

TALK

TALK ABOUT LITERATURE IN KANSAS

CATALOG



AVAILABLE
SUMMER 2025



HUMANITIES
KANSAS

TALK

TALK ABOUT LITERATURE IN KANSAS

Welcome to Talk About Literature in Kansas (TALK), a Humanities Kansas program for Kansans who love to read and discuss good books in their community. These stories invite readers to explore history – Kansas, American, and global – through many different characters and their experiences.

HOW TALK WORKS:

Each TALK series is built around a theme. A committee of readers nominates books for consideration and selections are based on reader appeal, literary quality, and relevance to expanding the ideas of the theme. The local sponsor—a public library, historical society, senior center, or other nonprofit group—chooses a series based on interest. Humanities Kansas provides copies of the books, discussion leaders, and special publicity materials to the sponsoring group free of charge. Local sponsors can choose to use some or all of these materials.

HOSTING A TALK BOOK DISCUSSION:

Local sponsors are encouraged to use the TALK program to create dynamic book discussions in their own communities. Where, when, and how often the group meets are up to the sponsor. The most popular TALK model is monthly discussions so that participants have time to read each book in the series. Books are available for participants to borrow in advance of the discussions. Then, during each book discussion event, the discussion leader offers information about the author and guides the discussion among participants. A TALK event usually lasts between 60 to 90 minutes—or longer when the discussion is particularly lively!

WHO CAN HOST A TALK BOOK DISCUSSION?

TALK book discussions are available for free to Kansas nonprofits and are intended for adult, out-of-school audiences.

THANK YOU!

The Northwest Kansas Library System in Norton maintains the inventory of TALK books, takes reservations from sponsors, and ships the books. It's a great Kansas collaboration.

GET STARTED

HOW TO CREATE A TALK BOOK DISCUSSION IN YOUR COMMUNITY:

- Review the catalog and select a TALK series (up to 3 books) and discussion leader(s).
- Reserve the TALK books from the Northwest Kansas Library System. Visit nwkls.org/talk-books to reserve your books.
- Use the directory at the end of the catalog to contact discussion leader(s) and confirm time, date, and location. Organizations can use their own discussion leaders, if preferred.
- Apply online at humanitieskansas.org for funding support to bring any TALK discussion leader(s) to your community.
- Publicize your event. Download a press release, bios, and Humanities Kansas's logo poster.
- Tell us how it went. After the event, fill out an evaluation.
- Some books are labeled LP (Large Print), DB (Digital Talking Book), BR (Digital Braille), DBSP (Spanish Digital Talking Book), and DBFR (French Digital Talking Book). These titles are available to individuals via the State Library of Kansas, Talking Books Service.



CONTACT: Kaitlyn Savage, Operations Manager
785-357-0359 or kaitlyn@humanitieskansas.org

The opinions expressed by the discussion leaders or authors do not necessarily reflect those of Humanities Kansas.

African Experiences of Migration

Immigrants from Africa have settled into Kansas communities over the past several decades, seeking escape from conflict, pursuing educational opportunities, or simply hoping for a better quality of life. The books in this series explore what it takes to fit into American culture while preserving the cultural values of a homeland left behind.

***Open City: A Novel* by Teju Cole (2011)
DB, BR**

In the streets of Manhattan, a young Nigerian doctor named Julius wanders, reflecting on his relationships, his recent breakup with his girlfriend, his present, his past, meeting people from different cultures during his journey from Brussels, and back to the Nigeria of his youth.

***Brooklyn Heights* by Miral al-Tahawy (2010)**

The story of Hind and her eight-year-old son, who have arrived in New York to start a new life, finds the two of them drawing parallels between their new urban community and memories of the Bedouin village where Hind was raised.

***The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*
by Dinaw Mengestu (2007) DB, BR**

Sepha Stephanos fled the Ethiopian revolution and now finds himself running a grocery store in a poor African American neighborhood in Washington, DC. This haunting and powerful novel illuminates what it means to lose a family and a country—and what it takes to create a new home.

***A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy
Soldier* by Ishmael Beah (2007) DB, BR**

Life in war-torn Sierra Leone did not prepare Ishmael Beah for his move to the United States in 1998, where he finished his last two years of high school. His personal experiences now inform his work in addressing children's conditions in countries ravaged by war throughout the world.

***What Is the What* by Dave Eggers
(2006) DB**

This moving novel traces the story of Valentino Achak Deng, one of thousands of Lost Boys of Sudan who fled on foot to escape the death squads of militias overtaking their villages. They walked hundreds of miles, evading bombs, wild animals, and environmental dangers to reach freedom.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

**Annette Billings, Gene Chavez,
Sheena Hernandez, Tim Bascom,
Jane Holwerda**

After the Fact

Some events in our lives are so pivotal that once they occur, everything changes. The Great Depression, World War II, and 9/11 represent large-scale cultural shifts, whereas marriage, job loss, and major illness serve as more intimate examples. The books in this series depict the many ways life can transform who we are.

***The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien
(1990) DB, BR, LP**

Author Tim O'Brien has stated, "stories are for joining the past and the present." This novel of the Vietnam War begins by listing the items soldiers carried in their packs and expands to what they have carried since: memories, stories, and a sense of duty toward the past and the present.

***Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel
(2014) DB, BR, LP**

A traveling Shakespeare theater troupe tours a post-apocalyptic world 20 years after a flu pandemic decimates 99% of the world's population. This beautiful and haunting novel explores the importance of art and human connection when all appears lost.

***The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (2017)
DB, BR, LP, DBSP**

Starr is the sole witness to a murder. Prior to the shooting, she lived in two worlds kept strictly separate—one of her majority white private school and the second of her majority Black neighborhood.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Lisa Moritz, Lori Brack, Miranda Ericsson,
Ranee Baty, Marilyn Klaus,
Matt Copeland



Between Fences

Fences mark our territory, define our boundaries, limit our movement, and convey our sense of property. We define ourselves and our space with fence. Metaphorically, fences can mark different states of being—ins and outs, the included and excluded, the sacred and taboo, and even life and death.

***Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston (1973) DB, BR**

In this memoir, Houston recalls life in the camp from a child's point of view, from dining to schooling to cultivating the land, in addition to recounting her reentry into American life and her return to Manzanar in 1972.

***Fences* by August Wilson (1985) DB**

For Troy, an old baseball player, fences mark the boundary for a home run, yet they also mark the restrictions that kept Troy from the big leagues and demarcate struggles with his own mortality.

***The Tortilla Curtain* by T. C. Boyle (1995) DB**

Two Los Angeles couples collide in Boyle's novel and expose deep rifts right below the surface of community: class, immigration, and the land.

***The Wire-Cutters* by Mollie E. Moore Davis (1899) DB**

Set during the 1880s Texas Wire-Cutting War, when fencing off the open plains set smallholders against the rich large-tract owners, this novel has all the trappings of a classic Western: cowboys, duels, and outlaws framed against the canvas of the struggle to survive on the frontier.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Sheena Hernandez, Marilyn Klaus, Deborah Peterson, Carmaletta Williams, Trish Reeves, Anne Hawkins, Annette Billings, Sara Tucker, Dan Eells, Kevin Rabas



Beyond the Border: Latino Immigration Experiences

Immigrants have been part of the Kansas story for more than a century. The books in this series explore the ways Latino immigrants see their journeys and communities; age old generational conflicts between parents and teenagers; and the push and pull of politics and a global economy.

***Antonio's Gun and Delfino's Dream: True Tales of Mexican Migration* by Sam Quinones (2007)**

Quinones delivers nine true stories that situate individual experiences within a broader social, political, cultural, and economic context—including one that follows a soccer season in Garden City, Kansas.

***The House of Broken Angels* by Luis Alberto Urrea (2018) DB**

Overflowing with joy, sorrow, and humor, this novel weaves the voices of four generations of a Mexican American family, from their move to southern California after the Mexican Revolution in 1910, the great wave of deportation of 1932 that took them back to Mexico, and their current lives in San Diego and Seattle.

***I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika L. Sánchez (2017) DB, DBSP**

Julia is an irreverent young daughter of Mexican immigrants. As she struggles to break free of her parents' expectations, she also tries to understand their migration experience crossing the border and their status as undocumented immigrants.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Gene Chavez, Nic Shump,
Deborah Peterson, Marilyn Klaus,
Dennis Etzel Jr., Lisa Moritz,
Rosemary Kolich, Kevin Rabas,
Rachel Goossen, Kim Stanley,
Miranda Ericsson

Civil Rights Revisited

The books in this series offer a look at American history, specifically Civil Rights history, from the launch pad of the 21st century. Kansas has an important place in this story from our state's early days in support of abolition in the 1850s, the Free State decision, and the passage of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* landmark Supreme Court decision a century later. Themes of citizenship and American dreams—and dreams deferred, to invoke Langston Hughes (also a Kansan)—thread these volumes together.

***March* by John Lewis (2013) DB, LP**

This trilogy of graphic novels tells the stories of the Civil Rights Movement, told through the perspective of history's icon and U.S. Congressman John Lewis.

Book 1

Through a series of flashbacks, Lewis recalls the impact of Martin Luther King Jr. and the philosophy of nonviolence that characterized the Civil Rights Movement, a movement that ultimately helped build momentum for the election of the first African American president of the United States.

Book 2

Book 2 follows Lewis's rise within the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the growing influence of the organization on the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. As Lewis states, "Human dignity is the most important thing in my life."

Book 3

The final volume in the trilogy focuses on the Selma to Montgomery march, which led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

***Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) DB, BR, LP, DBSP**

Written as a letter to his teenage son, this slim volume is a reflection on being Black in the United States. Part autobiography, part history lesson, Coates asks the reader to consider the meaning of being American.

***Citizen: An American Lyric* Claudia Rankine (2014) DB, BR, LP**

This poetic work crosses boundaries as it explores different definitions of belonging and citizenship. Rankine presents encounters in 21st-century daily life and explores the impact of accumulative stresses on a person.

***The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander (2010) DB, LP, DBSP**

Author Michelle Alexander meticulously examines the role of race in the American judicial system.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Gene Chavez, John Edgar Tidwell,
Nic Shump, Marilyn Klaus,
Margy Stewart, Carmaletta Williams

The Civil War

The Civil War came close to destroying the United States, and its legacy remains complicated. The books in this series reflect the continuing impacts of the Civil War on the contemporary American scene.

***A Diary from Dixie* by Mary Boykin Chesnut (1905/2006)**

Mary Chesnut (1823-1886) was a woman of the Southern plantation elite, well connected, and passionately committed to the Confederacy's losing cause. Through the course of the war, she worked in hospitals and witnessed the social costs of the Civil War and the slow destruction of her way of life.

***March* by Geraldine Brooks (2005) DB**

The March of Brooks's title is not Sherman's, but Alcott's. In Louisa May Alcott's classic *Little Women*, the father of the girls of the March family is absent for much of the novel, serving as a chaplain for Union forces during the Civil War. Brooks's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel reimagines the absent March as an abolitionist with utopian inclinations, testing his ideological commitments in the theater of war.

***The March* by E.L. Doctorow (2005) DB, BR**

General William Tecumseh Sherman's famous march, the rapacious scorched earth tromping of Union forces across Georgia and the Carolinas, seemed designed to prove his slogan that "war is hell." Doctorow in this novel brings to bear a perspective that blends panoramic overview with local experience, freely mixing fictional creations with historical figures.

***The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane (1895/2004) DB, BR**

For Henry Fleming, the fundamental contrast between his anticipation of war and his experience of battle frames his growing consciousness of the realities of war. That new consciousness brings into question the hero's initial idealized quest for a "red badge of courage," the wound that proves his manhood.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Deborah Peterson, Linda Lewis,
Trish Reeves, Margy Stewart,
Thomas Prasch, Jane Holwerda



Community: The Way We Live

The quest for community has taken many forms in the history of the United States, the quintessential nation of the individual. Today we worry about the erosion of community. But maybe this has always been the case? This series explores some of the many ways we live together.

***Bailey's Cafe* by Gloria Naylor (1992) DB**

No one comes to Bailey's Cafe for the food—they're drawn by the grace and magic that attracts souls living hard lives in complicated circumstances.

***Mama Day* by Gloria Naylor (1988) DB, BR**

On the Georgia sea island of Willow Springs, people still use only herbal medicine and honor ancestors who came over as enslaved. Matriarch Mama Day, who can call up lightning storms and see secrets in her dreams, tests her powers when her great-niece finds her life and soul in danger from the island's darker forces.

***Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* by Fannie Flagg (1987) DB**

This endearing novel travels from the 1980s back to the 1930s, when Idgie and Ruth's Alabama cafe offered good barbecue, love, laughter, and even an occasional murder.

***The Milagro Beanfield War* by John Nichols (1974) DB**

When feisty Joe Mondragon decides to irrigate his bean crop with "stolen" water, he drags the neighbors in his New Mexico village into a hilarious battle to save their community.

***Snow Falling on Cedars* by David Guterson (1994) DB, BR**

A fisherman drowns and a Japanese American is charged with his murder, forcing the island residents of San Piedro to come to terms with their past, including the exile of local Japanese families during World War II.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Anne Hawkins, John Edgar Tidwell,
Rachel Goossen, Trish Reeves,
Carmaletta Williams



Dearly Beloved

Society admonishes us to live in the now, be in the moment, don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today. This conveniently allows us not to think about our own end. Death and dying are uncomfortable topics. The three volumes in this series take on this taboo subject from a variety of perspectives.

***Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End* by Atul Gawande (2014) DB, LP**

Our culture idealizes youth. People are so busy trying to look, act, or feel younger that we ignore the fact of our aging. *Being Mortal* offers a brutally honest truth: We will all someday die. Dr. Gawande writes compassionately and engagingly about the sensitive topic of death and dying. He argues that our medicalization of aging and dying merely prolongs life without regard to whether or not it is enjoyable.

***Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* by Roz Chast (2014) DB, LP**

Chast's memoir discusses the emotional struggles of caring for aging parents without shying away from the gritty reality. How and when to help? How much, how often? When to downsize, what to do with all the stuff? How will the extended care be paid for? She takes on this tough topic in a lighthearted manner and in an unconventional way—through drawing.

***Medicine Walk* by Richard Wagamese (2014) LP, DB**

Sixteen-year-old Franklin agrees to take his estranged father to the back country of British Columbia to die the "warrior way," and along the way receives the stories his father must tell. "So far it's all been stories," remarks Franklin. "It's all we are in the end, our stories," replies his father.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Annette Billings, Lori Brack,
Rachel Goossen, Rosemary Kolich,
Margy Stewart

Entangled World

Globalization, typically considered in economic terms, has sparked cultural collisions. To all this, literature has responded, producing a range of works that investigate the complex interactions of people and cultures in our increasingly entangled world.

***Bel Canto* by Anne Patchett (2001) DB, BR**

An American opera singer, a Japanese industrialist, a French diplomat with skills in the kitchen, and a translator are taken hostage by revolutionary terrorists in an unnamed Latin American embassy. Low comedy and high suspense, romance and tragedy blend in Patchett’s novel inspired by the actual seizure of the Japanese ambassador’s residence in Peru in 1996.

***People of the Book* by Geraldine Brooks (2007) DB, BR, DBSP**

Book restorer Hannah Heath’s project, the 500-year-old illuminated Sarajevo Haggadah manuscript, is a repository of tragic episodes throughout human history. As she unpacks the clues in the book that illuminate its history—an insect wing, a wine stain, a missing silver clasp—her life in Sarajevo at the end of the Bosnian war enriches her own perspectives on humankind’s potential for violence and redemption.

***Anil’s Ghost* by Michael Ondaatje (2000) DB, BR**

Anil has fled her increasingly violent homeland to train in America as a forensic archaeologist. She comes to Sri Lanka on a UN mission and is teamed with local archaeologist Sarath, whose Buddhist faith and murky political connections balance her Western perspective on events.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Dennis Etzel Jr., Erin Pouppirt,
Joanne Janssen, Kim Stanley, Lisa
Moritz, Tim Bascom, Margy Stewart,
Thomas Praschh



The Exile's Place

Who is an exile and what does it mean to be one? Old ideas, foodways, religious beliefs, language, and habits are used to build a new life someplace else, but a new life comes with its own set of challenges. What drives the exile to this new place colors both the memories of the land left behind and the perspectives on the new homeland. It's the classic push and pull of change, sometimes voluntary and other times not.

***The Lazarus Project* by Aleksandar Hemon (2008) DB**

Bosnian Vladimir Brik is caught in exile in Chicago by the wars that broke up Yugoslavia. Obsessed with Lazarus Averbach, an immigrant who had fled Moldavian pogroms in the early 1900s only to die in Chicago as a presumed anarchist, Brik returns to Eastern Europe to explore the roots of the earlier tragedy.

***The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri (2003) DB, BR, DBSP**

This story of the Ganguli family centers on Gogol, the eldest son, and highlights the different ways in which his parents, first-generation immigrants, and Gogol's generation, American-born children of immigrants, interact with India as a place, a culture, and an ethnic identity, and how they work to shape these identities within the New World.

***Things I've Been Silent About* by Azar Nafisi (2008) DB**

Azar Nafisi's memoir covers both her increasing alienation from the theocratic state in Iran and her complex relationships with her mother, whose "coffee hours" with other women offered a refuge from an increasingly controlled public sphere, and her father, who kept his own secret diary.

***Brick Lane* by Monica Ali (2003) DB**

Nazneen is an 18-year-old Bangladeshi brought to Britain in an arranged marriage with almost no preparation—the only words she knows in English are "sorry" and "thank you." She must make a life with her much older, comically incompetent husband and survive her impoverished and violent surroundings in the Brick Lane territory of East London.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

**Joanne Janssen, Trish Reeves,
Marilyn Klaus, Thomas Prasch**

Do our lives unfold at random, or do the things that happen to us have a larger purpose? Do love and compassion matter in a world that often lacks both? Questions such as these have led people in every society, throughout history, to seek answers in the spiritual realm.

***Distant View of a Minaret and Other Stories*
by Alifa Rifaat (Islam) (1983)**

The private, hidden world of women in Egypt unfolds in 15 tales all permeated by the call of the mosque and the daily rituals of prayer.

***Go Tell It on the Mountain* by James
Baldwin (Christianity) (1953) DB, BR**

John is supposed to become a preacher like his father, Gabriel, but at 14 he is tempted to reject the strict faith of a family whose buried secrets and struggles gradually unfold.

***Harp of Burma* by Michio Takeyama
(Buddhism) (1967)**

When a carefree, harp-playing Japanese soldier is wounded in Burma at the close of World War II, he is saved by a Buddhist priest and undergoes a conversion that takes him and his country on the road to peace. (Upon request, The Burmese Harp. Video)

***Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya
(Hinduism) (1954) DB**

A simple peasant woman in India never loses her faith in life or her love for her family, even as she endures the uncertainties of farming, poverty, and changing times.

***The Romance Reader* by Pearl Abraham
(Judaism) (1995) DB**

The daughter of a Hasidic rabbi, Rachel is expected to care for her siblings, dress modestly, and submit to an arranged marriage. But there's a more enticing world in the pages of her forbidden paperback books.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Deborah Peterson, Nic Shump,
Carmalotta Williams, Lisa Moritz, Anne
Hawkins, Sara Tucker, Jane Holwerda,
Rosemary Kolich, Kevin Rabas, Rachel
Goossen, Kim Stanley, Thomas Prasch

Family stories are rooted in place. Home is not only where we live, but the homestead our ancestors tamed, a site of discovery, love, and loss for generations. When the land has made us into who we are today, these authors also look to how we have shaped the land in return.

***Running Out: In Search of Water on the High Plains* by Lucas Bessire (2021) DB**

Guided by his grandmother Fern’s diaries, author Lucas Bessire takes the long view as he explores the possible future of the endangered Ogallala Aquifer, which has enabled a way of life in western Kansas that defines us as a people.

***The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man’s Love Affair with Nature* by J. Drew Lanham (2016) DB, BR**

The “Home Place” held three worlds for young Drew Lanham: his family’s 1970s ranch house; his Mamatha’s ramshackle, tin-roofed Depression-era Southern home; and a world of wildlife in between.

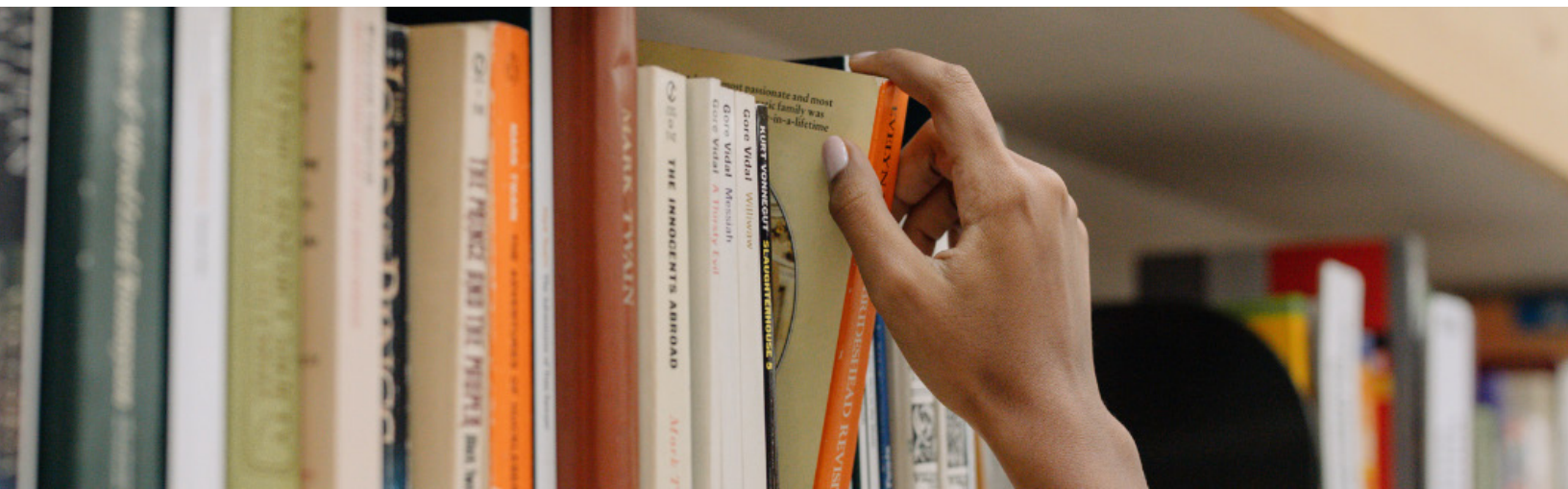
***Four Winds* by Kristin Hannah (2021) DB, DBSP**

It’s 1934, and Elsa Martinelli is in a desperate fight to save her family and their farm. Like others across the Great Plains, Elsa must fight to keep her children alive, but she also must ask herself, who will she be if she leaves the land she loves?



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Rachel Goossen, Margy Stewart,
Deborah Peterson, Carmaletta Williams,
Trish Reeves, Anne Hawkins, Dan Eells,
Tim Bascom, Rachel Goossen,
Erin Poupirt, Kim Stanley,
Miranda Ericsson, Nic Shump



Food for Thought

Food is more than sustenance: it's important emotionally and is a way to share traditions. Communities come together at events and eating places to get to know one another and to build common identities. At the same time, conflict can appear wherever people raise, cook, or eat food.

***Empire Falls* by Richard Russo (2001) DB**

Miles Roby, runs the local diner, the Empire Grill. "His daily parade of customers provides him with ample evidence of both the restrictions and forced intimacy of small-town life."

***Epitaph for a Peach* by David Mas Masumoto (1995) BR**

Masumoto details his struggle to survive the rigors of modern-day grocery cold storage and distribution timetables while addressing the importance of family and learning to work with, rather than against, nature.

***Miriam's Kitchen* by Elizabeth Ehrlich (1997) DB**

Ehrlich tells how and why, as the child of mostly secular Jewish parents, she came to reclaim the kosher cooking ways of her Holocaust-survivor mother-in-law, Miriam. Ehrlich writes gently and with humor, taking time to talk about the small details of how things are done to "keep kosher."

***Secrets of the Tsil Café* by Thomas Fox Averill (2001)**

Wes Hingler's parents had one marriage, but two kitchens—his father's Native American Tsil Café, and his mother's European-heritage catering business. Wes's search for his cooking style, and thus his own adult identity, comes interwoven with a number of memorable characters, family crises and secrets, and whole-world recipes.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Dan Eells, Dennis Etzel Jr.,
Sheena Hernandez, Lisa Moritz,
Sara Tucker, Kevin Rabas, Erin Pouppirt,
Thomas Prasch

Friends and Neighbors

“Of all possessions, a friend is the most precious,” stated Greek historian Herodotus. From Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn to Jo and Laurie, literature is filled with stories of friendships. This series is about forging friendships in unexpected places and the changes these relationships bring to our lives.

***A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman
(2012) DB, BR, LP**

Ove, a recent widower and forced retiree, likes things to be orderly and fair. He spends his days as self-appointed neighborhood watch making sure bicycles remain in designated areas and sheds are securely locked. New neighbors disrupt his world, beginning with knocking over his mailbox, driving over his flowerbed, and bringing him dinner as an apology.

***All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr (2014) DB, BR, DBSP**

This book follows the lives of Marie-Laure Leblanc, a French girl who is visually impaired eventually tasked with looking after the legendary diamond called the Sea of Flames, and Werner Pfenning, an orphan German boy extremely gifted in mathematics and technological knowledge. Their paths collide in occupied France as they both try to survive and endure the devastation of World War II.

***The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* by Dinaw Mengestu (2007) DB, BR, LP**

Ethiopian shopkeeper Sepha Stephanos chronicles his life in the rapidly gentrifying Washington, D.C., neighborhood of Logan Circle and his path there from war-torn Ethiopia as a young man in the 1970s. The story is about the pain of exile, a changing neighborhood, and friendships forged and lost.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Dennis Etzel Jr., Lisa Moritz, Miranda Ericsson, Rachel Goossen, Randee Baty, Tim Bascom, Matt Copeland, Jane Holwerda, Dr. Michaeline Chance-Reay

Ghost Stories

Literature, like folklore, is filled with the spirits of the dead: King Saul asks the Witch of Endor to call up Samuel's ghost; Odysseus tries to embrace his mother's wraith in Hades; and Hamlet asks whether his father's image is ghost or demon. People tell stories to try to explain what death is, where loved ones go, and why the good suffer.

***The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson (1959) DB, LP**

A lonely woman is strangely drawn to a house that others find hateful. We gradually discover what it is in her past and in the house's past that draws them together.

***The Woman in Black* by Susan Hill (1983) LP**

In this modern ghost story, all the classic elements are brought together: the isolated mansion and its dark past, described in riffs from yellowed letters; the young innocent charged with telling a dead woman's story; and the devastating final turn.

***The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman (2008) DB, BR, LP**

A small child wanders off into a graveyard pursued by a mysterious man named Jack who murdered the child's family. The boy is dubbed "Nobody Owens" by his adoptive ghostly parents who nickname him Bod. Bod's companions include an undead guardian named Silas and a graveyard full of ghosts who grant Bod the "freedom of the graveyard."



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Kim Stanley, Lori Brack, Randee Baty,
Rosemary Kolich, Sheena Hernandez,
Trish Reeves, Dan Eells



The Great Plains Spirit

Stretching from Texas north to the Dakotas, the vast Great Plains region has generated its share of myths and stereotypes, from the hardy pioneer farmer and the vanishing American Indian to the Dust Bowl refugee. It has also produced some of our best American writers and inspired a rich and varied literary tradition.

***The Bones of Plenty* by Lois Hudson (1962)**

Proud, independent Dakota wheat farmer George Armstrong Custer and his hardworking wife Rachel must battle both the land and their landlord during the depression years of 1933–34.

***Great Plains* by Ian Frazier (1989) DB**

Taking us on a journey of 25,000 miles up, down, and across the myth-inspiring Great Plains, Frazier’s adventures range from the site of Sitting Bull’s cabin to Homecoming in Nicodemus, Kansas.

***Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder (1932–1943/1971) DB, BR**

The Ingalls family leaves the Big Woods of Wisconsin and settles in the Indian territory of Kansas, a land of prairie fires, wolves, adventure, and startling beauty.

***O Pioneers!* by Willa Cather (1913) DB, BR**

Alexandra Bergson’s dying father leaves their struggling Nebraska homestead to her, not her brothers. With her iron will and intelligence, she overcomes family tragedy and tames wild land that she loves.

***Touching the Fire: Buffalo Dancers, the Sky Bundle, and Other Tales* by Roger Welsch (1992)**

The fictional Nehawka Indians wage a battle for the return of their sacred Sky Bundle, a medicine pouch whose stories take us back in time to the first Nehawka village on the Plains.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Anne Hawkins, Marilyn Klaus,
Trish Reeves, Margy Stewart, Dennis
Etzel Jr., Annette Billings, Sara Tucker,
Dan Eells, Tim Bascom,
Rosemary Kolich, Nic Shump

The transition to adulthood can be a bumpy passage as children turn into teenagers who then need to make their way in an adult world. However, if coming of age is broadly universal, it is also deeply particular and personal.

***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon (2003) DB, BR**

Finding a dead dog, any child might begin an investigation to find the murderer. However, Christopher Boone, a boy with autism, must not only carry out an investigation, but he must find a way to operate in the often-terrifying world, thereby bringing us into the world of the high-functioning autistic child.

***The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini (2003) DB, BR, DBSP**

Amir recalls his childhood in Afghanistan, prior to the Soviet invasion and the rise of the Taliban. His memories focus on his relationship with Hassan, his loyal servant and best friend, whom Amir betrayed. Returning to Afghanistan to rescue Hassan's son from the clutches of the Taliban, Amir comes to terms with his past.

***My Last Days as Roy Rogers* by Pat Cunningham Devoto (1999) DB**

Devoto's novel recalls life in small-town, 1950s Alabama where Tabitha's favorite cowboy is Roy Rogers, and her best friend Maudie May's is Gene Autry. As their friendship develops and challenges social conventions, Tabitha understands the racial and class dynamics of her hometown, and the limits of her own possibilities as the white-hatted hero who can come to the rescue.

***The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd (2002) DB, BR, DBSP, DBFR**

Fleeing from the law, 14-year-old Lily and her Black nanny, Rosaleen, head to South Carolina, where they find refuge in a pink house of African American sisters who cultivate bees and a cult of the Black Madonna. Lily comes to terms with her own past and struggles toward autonomy.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Kevin Rabas, Rachel Goossen

Growing Up American

Coming-of-age literature provides an opportunity to see the world through the eyes of someone still a bit outside of adulthood. Everyone's journey from teen to adult is different, but we can share familiar feelings – love, loss, and moments when we're simply trying to figure out how and where we fit in.

***Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger (1951)**
DB, BR

Can J. D. Salinger's classic still tell us anything about what it means to be American? Let's start this series by revisiting that too-wise-for-his-age, smart aleck Holden Caulfield and his quest for the un-phony.

***Tender at the Bone: Growing Up at the Table* by Ruth Reichl (1998) DB**

Through food, Ruth Reichl comes to learn who she is. By turns moving and hilarious, nostalgic and hopeful, she recalls the long road from her upbringing (with parents indifferent to the appeals of the palate) to her chosen profession of restaurant reviewer, with foreign travel and dumpster diving along the way, and a recipe to punctuate each chapter.

***Sag Harbor* by Colson Whitehead (2009)**
DB, BR

Benji explains the central terms of his summers away: "First you had to settle the question of out." The "out" is out from school, out for vacation, and out to Sag Harbor, but for the African American elites who made the resort their vacation home, the ins and outs of it were more complex.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

John Edgar Tidwell, Nic Shump,
Thomas Prasch, Dan Eells



Hispanic Heritage: Mothers, Sisters, Daughters

In this series, readers will discover a vibrant Latino literature in the United States that center around family ties, particularly the universal bonds between mother and daughter, grandmother and granddaughter, and among sisters.

***Brand New Memory* by Elias Miguel Muñoz (1998)**

Cuban American teenager Gina Domingo's life revolves around Southern California pop culture and her wealthy parents—until her grandmother arrives from Cuba for an unexpected visit.

***Esperanza's Box of Saints* by María Amparo Escandón (1999) DBSP**

Guided by her favorite saint, the beautiful young widow Esperanza sets off on a humorous journey from Mexico to Los Angeles in search of her missing daughter.

***The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1984) DB, DBSP**

This classic story of a young Mexican American girl growing up in the Latino section of Chicago is sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes deeply joyous.

***In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez (1994) DB, DBSP**

The four Mirabal sisters sacrificed safe and comfortable lives to become symbols of hope—the butterflies—who dared to oppose the Dominican Republic's cruel 30-year dictatorship.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Gene Chavez, Linda Lewis,
Deborah Peterson, Marilyn Klaus,
Sheena Hernandez, Lisa Moritz,
Jane Holwerda, Rosemary Kolich,
Joanne Janssen, Rachel Goossen,
Kim Stanley, Miranda Ericsson



It's a Hard Knock Life

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

***Orphan Train* by Christina Baker Kline
(2013) DB, BR, LP, DBSP**

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 she helps Vivian clean out the tucked-away trunks in her attic, Molly learns that Vivian is an Orphan Train survivor. An unexpected relationship develops between the two, and together, they find answers about their separate pasts.

***The Chaperone* by Laura Moriarty (2012)
DB, LP**

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
(2012) DB, LP**

A boat with a dead man and a living infant wash 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, convinces her husband that they must raise this child as their own. An impossible dilemma ensues when the true identity of the child is discovered.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Anne Hawkins, Miranda Ericsson,
Rosemary Kolich, Sara Jane Richter

The Kansas Experience

The Kansas state motto, “Ad Astra per Aspera,” translates as “to the stars through difficulty.” It’s a nod to the can-do, pioneer spirit of our people, but also references the struggles, violence, and bloodshed that marked the state’s entry to the union. The books in this series explore more contemporary aspirations and challenges – as suggested in the motto – more than a century later.

***Heartland* by Sarah Smarsh (2018) DB, BR**

The American Dream says that in the United States, anyone who works hard enough can get ahead. Author Sarah Smarsh sets out to challenge that line of thinking by sharing the story of a family working hard to get by alongside an examination of the economic policies and class inequalities that can lead to generations of poverty.

***The Learning Tree* by Gordon Parks (1963) DB, BR**

Thirteen-year-old Newt Winger is surrounded by a warm family and the idyllic countryside of southeast Kansas, but he must learn hard lessons about growing up Black in a small town in the 1920s.

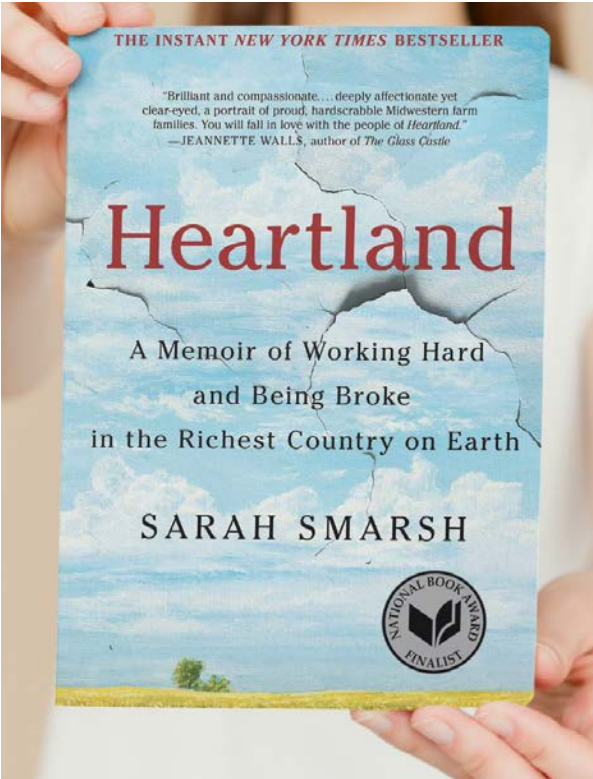
***No Place Like Home: Lessons in Activism from LGBT Kansas* by C. J. Janovy (2018)**

With a nod to the most famous quote from The Wizard of Oz, Janovy shares the stories of Kansans working together in support of LGBT Kansans and their rights here “at home.”

☪

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Anne Hawkins, Dennis Etzel Jr., John Edgar Tidwell, Kevin Rabas, Lori Brack, Nic Shump, Randee Baty, Matt Copeland, Margy Stewart, Thomas Prasch



Literature with Kansas Connections

Even if it isn't always completely accurate, almost everyone has a picture of 19th century Kansas—Free State Bleeding Kansas, Sod House Early Settler Kansas, Populist Farmer Kansas, and other conceptions of the state we call home. There's less agreement about what it means to live in Kansas today.

***The Center of Everything* by Laura Moriarty (2003) DB**

Evelyn Bucknow, a 10-year-old growing up in fictional Kerrville, Kansas, seeks the certainty provided by her church, where she is assured that she is at the “center of everything.” Difficulties and humor appear when her own interest in evolutionary science conflicts with church teachings.

***Not Without Laughter* by Langston Hughes (1930) DB**

Set in the fictional Kansas town of Stanton—purportedly based on Hughes's Lawrence boyhood experiences, the novel follows Sandy as he negotiates a world of prejudice and segregation, struggling to be the best that he can be despite the realities of being Black in the early 1900s.

***One Soldier's Story* by Bob Dole (2005) DB, BR**

Long before he was a United States senator, Bob Dole was first a boy growing up in Russell, Kansas. Although *One Soldier's Story* focuses on his wartime years with a gripping account of the years he spent recovering from his wounds, themes of family and community are a vital part of the story.

***The Slow Air of Ewan MacPherson* by Thomas Fox Averill (2003) DB**

Ewan MacPherson was brought as an infant from Scotland to the neo-Scottish town of Glasgow, Kansas. Times are hard, young love is harder, and everybody makes mistakes... but eventually, with perseverance, some good things do happen.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Dennis Etzel Jr., Kevin Rabas,
Matt Copeland, Dan Eells

Middle Eastern Culture and Society

The Middle East is a region with multiple histories, cultures, and peoples of varied backgrounds. This series delves into the complexities of the region's people and cultures so often in the news.

***The Israelis: Ordinary People in an Extraordinary Land* by Donna Rosenthal (2003)**

A nation of immigrants, Israel is much more religiously and ethnically diverse than many would guess, and this book explores the complexity of the region.

***My Prison, My Home: One Woman's Story of Captivity in Iran* by Haleh Esfandiari (2009)**

This autobiography provides a window into 21st century Iran and Iranian American relations. Esfandiari is an American citizen and native of Iran who travels from the United States to visit her mother in Tehran, where she is arrested and incarcerated.

***Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi (2000) BR**

This 2004 graphic novel, also made into a film, offers a quick read. Political changes following the 1979 revolution affect a young girl's daily life and the lives of those around her in ways that are difficult for her to understand.

***The Yacoubian Building* by Alaa Al Aswany (2002) DB**

A bestseller in the Arab world, this novel was also made into a film in 2006. It follows the lives of a group of people who live in one apartment building in Cairo during the first Gulf War. The diversity of the inhabitants reveals a cross-section of gritty lives in a big city.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Kim Stanley, Marilyn Klaus,
Dennis Etzel Jr., Sheena Hernandez,
Lisa Moritz, Sara Tucker, Jane Holwerda,
Joanne Janssen, Kim Stanley,
Thomas Prasch, Nic Shump

The Modern Family

Beginning in the mid-20th century, the stereotypical American family has comprised mother, father and 2.5 children—the so-called nuclear family. Yet, in reality, very few families meet this standard. Adoptive, step, blended, multigenerational—families realistically come in all shapes and sizes. The books in this series expand our notion of what it means to be a family.

***The Burgess Boys* by Elizabeth Strout (2013) DB, LP**

Three siblings from Maine—Jim, a successful New York attorney and twins Bob, a less-successful New York attorney, and Susan, who stayed behind in Maine, face a family crisis involving Susan’s teenage son. They must deal with the present and face the childhood tragedy that shaped their entire adult lives and family relationships.

***Family Man* by Elinor Lipman (2009) LP, BR**

Henry, a Manhattan lawyer, receives a call from his ex-wife, who is about to be kicked out of her posh apartment by her two stepsons after the death of her third husband. The call brings Denise—his ex-wife—and her daughter, Thalia, back into the lonely bachelor’s life. The ensuing plot twists and dialogue are worthy of Jane Austen.

***LaRose* by Louise Erdrich (2016) DB, LP**

Landreaux Iron accidentally shoots his neighbor’s son while hunting. Overcome with guilt and grief, he turns to his Native American ancestors for guidance. Hoping for redemption and forgiveness, he and his wife give their own son, LaRose, to the grieving family. The narrative chronicles the effect of the adoption on both families and their small North Dakota community.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Erin Pouppirt, Joanne Janssen,
Kevin Rabas, Kim Stanley, Lisa Moritz,
Miranda Ericsson, Tim Bascom,
Dr. Michaeline Chance-Reay

Native American Identity from Past to Present

Much of recent history has portrayed Native Americans as living in a mythical past or as a vanishing race who are isolated to reservations. The books in this series present Native American identity through the lens of Native writers and Native experiences. These writers speak to the complexity of Native identity. (This series was created by Dr. Brian Burkhardt (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma) in collaboration with Oklahoma Humanities.)

***Firekeeper's Daughter* by Angeline Boulley
(Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians)
(2021) DB, BR**

Daunis Fontaine is a science geek and hockey star grappling with two identities: that of her privileged, white, French-Canadian mother and the Sugar Island Sault tribe of her late father. Daunis is strongly connected to her Ojibwe family, but because she is unenrolled, she does not feel that she belongs anywhere. After the tragic death of her maternal uncle, she must reconcile her different identities in order to protect her communities, both Native and non-Native.

***There There* by Tommy Orange (Cheyenne
and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma) (2018)
DB, BR**

A multigenerational cast of 12 characters in and around Oakland, California, wrestle with broken identities, stereotypical misconceptions, and the power of Cheyenne stories as their lives intersect in various ways until they converge at the Big Oakland Powwow.

***The Removed* by Brandon Hobson
(Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma) (2021) DB**

Maria struggles to prepare for a bonfire to mark the dual anniversaries of her son Ray-Ray's death and the signing of the Cherokee Nation Constitution in 1839. As she attempts to pull her family together, a foster son who bears a striking resemblance to Ray-Ray shifts the family from their grief in startling ways.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Deborah Peterson, Erin Pouppirt,
Gene Chavez, Linda Lewis,
Sheena Hernandez, Tim Bascom,
Marilyn Klaus

On the Lighter Side

Life can be sad, stressful, and depressing. Fortunately, humor writers come to our rescue, bringing us both immediate laughs and healing new perspectives on the ordinary afflictions of daily living.

***How Elizabeth Barrett Browning Saved My Life* by Mameve Medwed (2006) BR**

Harvard-dropout Abby Randolph sells “eclectic” antiques. Dumped by her lover and losing her mother in an earthquake, things begin to look up when Abby makes an appearance on the program Antiques Roadshow with what turns out to be Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s chamber pot.

***Quite a Year for Plums* by Bailey White (1998) DB**

People want to help Roger, a divorced plant pathologist and peanut virologist, find true love and happiness again. One possibility is Della, a visiting artist who communicates through notes she leaves on discarded dumpster objects. Meanwhile, Roger’s ex-mother-in-law is trying to make contact with aliens.

***Standing in the Rainbow* by Fannie Flagg (2002) DB**

Flagg takes us to Elmwood Springs, Missouri, where we meet Bobby Smith, a 10-year-old living an idyllic postwar boyhood; his mother, Neighbor Dorothy, who broadcasts her Midwest housewife’s radio show; and later on, Tot Whooten, a very incompetent hairdresser; mortician Cecil Figgs; Hamm Sparks, the tractor salesman turned politician; and many, many others.

***Walking Across Egypt* by Clyde Edgerton (1988) DB**

Mattie Riggsbee tells everyone she is slowing down and can’t be responsible for the stray dog or the orphan that show up in her life. She’s busy with her church, planning her funeral, and wishing her two children would marry and give her grandchildren. The disapproval of family and neighbors provides tension but also laughter.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Kevin Rabas, Trish Reeves, Dennis Etzel Jr., Sheena Hernandez, Anne Hawkins, Annette Billings, Sara Tucker, Dan Eells, Dr. Michaeline Chance-Reay, Rosemary Kolich, Erin Pouppirt

Once Upon a Time in the West

American literature has had a continual love affair with the Western mythos: cowboys and gunfighters, pioneers and 49ers, saloon workers and drifters—individuals escaping hardship to apply their grit and tenacity to build a better life in the rugged frontier. How we define ourselves against a land of desperate need and depraved greed is the common theme in these novels. Some rise above the moment to be good people. Others make choices that leave them empty of options.

***News of the World* by Paulette Jiles (2016)**
DB, BR

It is 1870, and 71-year-old Captain Kidd is hired to return young Johanna Leonberger to her immigrant German family in Texas. But Johanna thinks of herself as Cicada, and her family as Turning Water and Three Spotted—her adoptive parents among the Kiowa Indians. During their journey they form the unlikeliest of friendships, eventually accepting that their fates are not as either expected.

***In the Distance* by Hernan Diaz (2017)**
DB, BR

It is a real-life nightmare: Two Swedish boys immigrate to America with mere survival in mind. Together. But in the crush of humans at the New York harbor, they are separated in the crowd. Hakan Soderstrom devotes his life to traveling this strange new land in the eternal hope of finding his brother. As time goes by, he grows into a man and eventually a legend among the people he has encountered.

***Butcher's Crossing* by John Williams (1960) DB**

Butcher's Crossing is a fictional outpost west of Ellsworth, Kansas, in the early days of statehood. Will Andrews has arrived determined to experience a bison hunt; he is inspired by his Harvard studies of Ralph Waldo Emerson to seek "an original relation to nature." When Andrews arrives in Kansas to discover that bison are dwindling, he follows a man who assures him that a large herd—and therefore a fortune—can be found in the Rocky Mountains. What follows is a harrowing winter, only for them to return to a changed world and questions about the meaning of it all.



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Anne Hawkins, Deborah Peterson,
Erin Poupirt, Gene Chavez, Joanne
Janssen, Randee Baty, Rosemary Kolich,
Matt Copeland, Dan Eells,
Jane Holwerda,
Dr. Michaeline Chance-Reay

Stories for Storytelling

For centuries, storytelling has been in our nature and the books in this series celebrate the art of storytelling and the fundamental role stories play in our lives.

***Cloud Cuckoo Land* by Anthony Doerr (2021) DB, DBSP**

Five strangers living in different centuries and lands are bound together by a single manuscript—the story of Aethon. From 15th-century Constantinople to a library in Idaho and then to an interstellar ship, the characters are connected through their love of storytelling.

***Haroun and the Sea of Stories* by Salman Rushdie (1990) DB, BR**

“What’s the point of stories that aren’t even true?” Haroun, the son of a master storyteller, can’t get the question out of his head. When his father loses the gift of storytelling, Haroun sets off on an adventure through fantastical worlds to reclaim his father’s gift of gab and vanquish the powerful enemy—the Prince of Silence.

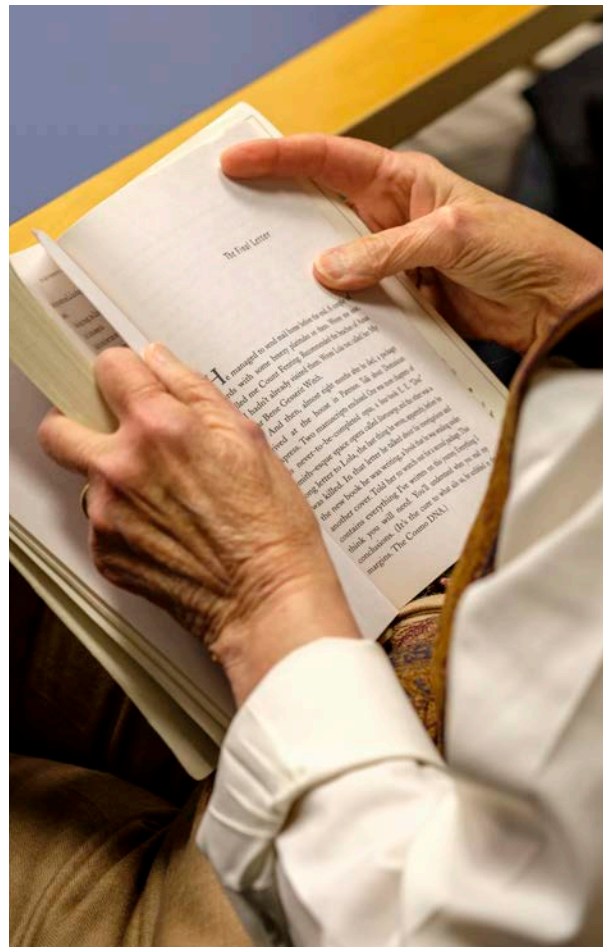
***The Dictionary of Lost Words* by Pip Williams (2020) DB**

Esme’s father and a team of lexicographers are assembling the first Oxford Dictionary. As a child, she begins to collect stray strips of papers with words written on them that have been discarded or neglected by the dictionary men. She hides the word slips in a box and labels them “The Dictionary of Lost Words.”



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Joanne Janssen, John Edgar Tidwell,
Kevin Rabas, Kim Stanley, Lisa Moritz,
Lori Brack, Miranda Ericsson, Nic Shump,
Tim Bascom, Trish Reeves,
Thomas Prasch, Dan Eells



That's Funny: Books That Make Us Laugh

We are often told that “laughter is the best medicine.” Books that make us laugh are often just plain fun to read, and the very best funny books are also much more. In the hands of skilled writers, humor helps us look (warts and all) at what it is to be human and what makes society tick—two topics at the heart of the humanities.

***The Egg and I* by Betty MacDonald (1945)
DB, BR**

Betty MacDonald writes about her years as a young bride in the late 1920s, which she spent with her less-than-realistic new husband on a very primitive chicken farm in rural Washington state.

***I'm a Stranger Here Myself* by Bill Bryson (1999) DB, BR**

In this collection of essays written for a London magazine, Bryson wonders what modern America looks like to an American newly returned after 20 years in England. Though often bemused by surface absurdities, Bryson is fundamentally both loving and appreciative of the core of American life.

***In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash* by Jean Shepherd (1966) DB**

Shepherd's wildly witty reunion with his Indiana hometown recalls the days when happiness was a Red Ryder BB gun and station wagons roamed the earth.

***Mama Makes Up Her Mind and Other Dangers of Southern Living* by Bailey White (1993) DB**

White pulls readers into her eccentric family that includes Aunt Belle, whose alligator bellows on command; Uncle Jimbuddy; and the elderly, endearing Mama, who turns roadkill into gourmet meals.

***The Mammy* by Brendan O'Carroll (1994) DB**

This funny, tender, and moving portrait of working-class Dublin life in the 1960s centers on Agnes Browne, widowed mother of seven and indomitable neighborhood character.



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Anne Hawkins, Dennis Etzel Jr.,
Rosemary Kolich, Sheena Hernandez,
Carmalotta Williams,
Dr. Michaeline Chance-Reay



Turning Points: Stories of Women Choosing Their Own Paths

Life is formed of countless choices, from tiny details to turning points. Every day we make choices that could change the course of our lives and ripple out to impact the lives of other people. In this series, readers will explore themes such as belonging, self-worth, and stereotypes through the stories of women who faced a turning point and chose to take their own path forward.

***Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus (2022) DB**

Elizabeth Zott is a chemist, a brilliant mind and hard worker who is not taken seriously in the 1960s male-dominated sciences. In a moment of desperation, she accepts a job as the host of a cooking show. Her producer imagines Elizabeth wearing a cute apron and cooking in a kitchen full of kitschy décor and gadgets, but Elizabeth has other ideas.

***The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett (2020) DB, BR, DBSP**

What happens when a woman cuts ties with her old life and chooses a different identity? This book is a compassionate exploration of public and private identity, and the ways that the choices of one person impact the lives of generations to come. When Stella takes a job usually reserved for white girls, letting her employer assume that she is white based on her light-skinned appearance, she finds that her life feels easier and better, so she starts a new life completely cut off from her past. Years later, the family will have to reckon with long-buried secrets and the truth of who they are.

***The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig (2020) DB, BR**

Burdened with regrets, Nora decides to end her life but instead finds herself in a space between life and death—The Midnight Library. In this library, the shelves are infinite and filled with books. Each book contains a version of Nora, a life story that could have existed if she had made different choices. Before her time runs out, Nora must decide for herself what is important, and why life is worth living.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

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Linda Lewis, Lisa Moritz,
Miranda Ericsson, Rachel Goossen,
Rosemary Kolich, Sheena Hernandez,
Trish Reeves, Marilyn Klaus,
Carmalotta Williams, Jane Holwerda

Voices from Appalachia

Although Appalachian literature often explores themes unique to the Appalachian region, including economic and ecological plight, the voices and souls of these characters struggling to survive and make life worth living are deeply human and recognizable to all of us. The books in this series provide a cast of remarkable and memorable characters with human strength that endures and spirit that soars.

***All the Forgivenesses* by Elizabeth Hardinger (2019)**

At 15 years old, Albertina “Bertie” Winslow who must take on the responsibility of raising her four younger siblings when her mother dies, and her father proves unreliable. She marries young and eventually moves some of the family from rural Kentucky to the oil fields of Kansas, but grief and guilt from a childhood tragedy haunts and consumes her on her journey to creating a home and a place.

***The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* by Kim Michele Richardson (2019) DB, BR**

Set in 1936 Kentucky, this story is inspired by both the “blue-skinned” people of Kentucky and the female librarians of Roosevelt’s Kentucky Pack Horse Library Project. Cussy Mary Carter, the protagonist, both blue-skinned and a book woman, must confront various forms of prejudice, doubt, and danger as she travels treacherous terrain—on a mule as stubborn and determined as she—to deliver books to isolated children and families in the hills and hollers of the Appalachian region.

***If the Creek Don’t Rise* by Leah Weiss (2017) DB**

Set in the 1970s in fictional Baines Creek, North Carolina, this character-driven novel is told from the point of view of 10 different narrators and portrays both powerfully and beautifully an array of folks filled with pluck and determination, knowledge and know-how, and real sorrow. This fascinatingly structured and brilliantly written novel shows that life can be hard on folks who give in or give up, but for those who stay and endure, Baines Creek proves to be enough.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Rosemary Kolich, Deborah Peterson,
Trish Reeves, Annette Billings,
Jane Holwerda, Rachel Goossen,
Erin Pouppirt, Miranda Ericsson

The westward movement of settlers during the 19th century played an important role in shaping our country's character. Popular ideas of the West still play a role in how the rest of the world perceives the United States, and in how we perceive ourselves. This series examines, through fact and fiction, the settling of the American West and its enduring influence on our patterns of thought.

***The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck (1939) DB, BR, DBSP**

Forced from their Oklahoma farm by the Dust Bowl, the Joad family sets out for the promised land of California. As they travel across the country, joined by other migrants, they confront an America deeply divided between rich and poor.

***A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* by Isabella L. Bird (1879) DB**

In 1873, Isabella Bird made an unlikely journey alone on horseback through the Rockies of Colorado, climbing Longs Peak, staying in mountain cabins, and observing the tumultuous world of the mining camps.

***The Last Cattle Drive* by Robert Day (1977) DB, BR**

Spangler Star Tukle, a cantankerous rancher, and his no-nonsense wife, Opal, defy the truckers and drive their cattle to market the old-fashioned way in a hilarious journey from Hays, Kansas to the eastern stockyards.

***Letters of a Woman Homesteader* by Elinore Pruitt Stewart (1914) DB**

Stewart took up homesteading in 1909 to prove that a woman could ranch. Her captivating letters reveal the isolation, the beauty, and the joy of working the prairie.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Erin Pouppirt, Linda Lewis, Randee Baty,
Matt Copeland,
Dr. Michaeline Chance-Reay

Wit and Grit: Women Characters in Contemporary Fiction

In this series, women of contemporary literature display the wit to think their way through obstacles, sometimes with humor and always with the grit to persist. They are women who think, act, and engage life on their own terms in search of their freedom and their dreams.

***A Piece of the World* by
Christina Baker Kline (2017) DB, BR, LP,
DBSP**

The protagonist of this historical novel, Christina Olson, is none other than the mysterious young woman of Andrew Wyeth's painting *Christina's World*. Written as her memoir, Christina reveals her frailties, her strengths, her flaws, and the importance of her friendship with Wyeth, who saw her as a kindred spirit, model, and muse.

***The Farming of Bones* by Edwidge Danticat
(1998) DB, LP**

The same day eight-year-old Amabelle Désir watches her parents drown in the swollen Massacre River that separates Haiti from the Dominican Republic, she is taken into the home of a prominent Dominican couple to become their servant and playmate for their daughter. How Amabelle survives her losses, her servitude, and the senseless terror brought down upon her and her fellow immigrants is a lesson in courage.

***The Underground Railroad* by
Colson Whitehead (2016) DB, BR, LP, DBSP**

It's hard to imagine a more daunting struggle for life and sanity than what young Cora faces as a third-generation slave on a Georgia plantation. Nevertheless, she possesses the intelligence and tenacity of her grandmother and mother and flees the unrelenting brutality and cruelty of the plantation to thread her way through swamp, sickness, and harrowing journey on the underground railroad in search of freedom.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Annette Billings, John Edgar Tidwell,
Linda Lewis, Lori Brack

Women Around the World

This series puts us on intimate terms with some realities unfamiliar to Americans: revolution, polygamy, the crimes of dictatorship. At the same time, readers will identify with universal themes that shape the lives of women everywhere, such as love, growing up, the joys and disappointments of marriage, and the struggle for respect and identity.

***The Country Girls Trilogy* by Edna O'Brien (Ireland) (1986) DB**

Kate and Baba are ambitious Irish country girls in search of life: Romantic Kate seeks love while pragmatic Baba will take whatever she can get. Together they set out to conquer Dublin and the world.

***The House of the Spirits* by Isabel Allende (Chile) (1982) DB, DBSP**

This is the epic tale of the proud Trueba family: stubborn patriarch Esteban, sweet but rebellious daughter Blanca, and Alba, the granddaughter who is part of both the old aristocratic order and the turbulent new Chile.

***Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel (Mexico) (1989) DB, BR, DBSP**

Obedient daughter Tita rebels when tradition and a tyrannical mother conspire to keep her from true love in this enchanting story of romance, recipes, and magic.

***None to Accompany Me* by Nadine Gordimer (South Africa) (1984) DB**

The evolving relationships of two couples, one Black, one white, illustrate the hazards and hopes of life in post-apartheid South Africa, especially for Vera Stark, a mature, self-possessed woman on the brink of change.

***So Long a Letter* by Mariama Bâ (Senegal) (1979)**

In a lively letter to a childhood friend, the recently widowed Ramatoulaye reminisces about her husband's devastating decision to take a second wife and about how she rebuilt her life and her emotional serenity.



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Annette Billings, Deborah Peterson,
Joanne Janssen, Jane Holwerda

World War II Generation

World War II profoundly reshaped the world, in part because it was so total a war, engaging civilian populations so fully and covering so much of the globe. This series bypasses the more familiar territories of the war—the European theater of operations, the Holocaust, and the use of atomic weaponry on Japan—by selecting later books that address less-familiar aspects of this world-wide conflict.

***The Cloud Atlas* by Liam Callanan (2004) DB**

A priest, at the deathbed of an Alaskan shaman, recalls the events that brought them together, including stories of love, magic, spirituality, and the secret history of Japanese balloon warfare. A cloud atlas, the shaman says, “would not be a map of where things are now,” but “where they will be.” Callanan’s novel is a “cloud atlas” in reverse: telling us where we are by looking at where we have been.

***The Gardens of Kyoto* by Kate Walbert (2001) BR, DB**

Ellen inherits a book, *The Gardens of Kyoto*, when her cousin is killed. Vignettes describing the famed Zen gardens and a professor’s struggle to keep Kyoto off the list of American atomic bomb targets intersected by Ellen’s elusive unfolding of her family’s secrets.

***Once Upon a Town* by Bob Greene (2002) DB, BR**

This is a journalistic account of the citizenry of North Platt, Nebraska, who found a unique way to express their patriotism: by giving the troops a final home-cooked meal before they headed off to war. The meals led to much more—lasting friendships, love, and a solidarity among the citizens of the city.

***When the Elephants Dance* by Tess Uriza Holthe (2002) BR**

Taking its title from a traditional adage “When the elephants dance, the chickens must be careful,” this novel focuses on the Filipino people, caught in the Japanese and American crossfire, in the war’s waning days. A hiding family spends its time telling tales of magic, ghosts, and legends, affirming their Filipino identity. Outside, we see the war through the eyes of a teenage boy, his older sister, and a partisan fleeing the Japanese.



Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in your community:

Deborah Peterson, Erin Pouppirt,
Marilyn Klaus, Anne Hawkins,
Annette Billings, Sara Tucker, Dan Eells,
Jane Holwerda, Kevin Rabas,
Thomas Prasch, Miranda Ericsson,
Nic Shump

Kansas Prairie and Identity

Featuring award-winning books selected from the Kansas Notable Books program and the State Library of Kansas.

This program brings together three distinct yet deeply connected portraits of life on the Kansas prairie. In *Headlights on the Prairie*, Robert Rebein reflects on personal memory, balancing nostalgia with the clarity of adulthood. Through the surreal, character-linked stories of *Mad Prairie*, Kate McIntyre reveals a layered emotional landscape that blends hardship with quiet affection. Finally, *Prairie Bachelor* by Lynda Beck Fenwick grounds the experience in history, tracing one man's life through the broader currents of homesteading, populism, and suffrage. Together, these works offer a rich exploration of Kansas identity—past and present, real and remembered, challenging and deeply felt.

***Headlights on the Prairie* by Robert Rebein (2017)**

A collection of essays reflecting his upbringing in western Kansas. Through vivid memories, he explores themes of place, family, and identity, balancing affection for his past with a clear-eyed, often stoic understanding of the hardships and complexities of rural life.

***Mad Prairie* by Kate McIntyre (2021)**

A collection of intertwining stories united by characters and a surrealist perspective. The stories explore the complexities of life in Kansas, a place that often challenges affection but also holds a certain subtle charm.

***Prairie Bachelor* by Lynda Beck Fenwick (2020)**

This novel tells the story of Isaac Beckley Werner, a Kansas homesteader, whose life serves as a lens through which to explore key aspects of Kansas history, including homesteading, the Populist movement, women's suffrage, and agrarian life. Through Werner's personal experiences, the book delves into broader historical themes tied to the Kansas plains and the social and political changes of the time.

Use this directory to contact discussion leaders for your TALK programs.
You may schedule up to three scholars per book series.



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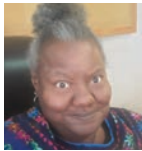
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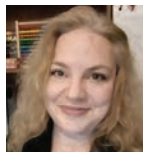
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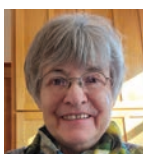
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