and territory of one of his most popular novels ever, *The Shining*, in this instantly riveting novel about the now middle-aged Dan Torrance and the very special twelve-year-old girl he must save from a tribe of murderous paranormals.

On highways across America, a tribe of people called the True Knot travel in search of sustenance. They look harmless—mostly old, lots of polyester, and married to their RVs. But as Dan Torrance knows, and spunky twelve-year-old Abra Stone learns, the True Knot are quasi-immortal, living off the steam that children with the shining produce when they are slowly tortured to death.

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Haunted by the inhabitants of the Overlook Hotel, where he spent one horrific childhood year, Dan has been drifting for decades, desperate to shed his father's legacy of despair, alcoholism, and violence. Finally, he settles in a New Hampshire town, an AA community that sustains him, and a job at a nursing home where his remnant shining power provides the crucial final comfort to the dying. Aided by a prescient cat, he becomes "Doctor Sleep."

Then Dan meets the evanescent Abra Stone, and it is her spectacular gift, the brightest shining ever seen, that reignites Dan's own demons and summons him to a battle for Abra's soul and survival. This is an epic war between good and evil, a gory, glorious story that will thrill the millions of devoted readers of *The Shining* and satisfy anyone new to this icon in the King canon.

***Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman**

Meet Eleanor Oliphant: She struggles with appropriate social skills and tends to say exactly what she's thinking. Nothing is missing in her carefully timetabled life of avoiding social interactions, where weekends are punctuated by frozen pizza, vodka, and phone chats with Mummy. But everything changes when Eleanor meets Raymond, the bumbling and deeply unhygienic IT guy from her office.

When she and Raymond together save Sammy, an elderly gentleman who has fallen on the sidewalk, the three become the kinds of friends who rescue one another from the lives of isolation they have each been living. And it is Raymond's big heart that will ultimately help Eleanor find the way to repair her own profoundly damaged one.

***The Great Believers* by Rebecca Makkai**

In 1985, Yale Tishman, the development director for an art gallery in Chicago, is about to pull off an amazing coup, bringing in an extraordinary collection of 1920s paintings as a gift to the gallery. Yet as his career begins to flourish, the carnage of the AIDS epidemic grows around him. One by one, his friends are dying and after his friend Nico's funeral, the virus circles closer and closer to Yale himself. Soon the only person he has left is Fiona, Nico's little sister.

Thirty years later, Fiona is in Paris tracking down her estranged daughter who disappeared into a cult. While staying with an old friend, a famous photographer who documented the Chicago crisis, she finds herself finally grappling with the devastating ways AIDS affected her life and her relationship with her daughter. The two intertwining stories take us through the heartbreak of the eighties and the chaos of the modern world, as both Yale and Fiona struggle to find goodness in the midst of disaster.

***Inland: a Novel* by Tea Obreht**

In the lawless, drought-ridden lands of the Arizona Territory in 1893, two extraordinary lives unfold. Nora is an unflinching frontierswoman awaiting the return of the men in her life—her husband, who has gone in search of water for the parched household, and her elder sons, who have vanished after an explosive argument. Nora is biding her time with her youngest son, who is convinced that a mysterious beast is stalking the land around their home.

Meanwhile, Lurie is a former outlaw and a man haunted by ghosts. He sees lost souls who want something from him, and he finds reprieve from their longing in an unexpected relationship that inspires a momentous expedition across the West. The way in which Lurie's death-defying trek at last intersects with Nora's plight is the surprise and suspense of this brilliant novel.

***The Institute* by Stephen King**

In the middle of the night, in a house on a quiet street in suburban Minneapolis, intruders silently murder Luke Ellis's parents and load him into a black SUV. The operation takes less than two minutes. Luke will wake up at The Institute, in a room that looks just like his own, except there's no window. And outside his door are other doors, behind which are other kids with special talents—telekinesis and telepathy—who got to this place the same way Luke did: Kalisha, Nick, George, Iris, and ten-year-old Avery Dixon. They are all in Front Half. Others, Luke learns, graduated to Back Half, "like the roach motel," Kalisha says. "You check in, but you don't check out."

In this most sinister of institutions, the director, Mrs. Sigsby, and her staff are ruthlessly dedicated to extracting from these children the force of their extranormal gifts. There are no scruples here. If you go along, you get tokens for the vending machines. If you don't, punishment is brutal. As each new victim disappears to Back Half, Luke becomes more and more desperate to get out and get help. But no one has ever escaped from the Institute.

As psychically terrifying as *Firestarter*, and with the spectacular kid power of *It*, *The Institute* is Stephen King's gut-wrenchingly dramatic story of good vs. evil in a world where the good guys don't always win.

***The Island of Sea Women* by Lisa See**

Mi-ja and Young-sook, two girls living on the Korean island of Jeju, are best friends that come from very different backgrounds. When they are old enough, they begin working in the sea with their village's all-female diving collective, led by Young-sook's mother. As the girls take up their positions as baby divers, they know they are beginning a life of excitement and responsibility but also danger. Despite their love for each other, Mi-ja and Young-sook's differences are impossible to ignore.

The Island of Sea Women is an epoch set over many decades, beginning during a period of Japanese colonialism in the 1930s and 1940s, followed by World War II, the Korean War and its aftermath, through the era of cell phones and wet suits for the women divers.

Throughout this time, the residents of Jeju find themselves caught between warring empires. Mi-ja is the daughter of a Japanese collaborator, and she will forever be marked by this association. Young-sook was born into a long line of haenyeo and will inherit her mother's position leading the divers in their village. Little do the two friends know that after surviving hundreds of dives and developing the closest of bonds, forces outside their control will push their friendship to the breaking point.

This beautiful, thoughtful novel illuminates a world turned upside down, one where the women are in charge, engaging in dangerous physical work, and the men take care of the children. A classic Lisa See story—one of women's friendships and the larger forces that shape them—*The Island of Sea Women* introduces readers to the fierce and unforgettable female divers of Jeju Island and the dramatic history that shaped their lives.

***Lady in the Lake* by Laura Lippman**

In 1966, Baltimore is a city of secrets that everyone seems to know—everyone, that is, except Madeline “Maddie” Schwartz. Last year, she was a happy, even pampered housewife. This year, she's bolted from her marriage of almost twenty years, determined to make good on her youthful ambitions to live a passionate, meaningful life.

Maddie wants to matter, to leave her mark on a swiftly changing world. Drawing on her own secrets, she helps Baltimore police find a murdered girl—assistance that leads to a job at the city's afternoon newspaper, the *Star*. Working at the newspaper offers Maddie the opportunity to make her name, and she has found just the story to do it: a missing woman whose body was discovered in the fountain of a city park lake.

Cleo Sherwood was a young black woman who liked to have a good time. No one seems to know or care why she was killed except Maddie—and the dead woman herself. Maddie's going to find the truth about Cleo's life and death. Cleo's ghost, privy to Maddie's poking and prying, wants to be left alone.

Maddie's investigation brings her into contact with people that used to be on the periphery of her life—a jewelry store clerk, a waitress, a rising star on the Baltimore Orioles, a patrol cop, a hardened female reporter, a lonely man in a movie theater. But for all her ambition and drive, Maddie often fails to see the people right in front of her. Her inability to look beyond her own needs will lead to tragedy and turmoil for all sorts of people—including the man who shares her bed, a black police officer who cares for Maddie more than she knows.

***Little Faith* by Nickolas Butler**

Lyle Hovde is at the onset of his golden years, living a mostly content life in rural Wisconsin with his wife, Peg, daughter, Shiloh, and six-year old grandson, Isaac. After a troubled adolescence and subsequent estrangement from her parents, Shiloh has finally come home. But while Lyle is thrilled to have his whole family reunited, he's also uneasy: in Shiloh's absence, she has become deeply involved with an extremist church, and the devout pastor courting her is convinced Isaac has the spiritual ability to heal the sick.

While reckoning with his own faith—or lack thereof—Lyle soon finds himself torn between his unease about the church and his desire to keep his daughter and grandson in his life. But when the church's radical belief system threatens Isaac's safety, Lyle is forced to make a decision from which the family may not recover.

Set over the course of one year and beautifully evoking the change of seasons, *Little Faith* is a powerful and deeply affecting intergenerational novel about family and community, the ways in which belief is both formed and shaken, and the lengths we go to protect our own.

***Lucky Boy* by Shanthi Sekaran**

Eighteen years old and fizzing with optimism, Solimar Castro-Valdez embarks on a perilous journey across the Mexican border. Weeks later, she arrives in Berkeley, California, dazed by first love found then lost, and pregnant. This was not the plan. Undocumented and unmoored, Soli discovers that her son, Ignacio, can become her touchstone, and motherhood her identity in a world where she's otherwise invisible.

Kavya Reddy has created a beautiful life in Berkeley, but then she can't get pregnant and that beautiful life seems suddenly empty. When Soli is placed in immigrant detention and Ignacio comes under Kavya's care, Kavya finally gets to be the singing, story-telling kind of mother she dreamed of being. But she builds her love on a fault line, her heart wrapped around someone else's child. "Nacho" to Soli, and "Iggy" to Kavya, the boy is steeped in love, but his destiny and that of his two mothers teeters between two worlds as Soli fights to get back to him. *Lucky Boy* is a moving and revelatory ode to the ever-changing borders of love.

***Miracle Creek* by Angie Kim**

In rural Virginia, Young and Pak Yoo run an experimental medical treatment device known as the Miracle Submarine—a pressurized oxygen chamber that patients enter for therapeutic "dives" with the hopes of curing issues like autism or infertility. But when the Miracle Submarine mysteriously explodes, killing two people, a dramatic murder trial upends the Yoo's small community.

Who or what caused the explosion? Was it the mother of one of the patients, who claimed to be sick that day but was smoking down by the creek? Or was it Young and Pak themselves, hoping to cash in on a big insurance payment and send their daughter to college?

The ensuing trial uncovers unimaginable secrets from that night—trysts in the woods, mysterious notes, child-abuse charges—as well as tense rivalries and alliances among a group of people driven to extraordinary degrees of desperation and sacrifice.

***My Brilliant Friend* by Elena Ferrante**

The story begins in the 1950s, in a poor but vibrant neighborhood on the outskirts of Naples. Growing up on these tough streets the two girls learn to rely on each other ahead of anyone or anything else. As they grow, as their paths repeatedly diverge and converge, Elena and Lila remain best friends whose respective destinies are reflected and refracted in the other.

They are likewise the embodiments of a nation undergoing momentous change. Through the lives of these two women, Ferrante tells the story of a neighborhood, a city, and a country as it is transformed in ways that, in turn, also transform the relationship between her protagonists, the unforgettable Elena and Lila.

Ferrante is the author of three previous works of critically acclaimed fiction: *The Days of Abandonment*, *Troubling Love*, and *The Lost Daughter*. With this novel, the first in a trilogy, she proves herself to be one of Italy's great storytellers. She has given her readers a masterfully plotted page-turner, abundant and generous in its narrative details and characterizations, that is also a stylish work of literary fiction destined to delight her many fans and win new readers to her fiction.

***The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead**

As the Civil Rights movement begins to reach the black enclave of Frenchtown in segregated Tallahassee, Elwood Curtis takes the words of Dr. Martin Luther King to heart: He is "as good as anyone." Abandoned by his parents, but kept on the straight and narrow by his grandmother, Elwood is about to enroll in the local black college.

But for a black boy in the Jim Crow South of the early 1960s, one innocent mistake is enough to destroy the future. Elwood is sentenced to a juvenile reformatory called the Nickel Academy, whose mission statement says it provides "physical, intellectual and moral training" so the delinquent boys in their charge can become "honorable and honest men."

In reality, the Nickel Academy is a grotesque chamber of horrors where the sadistic staff beats and sexually abuses the students, corrupt officials and locals steal food and supplies, and any boy who resists is likely to disappear "out back." Stunned to find himself in such a vicious environment, Elwood tries to hold onto Dr. King's ringing assertion "Throw us in jail and we will still love you." His friend Turner thinks Elwood is worse than naive, that the world is crooked, and that the only way to survive is to scheme and avoid trouble.

The tension between Elwood's ideals and Turner's skepticism leads to a decision whose repercussions will echo down the decades. Formed in the crucible of the evils Jim Crow wrought, the boys' fates will be determined by what they endured at the Nickel Academy.

Based on the real story of a reform school in Florida that operated for one hundred and eleven years and warped the lives of thousands of children, *The Nickel Boys* is a devastating, driven narrative that showcases a great American novelist writing at the height of his powers.

***The Secrets We Kept* by Lara Prescott**

At the height of the Cold War, two secretaries are pulled out of the typing pool at the CIA and given the assignment of a lifetime. Their mission: to smuggle *Doctor Zhivago* out of the USSR, where no one dare publish it, and help Pasternak's magnum opus make its way into print around the world.

Glamorous and sophisticated Sally Forrester is a seasoned spy who has honed her gift for deceit all over the world—using her magnetism and charm to pry secrets out of powerful men. Irina is a complete novice, and under Sally's tutelage quickly learns how to blend in, make drops, and invisibly ferry classified documents.

The Secrets We Kept combines a legendary literary love story—the decades-long affair between Pasternak and his mistress and muse, Olga Ivinskaya, who was sent to the Gulag and inspired Zhivago's heroine, Lara—with a narrative about two women empowered to lead lives of extraordinary intrigue and risk. From Pasternak's country estate outside Moscow to the brutalities of the Gulag, from Washington, D.C. to Paris and Milan, *The Secrets We Kept* captures a watershed moment in the history of literature—told with soaring emotional intensity and captivating historical detail. And at the center of this unforgettable debut is the powerful belief that a piece of art can change the world.

***Summer of '69* by Elin Hilderbrand**

Welcome to the most tumultuous summer of the twentieth century. It's 1969, and for the Levin family, the times they are a-changing. Every year the children have looked forward to spending the summer at their grandmother's historic home in downtown Nantucket. But like so much else in America, nothing is the same: Blair, the oldest sister, is marooned in Boston, pregnant with twins and unable to travel. Middle sister Kirby, caught up in the thrilling vortex of civil rights protests and determined to be independent, takes a summer job on Martha's Vineyard.

Only-son Tiger is an infantry soldier, recently deployed to Vietnam. Thirteen-year-old Jessie suddenly feels like an only child, marooned in the house with her out-of-touch grandmother and her worried mother, each of them hiding a troubling secret. As the summer heats up, Ted Kennedy sinks a car in Chappaquiddick, man flies to the moon, and Jessie and her family experience their own dramatic upheavals along with the rest of the country.

In her first historical novel, rich with the details of an era that shaped both a nation and an island thirty miles out to sea, Elin Hilderbrand once again earns her title as queen of the summer novel.

***The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* by Alan Bradley**

In his wickedly brilliant first novel, Debut Dagger Award winner Alan Bradley introduces one of the most singular and engaging heroines in recent fiction: eleven-year-old Flavia de Luce, an aspiring chemist with a passion for poison. It is the summer of 1950—and a series of inexplicable events has struck Buckshaw, the decaying English mansion that Flavia's family calls home. A dead bird is found on the doorstep, a postage stamp bizarrely pinned to its beak. Hours later, Flavia finds a man lying in the cucumber patch and watches him as he takes his dying breath. For Flavia, who is both appalled and delighted, life begins in earnest when murder comes to Buckshaw. "I wish I could say I was afraid, but I wasn't. Quite the contrary. This was by far the most interesting thing that had ever happened to me in my entire life."

To Flavia the investigation is the stuff of science: full of possibilities, contradictions, and connections. Soon her father, a man raising his three daughters alone, is seized, accused of murder. And in a police cell, during a violent thunderstorm, Colonel de Luce tells his daughter an astounding story—of a schoolboy friendship turned ugly, of a priceless object that vanished in a bizarre and brazen act of thievery, of a Latin teacher who flung himself to his death from the school's tower thirty years before. Now Flavia is armed with more than enough knowledge to tie two distant deaths together, to examine new suspects, and begin a search that will lead her all the way to the King of England himself. Of this much the girl is sure: her father is innocent of murder—but protecting her and her sisters from something even worse...

***There There* by Tommy Orange**

As we learn the reasons that each person is attending the Big Oakland Powwow—some generous, some fearful, some joyful, some violent—momentum builds toward a shocking yet inevitable conclusion that changes everything.

Jacque Red Feather is newly sober and trying to make it back to the family she left behind in shame. Dene Oxendene is pulling his life back together after his uncle's death and has come to work at the powwow to honor his uncle's memory. Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield has come to watch her nephew Orvil, who has taught himself traditional Indian dance through YouTube videos and will to perform in public for the very first time.

There will be glorious communion, and a spectacle of sacred tradition and pageantry. And there will be sacrifice, and heroism, and loss. *There There* is a wondrous and shattering portrait of an America few of us have ever seen. It's "masterful ... white-hot ... devastating" (*Washington Post*) at the same time as it is fierce, funny, suspenseful, thoroughly modern, and impossible to put down.

***The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James (2020 film)**

One of literature's most gripping ghost stories depicts Miles and Flora, two children who see ghostly apparitions. Their young governess, believes the specters morally dominate the two. James's story follows the sinister transformation of the children—are they become flagrant liars, or innocents enthralled to evil spirits?

The Turn of the Screw is an elegantly told tale of unspoken horror and psychological terror creates what few stories in literature have been able to do—a complete feeling of dread and uncertainty.

***Unsheltered* by Barbara Kingsolver**

Willa Knox has always prided herself on being the embodiment of responsibility for her family. Which is why it's so unnerving that she's arrived at middle age with nothing to show for her hard work and dedication but a stack of unpaid bills and an inherited brick home in Vineland, New Jersey, that is literally falling apart.

The magazine where she worked has folded, and the college where her husband had tenure has closed. The dilapidated house is also home to her ailing and cantankerous Greek father-in-law and her two grown children: her stubborn, free-spirited daughter, Tig, and her dutiful debt-ridden, ivy educated son, Zeke, who has arrived with his unplanned baby in the wake of a life-shattering development.

In an act of desperation, Willa begins to investigate the history of her home, hoping that the local historical preservation society might take an interest and provide funding for its direly needed repairs. Through her research into Vineland's past and its creation as a Utopian community, she discovers a kindred spirit from the 1880s, Thatcher Greenwood.

A science teacher with a lifelong passion for honest investigation, Thatcher finds himself under siege in his community for telling the truth: his employer forbids him to speak of the exciting new theory recently published by Charles Darwin. Thatcher's friendships with a brilliant woman scientist and a renegade newspaper editor draw him into a vendetta with the town's most powerful men. At home, his new wife and status-conscious mother-in-law bristle at the risk of scandal, and dismiss his financial worries and the news that their elegant house is structurally unsound.

***The Water Dancer* by Ta-Nehisi Coates**

Young Hiram Walker was born into bondage. When his mother was sold away, Hiram was robbed of all memory of her—but was gifted with a mysterious power. Years later, when Hiram almost drowns in a river, that same power saves his life. This brush with death births an urgency in Hiram and a daring scheme: to escape from the only home he's ever known.

So begins an unexpected journey that takes Hiram from the corrupt grandeur of Virginia's proud plantations to desperate guerrilla cells in the wilderness, from the coffin of the Deep South to dangerously idealistic movements in the North. Even as he's enlisted in the underground war between slavers and the enslaved, Hiram's resolve to rescue the family he left behind endures.

This is the dramatic story of an atrocity inflicted on generations of women, men, and children—the violent and capricious separation of families—and the war they waged to simply make lives with the people they loved.

***Where'd You Go, Bernadette?* By Maria Semple**

Bernadette Fox is notorious. To her Microsoft-guru husband, she's a fearlessly opinionated partner; to fellow private-school mothers in Seattle, she's a disgrace; to design mavens, she's a revolutionary architect, and to 15-year-old Bee, she is a best friend and, simply, Mom.

Then Bernadette disappears. It began when Bee aced her report card and claimed her promised reward: a family trip to Antarctica. But Bernadette's intensifying allergy to Seattle—and people in general—has made her so agoraphobic that a virtual assistant in India now runs her most basic errands. A trip to the end of the earth is problematic.

To find her mother, Bee compiles email messages, official documents, secret correspondence—creating a compulsively readable and touching novel about misplaced genius and a mother and daughter's role in an absurd world.

***Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel**

England in the 1520s is a heartbeat from disaster. If the king dies without a male heir, the country could be destroyed by civil war. Henry VIII wants to annul his marriage of twenty years, and marry Anne Boleyn. The pope and most of Europe opposes him. The quest for the king's freedom destroys his adviser, the brilliant Cardinal Wolsey, and leaves a power vacuum.

Into this impasse steps Thomas Cromwell. Cromwell is a wholly original man, a charmer and a bully, both idealist and opportunist, astute in reading people and a demon of energy: he is also a consummate politician, hardened by his personal losses, implacable in his ambition. But Henry is volatile: one day tender, one day murderous. Cromwell helps him break the opposition, but what will be the price of his triumph?

In inimitable style, Hilary Mantel presents a picture of a half-made society on the cusp of change, where individuals fight or embrace their fate with passion and courage. With a vast array of characters, overflowing with incident, the novel re-creates an era when the personal and political are separated by a hairbreadth, where success brings unlimited power but a single failure means death.

2020 Book Club Ballot

Voting ends November 13th. You may use the Google form linked on the library's website, or you may complete and return this paper ballot.

Non-Fiction (Choose 1 or 2)

- Becoming* by Michelle Obama
- How to Change Your Mind* by Michael Pollan
- Lab Girl* by Hope Jahren
- The Lost City of Z* by David Grann
- Once More We Saw Stars* by Jayson Greene
- Say Nothing* by Patrick Keefe
- A Woman of No Importance* by Sonia Purnell

Fiction (Choose up to 11)

- American Spy* by Lauren Wilkinson
- American War* by Omar El Akkad
- Best Boy* by Eli Gottlieb
- The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* by Kim Michele Richardson
- Doctor Sleep* by Stephen King
- Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman
- The Great Believers* by Rebecca Makkai
- Inland: a novel* by Tea Obreht
- The Institute* by Stephen King
- The Island of Sea Women* by Lisa See
- Lady in the Lake* by Laura Lippman
- Little Faith* by Nickolas Butler
- Lucky Boy* by Shanthi Sekaran
- Miracle Creek* by Angie Kim
- My Brilliant Friend* by Elena Ferrante
- The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead
- The Secrets We Kept* by Lara Prescott
- Summer of '69* by Elin Hilderbrand
- The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie* by Alan Bradley
- There There* by Tommy Orange
- The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James
- Unsheltered* by Barbara Kingsolver
- The Water Dancer* by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- Where'd You Go, Bernadette?* By Maria Semple
- Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel