**Talk About Literature in Kansas** is a program for every Kansan who loves to read and discuss good books. For more information about TALK and other programs for libraries, museums, and non-profit groups, contact

www.humanitieskansas.org

**It’s a Hard Knock Life**

Orphans have populated literature for centuries, from Little Goody Two-Shoes to Oliver Twist to Jane Eyre to Little Orphan Annie to Tom Sawyer to Harry Potter. Many roamed the streets, some lived in orphanages, while others were placed with cruel and heartless relatives - but all longed for someone to love and shelter them and give them a home.

Though often found out of place and home in real life, orphans held a special place and function in literature, especially in 19th century novels. These parentless children revealed a bleak social history as they negotiated street and world and found their way into story.

Orphan Trains that operated in America from 1854 to 1929 somewhat altered the definition of orphans, as they transported parentless or abandoned children across the country from the cities of the East Coast to the farming communities of the Midwest. Transported far from home, these orphans were both placed and displaced simultaneously, and often found themselves struggling and searching for even more than food and shelter. Often it became the search for records – of birth, of biological parents, of home. Though many Orphan Train riders never talked about their early lives others, longing for self-identity and to know who they were and to whom they belonged, found themselves journeying home - sometimes only to discover that they were already there. Two stories in this series examine the fictional lives of Orphan Train riders, and another unfolds the story of two families longing to love the same little girl.

***Orphan Train* by Christina Baker Kline**

When foster-teen Molly Ayer steals a copy of Jane Eyre from the library, she is assigned community service with the elderly Vivian Daly. As the troubled foster-care juvenile helps 91-year-old Vivian clean out the tucked-away trunks in her attic, Molly learns that Vivian/Dorothy/Niamh is an Orphan train survivor. An unexpected relationship develops between the two; together, they find answers about their separate pasts.

***The Chaperone* by Laura Moriarty**

Thirty-six-year-old Mrs. Cora Carlisle chaperones teen Louise Brooks to New York City from Wichita, Kansas, when the budding silent-film star secures an opportunity to study at the prestigious Denishawn school of dance. While Louise attends dance lessons Cora secretly embarks on her own personal quest, finding herself knocking at the door of the New York Home for Friendless Girls.

***The Light Between Oceans* by M.L. Stedman**

A boat with a dead man and a living infant washes ashore an isolated island off the coast of mainland Australia where a lighthouse keeper and his young wife reside. Isabel, who has suffered two miscarriages and a stillbirth, pleads and convinces her husband Tom that they must keep and raise this child – a “gift from God” - as their own. An impossible dilemma ensues when, after a visit to the mainland, the true identity of the child is discovered.