



**HUMANITIES
KANSAS**

A Movement of Ideas

MOVEMENT OF IDEAS

TALK CATALOG



October 2018

Welcome to
Talk About
Literature in
Kansas (TALK),
a program for
every Kansan
who loves
to read and
discuss good
books.

TALK is a HK program that explores topics important to Kansans through literature. The humanities help us understand what it means to be human — to seek connections with people and place. Talk About Literature in Kansas book discussions draw on our diverse literatures to help us see more clearly who we are as people and define ideas that will shape a future worthy of generations to come.

HOW TALK WORKS:

Each TALK series is built around an entertaining topic of interest to adult readers. The books in each series are selected for reader appeal, literary quality, and relevance to the series theme. The local sponsor – a library, senior center, historical society, community center, or other nonprofit group – selects the series to present to the community. Humanities Kansas provides financial assistance that includes multiple sets of books, discussion leaders, and special publicity materials to the sponsoring group.

THE TALK MODEL:

There are many different ways to plan TALK Book discussions in your community! Coordinators are encouraged to experiment and develop a TALK model that works with their community. Not sure how to begin? Let this example of a popular TALK model inspire you to create your own. A TALK reading discussion group meets at regular intervals – usually once per month. A series includes up to three scholar-facilitated discussions, depending on the local sponsor's preference.

Before each meeting, the discussion group participants check out and read the book to be discussed. Each meeting may begin with informal comments by a HK discussion leader, who may provide background information about the author and the book, and raise thought-provoking questions for discussion. The questions provide a point of departure for open discussion among the participants. Program time is 60 to 90 minutes – or longer when the discussion is particularly lively!

Please note: TALK programs are intended for adult, out-of-school audiences.

BOOKING A PROGRAM:

How to create a TALK book discussion in your community

- Review the catalog and select a TALK series and discussion leader.
- Reserve the TALK series form the Northwest Kansas Library System: contact illoan@nwks.org or call 785-877-5148.
- Contact discussion leader(s) and confirm time, date, and location.
- Apply online at humanitieskansas.org for HK program funds to bring the discussion leader(s) to your community.
- Publicize your event. Download a press release, discussion leader bios, and Humanities Kansas' logo poster
- Tell us how it went. After the event, download and fill out a TALK evaluation and cost-share form and email them to abigail@humanitieskansas.org.

A list of series and books is available in the TALK catalog. Some books are labeled **LP** (Large Print), **DB** (Digital Talking Book), and **BR** (Digital Braille). These titles are available to qualifying individuals via the State Library of Kansas, Talking Books Service in Digital Talking Book (DB) and/or Digital Braille (BR) format. Kansans with a visual or physical impairment that keeps them from reading traditional print materials should contact Kansas Talking Books at 1-800-362-0699 or KTB@ks.gov to learn more.

Book Discussion Leaders indicates scholars who will lead discussions for a particular book.

Series Discussion Leaders indicates scholars who will lead discussions for any book within that series.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The 1930s page 6

All the King's Men
The Day of the Locust
Mules and Men
The Worst Hard Time

African Experiences of Migration page 7

Open City: A Novel
Brooklyn Heights
The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears
A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier
What Is the What

After the Fact (NEW) page 8

The Things They Carried
Station Eleven
The Hate U Give

Award Winners page 9

Charming Billy
Cold Mountain
Gilead
Motherless Brooklyn

Before the Civil War page 10

The All-True Travels and Adventures of Lidie Newton
John Brown: The Legend Revisited
Uncle Tom's Cabin
Waterlily

Between Fences page 11

Farewell to Manzanar
Fences
The Tortilla Curtain
The Wire-Cutters

Childhood Classics page 12

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
Charlotte's Web
The Jungle Book
The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe
A Little Princess
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry
The Wind in the Willows

Civil Rights Revisited (NEW) pages 13-14

March
 Book 1
 Book 2
 Book 3
Between the World and Me
Citizen: An American Lyric
The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

The Civil War page 15

A Diary from Dixie
March
The March
The Red Badge of Courage

Coming of Age in Rural America page 16

Farmer Boy
Good Land
Nathan Coulter
Under the Feet of Jesus
Winter Wheat

Community: The Way We Live page 17

Bailey's Cafe
Mama Day
Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe
The Milagro Beanfield War
Snow Falling on Cedars

Contemporary Immigration page 18

Breath, Eyes, Memory
Caramelo
Harbor
Typical American

Dearly Beloved (NEW) page 19

Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End
Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?
Medicine Walk

Encountering Asia page 20

An Artist of the Floating World
The Chinese Gold Murders
Memoirs of a Geisha
Waiting

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONT.)

Entangled World page 21

Bel Canto
People of the Book
Anil's Ghost

The Exile's Place page 22

The Lazarus Project
The Namesake
Things I've Been Silent About
Brick Lane

Faiths in Fiction: World Faiths page 23

Distant View of a Minaret and Other Stories
Go Tell It on the Mountain
Harp of Burma
Nectar in a Sieve
The Romance Reader

Food for Thought page 24

Empire Falls
Epitaph for a Peach
Miriam's Kitchen
Secrets of the Tsil Café

Friends and Neighbors (NEW) page 25

A Man Called Ove
Five Skies
The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears

Ghost Stories (NEW) page 26

The Haunting of Hill House
The Woman in Black
The Graveyard Book

The Great Plains Spirit page 27

The Bones of Plenty
Great Plains
Little House on the Prairie
O Pioneers!
Touching the Fire: Buffalo Dancers, the Sky Bundle, and Other Tales

Growing Up page 28

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time
The Kite Runner
My Last Days as Roy Rogers
The Secret Life of Bees

Growing Up American page 29

Catcher in the Rye
Tender at the Bone: Growing Up at the Table
Sag Harbor

Hispanic Heritage: Mothers, Sisters, and Daughters page 30

Brand New Memory
Esperanza's Box of Saints
The House on Mango Street
In the Time of the Butterflies

It's a Hard Knock Life (NEW) page 31

Orphan Train
The Chaperone
The Light Between Oceans

Kansas at 150 page 32

It Happened in Kansas
Kansas Poems of William Stafford
Now Let Me Fly
Ordinary Genius

Literature with Kansas Connections page 33

The Center of Everything
Not Without Laughter
One Soldier's Story
The Slow Air of Ewan MacPherson

Living with the Land page 34

The Good Earth
Out of Africa
Prodigal Summer
Spartina

Middle Eastern Culture and Society page 35

The Israelis: Ordinary People in an Extraordinary Land
My Prison, My Home: One Woman's Story of Captivity in Iran
Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood
The Yacoubian Building

The Modern Family (NEW) page 36

The Burgess Boys
Family Man
LaRose

Native American Mysteries page 37

DreadfulWater Shows Up
Dance for the Dead
Dance Hall of the Dead
The Ghost Walker

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONT.)

On the Lighter Side page 38

How Elizabeth Barrett Browning Saved My Life
Quite a Year for Plums
Standing in the Rainbow
Walking Across Egypt

That's Funny: Books that Make Us Laugh page 39

The Egg and I
I'm a Stranger Here Myself
In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash
Mama Makes Up Her Mind and Other Dangers of Southern Living
The Mammy

Urban Indians page 40

Bone Game
The Grass Dancer
Tracks

Westering page 41

The Grapes of Wrath
A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains
The Last Cattle Drive
Letters of a Woman Homesteader

Wit and Grit: Women Characters in Contemporary Fiction (NEW) page 42

A Piece of the World
The Farming of Bones
The Underground Railroad

Women Around the World page 43

The Country Girls Trilogy
The House of the Spirits
Like Water for Chocolate
None to Accompany Me
So Long a Letter

World War II Generation page 44

The Cloud Atlas
The Gardens of Kyoto
Once Upon a Town
When the Elephants Dance



The 1930s

We have all seen the pictures: long breadlines; the Okie mother with her hungry children huddled around her; the dustbowl cloud descending on the Plains community. For American history, the 1930s was a pivotal, critical era. A range of fundamental challenges confronted the nation: the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, Prohibition, and radicalized politics undermined the security of democratic institutions. Overseas, the path toward war was growing increasingly clear. Yet as the decade progressed, America mapped a route out of the crisis.

All the King's Men by Robert Penn Warren (1946) **DB, BR**

Warren was a novelist, but he thought of his work as a sort of history as well. "And what we students of history always learn is that the human being is a very complicated contraption and that they are not good or bad but are good and bad and the good comes out of the bad and the bad out of the good, and the devil take the hindmost." The devil in question here is Huey Long, the notorious Louisiana governor who provided Warren a model for Willie Stark.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert

The Day of the Locust by Nathanael West (1939) **DB, BR**

"It is hard to laugh at the need for beauty and romance, no matter how tasteless, even horrible, the results of that need are. But it is easy to sigh," declares Tod, the narrator of this Hollywood satire. Tod is a painter, but his work is background and costumes; aspiration rather than achievement defines him. His painting, *The Burning of Los Angeles*, foreshadows the novel's violent climax.

Book Discussion Leaders: Randi Hacker, William Clyde Brown, Rosemary Kolich

Mules and Men by Zora Neale Hurston (1935) **DB, BR**

Hurston recalled in her introduction, "I was glad when somebody told me, 'You may go and collect Negro folklore.'" And the resulting book established the territory she would continue to explore in both fiction and nonfiction, the shaping of African-American identity in the contexts of both the experience of the South and the Great Migration to the cities of the North.

Book Discussion Leaders: John Edgar Tidwell, Sandra Wiechert, Rosemary Kolich, Sara Tucker

The Worst Hard Time by Timothy Egan (2006) **DB, BR**

Egan describes the first of the new storms that would come to define the Dust Bowl: "Wasn't a sandstorm... And it wasn't a hailstorm, though it certainly brought with it a dark, threatening sky.... It rolled, like a mobile hill of crud, and it was black." Egan provides a masterful overview of the dust storms and their consequences for agriculture and people on the Great Plains.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Margy Stewart, Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Susan Anne Carlson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Nicholas Shump, Linda Lewis, Randee Baty, Ann Birney, Sara Jane Richter, Shawn Alexander, Kevin Rabas

African Experiences of Migration

Immigrants from Africa have settled into Kansas's communities over the past several decades, seeking escape from social conflict, pursuing educational opportunities, or simply hoping for a better quality of life. Like immigrants who came before them, they suffer in their struggles to adjust to differences in language, culture, and some of the stereotypes they hold of Americans, as well as the stereotypes through which they are perceived. The books in this series provide intimate portraits of African immigrants' efforts to understand what it takes to fit into American culture, and how to preserve their own cultural values in the process. Perhaps most insightful, however, is the extent to which these stories illuminate what it means to be American in a place where nearly all of us have come from somewhere else.

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. Set in New York's Brooklyn Heights, this novel unfolds the relationship between mother and son struggling in a new culture.

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

In 1990 Sepha Stephanos fled the Ethiopian revolution. Now he finds himself running a grocery store in a poor African-American neighborhood in Washington, DC. Told in a haunting and powerful first-person narrative that casts the streets of DC and Addis Ababa through Sepha's eyes, this novel illuminates what it means to lose a family and country—and what it takes to create a new home.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Sara Tucker

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

Ishmael Beah's life in war-torn Sierra Leone did not prepare him for his move to the United States in 1998, where he finished his last two years of high school at the United Nations International School in New York. He went on to earn a degree in Political Science from Oberlin College and become a member of the Human Rights Watch Children's Division Advisory Committee. His personal experiences now inform his work in addressing children's conditions in countries ravaged by war throughout the world.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez

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 government bombers, wild animals, and environmental dangers to reach freedom. Many of these boys, like Valentino, were settled in the United States, where new challenges tried their resilience.

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Carmaletta Williams, Tom Prasch, Rosemary Kolich, Shawn Alexander, Kevin Rabas

After the Fact (NEW in 2018)

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 events while marriage, job loss, and major illness serve as more intimate examples. This series is about the changes that happen during and after major traumas. The books in this series take on the topics of war, illness, and murder. Each author depicts the transformations shaped by the main characters due to a variety of stressors. How does each character handle change?

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

Written nearly 30 years ago about his experiences in the Vietnam War, O'Brien's book still resonates with readers young and old. In fact, some critics refer to this prize-winning work that defies genres as the best book ever written about war. As O'Brien has stated, "stories are for joining the past and the present," and that is exactly what this book does. The work served as a catharsis for the author and his memories of Vietnam. He begins the work with the literal weight of the objects in the soldiers' packs—steel helmets five pounds, letters four ounces, .45 caliber pistol 2.9 pounds, etc. Interviewed for the book's 20th anniversary in 2010, O'Brien remembered, "I carry the memories of the ghosts of a place called Vietnam, the people of Vietnam, my fellow soldiers. . . I carry the weight of responsibility and a sense of abiding guilt." Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Rosemary Kolich

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

This fascinating work depicts the lives of characters after a flu pandemic that decimates 99% of the world's population. Set 20 years after the fact where small groups of people live in abandoned gas stations (the fossil fuel economy no longer exists) and abandoned fast food restaurants such as Wendy's. Readers meet Kirsten, an actress with the traveling symphony that tours the upper peninsula of Michigan performing Shakespeare (because audiences prefer it to more modern plays). The novel examines a post-apocalyptic world consisting of "ferals," starvation, and loneliness through themes of nostalgia, memory, and art. Mandel weaves together this cast of characters with an air of mystery and suspense that propels the reader forward wanting to learn more.

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

This young adult novel revolves around the aftermath of the murder of a young Black teenager by a police officer during a traffic stop. The story is told through the eyes of Starr, the sole witness to the murder. Prior to the shooting Starr lived in two worlds kept strictly separate—one of her majority white private school and the second of her majority Black neighborhood. The book explores how unstable the boundary between these two worlds is. As the *Los Angeles Review of Books* notes, this is a "powerful novel that strikes to the heart of contemporary race relations in the United States." Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Susan Anne Carlson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Dennis Etzel, Anne Hawkins, Nicolas Shump, Randee Baty, Miranda Ericsson, Kim Stanley, Lori Brack, Al Ortolani, Dana Waters, Annette Billings, Kevin Rabas, Dan Eells

Award Winners

Just as the film industry has the Oscars and the Golden Globes to honor artistic achievement, the literary world has the Pulitzer Prizes, the National Book Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award to highlight the year's best works of fiction. Likewise, just as the movie awards favor smaller, more finely crafted films over blockbusters, book awards tend to shine a spotlight on well-wrought literary works rather than formulaic best sellers. By upholding a standard of literary excellence, awards can help ensure that the most significant books will find an audience, both in the moment and for years to come.

Charming Billy by Alice McDermott (1997) **DB**

Billy Lynch's loved ones gathered at a Bronx bar to eulogize a great romantic. Their voices form Billy's tragic story, becoming a gentle homage to the lives in their community fractured by grief, shattered by secrets, and sustained by the dream of love.

-- National Book Award Winner (1998)

Cold Mountain by Charles Frazier (1997) **DB**

This novel tells an interwoven epic love story between Inman, a Confederate soldier, and the woman he loves, Ada. Frazier writes a gripping story of human connection during a defining ideological crossroads of American history.

-- National Book Award Winner (1997)

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Sandra Wiechert

Gilead by Marilynne Robinson **DB, BR**

Gilead is written as a letter from the aging John Ames to his young son. It chronicles the lives of three generations of Ames men who took different approaches to the same moral questions.

-- Winner of the Pulitzer Prize (2005)

-- Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award (2004)

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Sandra Wiechert, William Clyde Brown

Motherless Brooklyn by Jonathan Lethem (1999) **DB**

Lionel Essrog narrates this literary detective novel, centering on the death of mobster Frank Minna. Lionel must comb the cityscape for answers, while negotiating the uncontrollable verbal acrobatics of his Tourette's Syndrome in this amusing novel.

-- Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award (1999)

Book Discussion Leaders: Randi Hacker, Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Susan Anne Carlson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Linda Lewis, Miranda Ericsson, Kevin Rabas

Before the Civil War

Kansas was opened as a territory in 1854, allowing for the first time legal settlement by non-Native Americans within its borders. Between 1854 and 1861, people with opposing views from across the United State clashed within the territory, fighting about the fate of the state. The decision was monumental. Would Kansas allow slavery within its borders? Or, would it join the United States as a free state? Two competing visions of America's future were to be determined on the Kansas frontier. However, the Kansas Territory was already home to many Native Americans. How would settlement impact the existing Native American way-of-life?

The All-True Travels and Adventures of Lidie Newton by Jane Smiley (1998) **DB**

Set mostly in the Kansas Territory shortly before the Civil War, narrator Lydia "Lidie" Harkness recounts her adventures while disguised as a boy, reporting for a proslavery newspaper, and helping a woman escape a plantation.

John Brown: The Legend Revisited by Merrill D. Peterson (2002)

Peterson gives us Brown in his day, yet shows how the abolitionist's image, celebrated in art, literature, and journalism, has shed the infamy conferred by "Bleeding Kansas," becoming a symbol of American idealism to activists along the political spectrum.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Gene Chávez, Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich

Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1852) **DB, BR**

A novel of Antebellum South, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was revolutionary for its passionate indictment of slavery, its presentation of Tom, the first black hero in American fiction, and its heartrending description of the tragic breakup of Black families.

Book Discussion Leaders: John Edgar Tidwell, William Clyde Brown

Waterlily by Ella Cara Deloria (1988) **DB**

Written in the 1940s by Deloria, Sioux Indian and ethnologist, and now published for the first time, this novel presents an authoritative account of Sioux beliefs, social conventions, and ceremonies through the life of a young girl named Waterlily.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Gene Gene Chávez, Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Erin Pouppirt, Nicolas Shump, Linda Lewis, Randee Baty, Michaeline Chance-Reay, Al Ortolani, Denise Low, Shawn Alexander, Kevin Rabas

Between Fences

“Good fences make good neighbors,” Robert Frost famously declared in his poem “Mending Wall,” but not all fences do. In the same poem, Frost notes nature’s own resistance to man-made boundaries: “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.” 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. There must be some kind of enclosure for there to be a need for “pearly gates.”

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 re-entry into American life and her return to Manzanar in 1972.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, William Clyde Brown, Sara Tucker

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

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

Book Discussion Leaders: John Edgar Tidwell, Gene Chávez, William Clyde Brown

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

Boyle juxtaposes two Los Angeles couple’s lives: one of privilege; the other of illegal immigration. Boyle’s plot brings the two families into tragic collision, exposing issues of class divides, problems of illegal Mexican immigration, and environmental degradation. As the United States builds hundreds of miles of fence along the Mexican border, his novel has never been timelier.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Gene Chávez

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

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Dan Eells, Sabdra Wiechert

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Erin Poupirt, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Kim Stanley, Michaeline Chance-Reay, Nancy Hope, Shawn Alexander, Martha Sanchez, Kevin Rabas

Childhood Classics

Remember curling up in a chair with *Charlotte's Web*, or climbing onto the lap of a favorite aunt to hear *The Jungle Book*? Such books entertained and educated us as children, teaching us about human nature, friendship, and adventure. Today, the childhood classics have just as much, if not more, to say to us as adults. The books in this series speak of courage and faith, of insurmountable obstacles, character, and the power of love. They reveal our society's most cherished visions of family life, and celebrate the power of the imagination to pass values and traditions on to the next generation.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by Roald Dahl (1964) **DB, BR**

The gates of Mr. Willy Wonka's famous chocolate factory are opening at last, and only five children will be allowed inside: the good-hearted Charlie and a pack of spoiled, destructive brats.

Charlotte's Web by E. B. White (1952) **DB, BR**

The gentle story of Wilbur the pig and his loyal spider friend, Charlotte, unfolds amidst the nostalgia of the barnyard, the changing seasons, and the pains and rewards of growing up. Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Rosemary Kolich

The Jungle Book by Rudyard Kipling (1894) **DB, BR**

Orphan Mowgli, raised by wolves, learns the lore and law of the jungle from wise Bagheera the panther and Baloo the bear in this magical tale set in colonial India. Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Rosemary Kolich

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by C. S. Lewis (1950) **DB, BR**

Four brothers and sisters discover a magical land inside the wardrobe – and must find the faith, imagination, and courage to help Aslan the Lion free Narnia from the White Witch. Book Discussion Leaders: William Clyde Brown, Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich

A Little Princess by Frances Hodgson Burnett (1905) **DB, BR**

Ten-year-old Sara Crewe had everything – fancy clothes, dolls, her own maid – until tragic misfortune leaves her penniless but still rich in friendship and imagination. Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred Taylor (1976) **DB, BR**

Raised in Depression-era Mississippi, Cassie Logan learns strength and independence from her Black farm family – but now she must confront the harsh realities of racial hatred and the threat of the night riders. Book Discussion Leaders: John Edgar Tidwell

The Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame (1908) **DB, BR**

The mischievous Toad, Mole, Rat, and wise Badger enjoy wild adventures and much laughter in their quest to find the secret of the wind. Their fantasy world blends childhood innocence with gentle social satire for adults. Book Discussion Leaders: William Clyde Brown, Sara Tucker

Series Discussion Leaders: Ann Birney, Rachel Goossen, Sara Jane Richter, Deborah Peterson, Susan Anne Carlson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Nicolas Shump, Randee Baty, Miranda Ericsson, Dan Eells, Randi Hacker, Kevin Rabas

Civil Rights Revisited (NEW in 2018)

When poet Langston Hughes attended middle school in Lawrence, Kansas, in the 1910s his teacher placed all the Black students in a single row of desks in the classroom, effectively segregating the African-American students from their white classmates. Hughes, who grew up in a progressive household, protested this treatment by placing signs on the desks of his fellow African-American classmates that read “Jim Crow row.” When his teacher grew angry and removed the signs, Hughes ran through the halls of the school and into the courtyard shouting, “Jim Crow row! Jim Crow row!” The literal and figurative disruption he caused led to a meeting between African-American parents, community leaders, and school officials, which ended the segregation of students in the classroom.

The story of Hughes’s act of resistance towards racism and injustice highlights two points. First, the actions of one person can make a difference. Hughes’s act of disruption affected change. Second, the story represents one episode in the fight for equality and dignity for African-Americans in Kansas.

The books in this series offer a look at Civil Rights from the launch pad of the 21st century. John Lewis’s graphic novel memoir reveals the power of pictures and words in his intimate retelling of pivotal events of the Civil Rights Movement and how these actions can be directly linked to the election of this country’s first African-American president. Coates, Rankine, and Alexander forefront the injustices that still exist through systemic racism, microaggressions, or outright hostility. Themes of the body, citizenship, and dreams—and dreams deferred, to invoke Hughes—thread all of these volumes together.

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

Civil Rights icon and United States Congressman John Lewis wrote this series of three graphic novels based on his experiences in the Civil Rights Movement during the early 1960s. A 1958 comic about Martin Luther King, Jr. inspired him as a young man growing up in rural Alabama, and he sought to instill that same sense of pride in a new generation of youth. The illustrations and first-hand account bring this period to life.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Sara Tucker

Book 1

This volume begins the day of the inauguration of Barack Obama and 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. Lewis explains how he and other young activists became frustrated with the conservatism of the folks in the Civil Rights Movement from an earlier generation and that this led to the formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). SNCC’s policy, while still following the philosophy of nonviolence, leaned towards direct confrontation.

Book 2

Book 2 follows Lewis’s rise within SNCC and the growing influence of the organization on the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. We witness the struggles of the 1961 Freedom Riders, the voter registration campaign in Mississippi, and the 1963 March on Washington. 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. The longest of the three volumes, it covers the death of the three girls in the Birmingham church bombing and Freedom Summer in Mississippi.

(continued on pg 14)

Civil Rights Revisited (NEW in 2018)

(continued)

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

Author Ta-Nehisi Coates won the National Book Award for this searingly honest reflection on contemporary race relations in the United States. Written as a letter to his teenage son, this slim volume provokes a myriad of emotions. Part autobiography, part history lesson, Coates forces the reader to grapple with the meaning of being American.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, John Edgar Tidwell

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

This poetic work crosses boundaries in its sojourn into American race relations in the twenty-first century. Rankine turns a critical eye to everything from tennis superstar Serena Williams to everyday microaggressions on the subway. As one of the blurbs on the back of her book reads, “[Citizen] lovingly embraces and articulates the trauma and contradictions of what happens when one person is spat upon and another person spits.”

Book Discussion Leaders: John Edgar Tidwell

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

Author Michelle Alexander meticulously examines the role of race in the American judicial system. In a powerful tour de force, she steps back, looks at the big picture, and concludes that the prison industrial complex picks up where slavery and Jim Crow segregation left off. She demonstrates how today’s conditions perpetuate a system that discriminates against people of color through the War on Drugs. “No other country in the world imprisons so many of its racial or ethnic minorities,” Alexander writes. In fact, “the United States imprisons a larger percentage of its black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid.” Beyond this lurks the fact that once a person is branded a felon, it is legal to discriminate against him or her in employment, housing, and education. He or she is excluded from voting, jury service, and often denied public benefits. All of this adds up to effectively creating a caste system as a result of mass incarceration.

Book Discussion Leaders: John Edgar Tidwell, William Clyde Brown

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Carmaletta Williams, Dennis Etzel, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Miranda Ericsson, Ann Birney, Gene Chávez, Shawn Alexander, Annette Billings, Margy Stewart, Kevin Rabas

The Civil War

After commemorating the Civil War's sesquicentennial from 2011-2015, the reasons to continue exploring its impact are clear: because no political dispute came closer to destroying the United States, and defining issues of race and inclusion began to be settled then, but the work is not over. The war left deep scars, and its legacy remains unresolved. Contemporary disputes—over the display of Confederate flags and monuments, over Southern politicians returning to the discourse of “state’s rights” that had informed secession, over the continued struggle of African-Americans to claim a full share of political rights and economic power in America, even over what to call this war that divided America—all reflect the continuing legacy 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, the slow destruction of her way of life.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Sandra Wiechert, Sara Tucker

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 re-imagines the absent March as an abolitionist with utopian inclinations, testing his ideological commitments in the theatre of war.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert

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

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Sara Tucker

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

For Henry Fleming, the protagonist of Crane's classic Civil War novel, the fundamental contrast between his anticipation of war and his experience of battle frames the hero's 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.

Book Discussion Leaders: John Edgar Tidwell, Gene Chávez, William Clyde Brown

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Erin Pouppirt, Tom Prasch, Michaeline Chance-Reay, Sara Jane Richter, Al Ortolani, Margy Stewart, Kevin Rabas

Coming of Age in Rural America

America came of age on the family farm. The stories of growing up that comprise this series are interwoven with the story of American agriculture as it evolved from the self-sufficient homesteads of the 19th century to the large mechanized farms of today. But while farming and its place in American society may be changing, the young heroes and heroines in these books discover that their identity remains inseparably tied to family, land, and neighbors. They learn early about hard work, uncertainty, and loss; they relish the ability to tame a colt, drive a tractor, and enjoy the freedom of the outdoors. These books will introduce readers to a varied portrait of youth in rural America: at times nostalgic, at times painful, but full of wisdom and grace.

Farmer Boy by Laura Ingalls Wilder (1933) **DB, BR**

While Laura Ingalls grew up in the little house on the prairie, Almanzo Wilder was living on a big farm in New York state. With chores from dawn to dinner, but plenty of time for fun, Almanzo's childhood is a celebration of the self-sufficient family farm.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Dan Eells, Sara Tucker

Good Land by Bruce Bair (1997)

Bruce Bair was nine-years-old when his father put him to work on the family farm near Goodland, Kansas. This unsentimental chronicle of forty years in the life of one family on a mechanized farm is also the story of the evolution of American agriculture.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

Nathan Coulter by Wendell Berry (1960) **DB**

Nathan Coulter's youth is shaped by the tiny farming community of Port William, Kentucky, where generations of his family are rooted to the land. Grandparents, uncles, neighbors, and the beauty and cruelty of nature itself all teach him how to live.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, William Clyde Brown

Under the Feet of Jesus by Helena Maria Viramontes (1995) **BR**

At the center of this powerful tale of migrant farm life is Estrella, a girl about to cross the perilous border to womanhood. Deeply aware of her family's poverty and marginalization, she learns to fight back and to help the young Mexican farm worker she loves.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Rosemary Kolich

Winter Wheat by Mildred Walker (1944)

Eighteen-year-old Ellen Webb goes off to college and falls in love. When she comes home for the summer to her beloved Montana wheat farm, she sees everything, including her parents, with new and critical eyes.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Margy Stewart, Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Nicolas Shump, Steven Foulke, Miranda Ericsson, Ann Birney, Rachel Goossen, Kevin Rabas

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 as growing incivility, ethnic diversity, and fear of crime seem to weaken the ties that bind our towns and neighborhoods. This series explores some of the many ways we live together, from rural New Mexico and Alabama to our aging cities. Neighbors who've known each other all their lives and lonely folks slipping through the cracks of society all have something to teach us about how to depend on one another – about our need for support, for tolerance, for forgiveness.

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 like alcoholic Sadie; sweet Esther, who accepts only roses for her "services;" and Mariam, the Ethiopian child who may be the bearer of a miracle.

Book Discussion Leaders: Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Rosemary Kolich

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

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

Book Discussion Leaders: Caryn Mirriam-Goldbert, Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Randi Hacker, Caryn Mirriam-Goldbert, Rosemary Kolich, Sara Tucker

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Carmaletta Williams, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Erin Pouppirt, Nicolas Shump, Dan Eells, Ann Birney, Rachel Goossen, Shawn Alexander, Kevin Rabas

Contemporary Immigration

America is a nation of immigrants. But that simple truth disguises a complex interaction of push-pull forces that has brought a shifting range of immigrants to American shores over time. Societal and natural disasters always produce new waves of immigrants looking for refuge. If the principal attractions of America, economic opportunity and promises of freedom, have remained generally constant, the specifics have certainly changed, reflecting the economies and social structures of the nation. Each new wave of immigration brings new traditions, new foodways, new styles, new artistic traditions, and new histories into the complex mosaic of American life.

Breath, Eyes, Memory by Edwidge Danticat (1994) **DB, BR**

Sophie makes the difficult transition from rural Haiti to an impoverished New York. Sexual trauma is a central motif for the book, through Sophie's past, as she comes of age, and through the difficult path toward familial reconciliation. "I come from a place where breath, eyes, and memory are one," Sophie declares, as she comes to terms with that dark heritage. Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez

Caramelo by Sandra Cisneros (2002) **DB**

Beginning with family trips from Chicago to Mexico in the 1960s, circling back to stories from the Mexican Civil War, Cisneros weaves a dense tapestry of family, identity, and immigration in a fancifully postmodern style incorporating footnotes and characters who argue with the narrator. It's rich, sweet storytelling. Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez

Harbor by Lorraine Adams (2004) **DB**

Aziz, the Algerian protagonist of Adams's novel, arrives in America without money or even English. In the context of a post-9/11 world, different forms of illegality shade into each other as Aziz finds himself caught in the web of an anti-terrorism investigation.

Typical American by Gish Jen (1992) **DB**

Chinese immigrants Yifeng, Theresa, and Helen find themselves trapped in America by the triumph of the Communist Revolution back home. Jen follows the intertwined course of the three Chinese-Americans despite themselves with a light touch, employing a narrative voice strong on both empathy and humor.

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Miranda Ericsson, Kim Stanley, Ann Birney, Rosemary Kolich, Martha Sanchez, Kevin Rabas

Dearly Beloved (NEW in 2018)

Society admonishes us to live 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. In *Being Mortal* Dr. Atul Gawande looks at aging from a medical point of view and explores how the profession has dealt with death incorrectly. Roz Chast adds whimsy and humor in her illustrated memoir based on her experiences dealing with the decline of her parents. Finally, author Richard Wagamese offers a fictional story of a father trying to make amends before he dies.

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. Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker

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

"So far it's all been stories," remarks Franklin Starlight. "It's all we are in the end, our stories," replies his companion. Wagamese, widely considered one of Canada's best novelists, writes about redemption, reconciliation, and the healing process in this rich novel filled with lush landscape. 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.

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Dennis Etzel, Rosemary Kolich, Erin Pouppirt, Nicolas Shump, Miranda Ericsson, Dan Eells, Randi Hacker, Rachel Goossen, Denise Low, Tom Weso, Margy Stewart, Kevin Rabas

Encountering Asia

“Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,” wrote Rudyard Kipling over 130 years ago. Times have changed. Although bridges of understanding between East and West have been built, tradition and experience can produce meaningful differences between peoples and cultures. Two thousand years of Confucian beliefs saturated the political and ethical foundations of China in ways that are still apparent today. Japanese gender roles continue to differ significantly from those in the West. Events such as the Japanese nation’s defeat in World War II are part of a very real, modern Japanese experience, as are the decline of rural life and the trauma of the Cultural Revolution in Communist China. These books provide ways to learn more about Asian tradition and experience. Each, in one way or another, bridges the worlds of Asia and the West.

An Artist of the Floating World by Kazuo Ishiguro (1986)

This novel brings the world of mid-20th century Japan to life. The story follows an artist, Masuji Ono, through his early years in the pre-war teahouse culture, his growing support of wartime militarism, and finally his postwar confrontations with that legacy and its consequences for his family.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich

The Chinese Gold Murders by Robert Van Gulik (1959)

Through his main character, Judge Dee, Van Gulik introduces readers to an idealized, yet accurate world of traditional Confucian Chinese government. His style is that of Golden Age mysteries, with upright heroes and jigsaw puzzle plots, but also memorable characters, fascinating details, and important subject matter.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Sandra Wiecher, Rosemary Kolich

Memoirs of a Geisha by Arthur Golden (1997) **DB, BR**

Golden brings alive the often-misunderstood world of what was perhaps the only important career opportunity for traditional Japanese women: mastering the very formal and demanding art of entertaining men.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert

Waiting by Ha Jin (1999) **DB**

Jin provides a moving, but disturbing view of Cultural Revolution-era China and human frailties. Lin Kong, a doctor whose duties separate him from his arranged-marriage wife, falls in love with Manna. Lin’s wife won’t agree to divorce. Thus, he is “waiting” the 18 years before he can divorce without her consent.

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Linda Lewis, Randi Hacker, Nancy Hope, Al Ortolani, Kevin Rabas

Entangled World

Globalization, typically considered in economic terms, has sparked cultural collisions and ignited new multicultural identities. Although these cultural exchanges are as old as human history, patterns of globalization have accelerated dramatically over the past century. Whereas new forms of trade and exchange of ideas have elevated living standards, wars and ethnic clashes have dislocated peoples and remapped the world. 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 who falls in love with a Latin American terrorist are taken hostage by revolutionary terrorists in an unnamed Latin American embassy. Low comedy and high suspense, romance and tragedy blend in Patchett's Orange Prize-winning novel, inspired by the actual seizure of the Japanese ambassador's residence in Peru by Tupac Amaru guerillas in 1996.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Randi Hacker, Rosemary Kolich, Caryn Mirriam-Goldbert, Gene Chávez

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

Book restorer Hannah Heath's project, the 500-year-old illuminated Sarajevo Haggadah manuscript, is a repository of tragic episodes throughout human history: as a friend tells her, "this book has survived the same disaster over and over again," referring to "this fear, this hate, this need to demonize 'the other.'" As Heath 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 fratricidal Bosnian war enriches her own perspectives on humankind's potential for violence and redemption.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Gene Chávez

Anil's Ghost by Michael Ondaatje (2000) DB

Canadian novelist Michael Ondaatje explores his own Sri Lankan roots in his fourth novel, limning the violence of the conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan state. Anil has fled her increasingly violent homeland to train in America as a forensic archaeologist. She comes to Sri Lanka on a UN mission after work in the killing fields of Guatemala's "dirty war." She is teamed with local archaeologist Sarath, whose Buddhist perspective and murky political connections balance her Western perspective on events.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Miranda Ericsson, Rachel Goossen, Denise Low, Shawn Alexander, Dana Waters, Kevin Rabas

The Exile's Place

The exile's place is a site of construction: old ideas, foodways, religious beliefs, language, and habits are used to build a new life in a place newly settled. This place is always also a site of contest, of struggles with residents already there who might reject the newcomer's religion or skin color or anything else that differs from the new land's norm. What drives the exile to this new place colors both the memories of the land left behind and the perspectives on the new homeland. The exile straddles frontiers; finding a balance is always a question, always a negotiation.

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 be gunned down by Chicago police as a presumed anarchist, Brik returns to Eastern Europe to explore the roots of the earlier tragedy. The parallels illuminate the recurrent motifs of exile and the sufferings of Central Europeans through the bloody history of the twentieth century.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Rosemary Kolich

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

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Randi Hacker, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Sara Tucker

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

Iranian exile Azar Nafisi recognizes that "the ease with which all that you call home, all that gives you an identity, a sense of self and belonging, can be taken away from you." Her 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 that has been the refuge for waves of immigrants from the eighteenth century onward.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Anne Hawkins, Erin Pouppirt, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Michaeline Chance-Reay, Kevin Rabas

Faiths in Fiction: World Faiths

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. In this series, readers will encounter characters whose lives are shaped by faith – both in the formal sense of an inherited religious tradition, and in their personal struggles with questions of doubt and belief, fate and free will, forgiveness and redemption.

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 – a disloyal husband, a pregnant daughter, a naive wife, an aging spinster – all permeated by the call of the mosque and the daily rituals of prayer.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Sandra Wiechert

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, William Clyde Brown, Rosemary Kolich, John Edgar Tidwell

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)

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Sandra Wiechert, William Clyde Brown, Rosemary Kolich

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Sandra Wiechert, William Clyde Brown, Rosemary Kolich

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Susan Anne Carlson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Dan Eells, Nancy Hope, Al Ortolani, Kevin Rabas

Food for Thought

Food is more than sustenance. Cooking and serving food has always been important emotionally. Old and new generations learn family recipes and share family 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. The books in this series were shaped by both the power and the conflicts surrounding the way we eat.

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

Richard Russo offers a different relationship between food and human interaction. 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.”

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich

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.”

Book Discussion Leaders: Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Sara Tucker

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Tom Prasch, Miranda Ericsson, Dan Eells, Denise Low, Gene Chávez, Kevin Rabas

Friends and Neighbors (NEW in 2018)

“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**

In *Ove*, author Fredrik Backman creates a loveable curmudgeon. Ove, a recent widower and forced retiree, likes things to be orderly and fair. He spends his days as self-appointed neighborhood watch overlord in his Swedish housing complex making sure bicycles remain in designated areas and sheds are securely locked. He’s the type of guy who goes out of his way to ensure that a tailgating Mercedes misses out on a prime parking space near the mall by physically blocking the space with his Saab—the only brand of car that people should drive. New neighbors disrupt his world, beginning with knocking over his mailbox, driving over his flowerbed, and bringing him dinner as an apology.

Book Discussion Leaders: Randi Hacker, William Clyde Brown, Sara Tucker, Dan Eells

Five Skies by Ron Carlson (2007) **DB, BR, LP**

“And so their days ended with this regard for their tools and the days began, as they squinted over coffee, in the exhilarating open air knowing where the shovel was, the chain, the awl,” author Ron Carlson poignantly writes, about his male protagonists. This book is about three strangers, each with a scarred past, who come together for a summer to construct a motorcycle ramp over a canyon gorge in the Idaho Rockies. The foreman looks for a way around his grief after the sudden death of his wife and the project engineer seeks to overcome his guilt over the death of his brother. They are joined by a runaway teen with a history of petty crime. Carlson chronicles how the trio immerses themselves in the work in search of salvation and become friends along the way.

Book Discussion Leaders: Dan Eells

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

Ethiopian shopkeeper Sepha Stephanos states, “I was hit with the sudden terrible and frightening realization that everything I cared for and loved was either lost or living on without me seven thousand miles away, and that what I had here was not a life, but a poorly constructed substitution made up of one uncle, two friends, a grim store, and a cheap apartment.” This novel follows Stephanos as he 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. Though his friendship with two other African immigrants help ease his transition, it is the companionship of Judith and her biracial 11-year-old daughter Naomi that transform his world into something hopeful.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Sara Tucker

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Dennis Etzel, Anne Hawkins, Rosemary Kolich, Nicolas Shump, Miranda Ericsson, Rachel Goossen, Annette Billings, Kevin Rabas

Ghost Stories (NEW in 2018)

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 books in this series represent some classic explanations.

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. This story provides some truly scary moments.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert

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

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

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert

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

"There was a hand in the darkness, and it held a knife," so begins Neil Gaiman's Newberry Medal winning work of fiction. 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." As Bod grows, he learns to read from gravestones, is someone's imaginary friend, develops a crush on a witch, and experiences more adventures.

Series Discussion Leader: Sara Jane Richter, Trish Reeves, Tom Weso, Lori Brack, Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Dennis Etzel, Rosemary Kolich, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Randee Baty, Miranda Ericsson, Kim Stanley, Dan Eells, Kevin Rabas

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 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 hard-working 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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: William Clyde Brown, Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich, Sandra Wiechert

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

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: William Clyde Brown, Rosemary Kolich, Sandra Wiechert

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Sara Tucker, Sandra Wiechert

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Erin Pouppirt, Linda Lewis, Randee Baty, Steven Foulke, Rachel Goossen, Sara Jane Richter, Margy Stewart, Kevin Rabas

Growing Up

“Rites of passage” is the term for rituals used by different cultures to mark the entrance of an individual into adulthood and full membership of the community. Western societies have not routinely marked the passage to adulthood with such dramatic and ritualized events as those chronicled by anthropologists like Margaret Mead and Victor Turner, but our own culture’s ceremonial markers – driver’s licenses, draft cards, restrictions on drinking age, voting rights – have their own unique mix of drama and ritual. The transition to adulthood is a deeply fraught passage, involving coming to terms with sexuality, choosing a career path, and generally making one’s 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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker

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

Amir recalls his childhood in Afghanistan, prior to the Soviet invasion and the rise of the Taliban. His memories focus on his relation 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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Sara Tucker

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

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

Series Discussion Leaders: Sara Jane Richter, Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Michaeline Chance-Reay, Ann Birney, Rachel Goossen, Rosemary Kolich, Kevin Rabas

Growing Up American

Coming-of-age literature captures the liminal state of adolescence while also serving as a tool for broader social critique, providing a cultural examination through the eyes of someone still a bit outside of the adult world's norms and values. It comprehends both the terrain of the personal and the historically specific territory of a work's moment of creation. In this sense, that fancy German term, *Bildungsroman*, provides some illumination: the notion that a person is an act of construction, and all of the experiences of a person's life are building blocks that create that final product, the self-conscious adult. In the American context, the very complexity of the American mosaic makes the coming-of-age genre such rich territory.

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

"I keep picturing all these kids playing some game in this big field of rye.... What I have to do," Holden explains, "I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff." 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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Dan Eells

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

"I was slowly discovering that if you watched people as they ate, you could find out who they were." Through food, Ruth Reichl also 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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Dan Eells

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. Fifteen-year-old Benji must try to come to terms with growing up, with African-Americanness, and with American popular culture.

Book Discussion Leaders: John Edgar Tidwell, Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Miranda Ericsson, Gene Chávez, Lori Brack, Shawn Alexander, Kevin Rabas

Hispanic Heritage: Mothers, Sisters, and Daughters

In this series, readers will discover authors who are helping to create a new and vibrant Latino literature in the United States. Their novels 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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chavez, Rosemary Kolich

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

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Rosemary Kolich

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

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

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez

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

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Anne Hawkins, Nicolas Shump, Kim Stanley, Ann Birney, Trish Reeves, Martha Sanchez, Kevin Rabas

It's a Hard Knock Life (NEW in 2018)

Orphans have populated literature for centuries, from *Little Goody Two-Shoes* to *Oliver Twist* to *Jane Eyre* 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. Though often found out of place and out of home in real life, orphans have held a special place and function in literature, especially in 19th century novels. These parentless children revealed a bleak social history as they negotiated the streets and world.

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. Though many Orphan Train riders never talked about their early lives, others, longing for self-identity, found themselves journeying home - sometimes only to discover that they were already there.

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

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 is an Orphan Train survivor. An unexpected relationship develops between the two and together, they find answers about their separate pasts.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker

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, pleads and convinces her husband Tom that they must keep and raise this child as their own. An impossible dilemma ensues when, after a visit to the mainland, the true identity of the child is discovered.

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Dennis Etzel, Anne Hawkins, Rosemary Kolich, Erin Pouppirt, Miranda Ericsson, Kevin Rabas

Kansas at 150

Outsiders may know us mostly as that place where Dorothy and Toto lived before the tornado swept them away, but Kansans know better. More than just the geographic center of the nation, Kansas provided a stage for many of the most dramatic episodes of American history. Over 150 years later, Kansas continues to face challenges and opportunities: seeking to create new sources of economic growth in biotechnology and sustainable energy resources while preserving the last of the tall-grass prairie and struggling to maintain its small towns and agrarian base; and continuing to contribute new art, film, and literature. Following the state's sesquicentennial, commemorating 150 years of Kansas, is an apt time to take stock of where we have been, and where we are going.

It Happened in Kansas by Sarah Smarsh (2010)

Sarah Smarsh provides an encapsulation of significant events and figures in Kansas's history in this work. Her selection is always interesting, including towering figures like John Brown and unusual ones like the Bloody Benders and John Brinkley, the goat-gland doctor, and she delivers her history lessons with warmth and humor.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker

Kansas Poems of William Stafford edited by Denise Low (1990)

William Stafford may have been named Oregon's poet laureate, but he was a Kansas boy at heart – born in Hutchinson – and his youth in Kansas deeply inflected his poetry. "Mine was a Midwest home – you can keep your world," he proclaimed in the poem "One Home." Stafford's poetry is rooted in a sense of place, and the work in this collection shows how Kansas as a place continued to inform his thought and verse.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, William Clyde Brown

Now Let Me Fly by Marcia Cebulski (1993)

Topeka playwright Marcia Cebulski's play provides a thorough treatment of the epochal case that ended school segregation in America. Framed as a crisis of conscience for lawyer Thurgood Marshall on the eve of the Supreme Court's hearing of the case and a debate with the ghost of his mentor Charles Houston, the play treats all five cases brought together in the Supreme Court decision and examines the grassroots activism that propelled the court actions.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker

Ordinary Genius by Thomas Fox Averill (2004)

Readers familiar with HK's other TALK programs may know Topekan Tom Averill's novels, *Secrets of the Tsil Café* and *The Slow Air of Ewan MacPherson*. The short-story form has long been one of Averill's greatest strength, and *Ordinary Genius* showcases his deep engagement with Kansas land, people, and history.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Sandra Wiechert, Gene Chávez

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Erin Pouppirt, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Miranda Ericsson, Kim Stanley, Rachel Goossen, Denise Low, Rosemary Kolich, Kevin Rabas

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. Urbanization, rural decline, and social changes in the roles of women and the races have fundamentally altered what it means to be a Kansan. The desire to cling to tradition is set at odds with the changing technological and social landscape.

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

Evelyn Bucknow, a ten-year-old growing up in fictional Kerrville, Kansas, seeks the certainty provided by a very conservative 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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker

Not Without Laughter by Langston Hughes (1930)

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 racial inequality and poverty.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, John Edgar Tidwell

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 *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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Sandra Wiechert

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

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.

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Carmaletta Williams, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Randee Baty, Miranda Ericsson, Shawn Alexander, Kevin Rabas

Living with the Land

Much of human history viewed nature as an enemy to be tamed, conquered, or endured. Today, faced with accelerated loss of the natural world, increasing numbers of people have begun to recognize the natural world's value, and worry about how best to keep its ways – and the livelihoods and cultures that have specifically adapted to exploit a certain kind of environment – from being lost. The characters in this series ask themselves what the place of nature can or should be when the world is becoming increasingly complex and “unnatural.”

The Good Earth by Pearl S. Buck (1931) **DB, BR**

Wang Lung, a poor peasant who “makes good” by caring about and acquiring land, has unfailing help from his wife, but values her only for her labor and sons she supplies. Sons, brought up in an industrializing China, stray from their father’s commitment to the land and to older values.

Book Discussion Leaders: Randi Hacker, Sara Tucker

Out of Africa by Isak Dinesen (1937) **DB**

Set at the end of colonial Africa, Dinesen’s memoir idealized the African land and those living in harmony with it, as compared with what she saw as the failings of the industrialized West. The beauty of Africa and its animals, along with the relatively undisturbed life of its people, are all lovingly described.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Randi Hacker, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

Prodigal Summer by Barbara Kingsolver (2000) **DB, BR**

This novel focuses on three sets of intertwined lives. Forest ranger Deanna Wolfe tries to protect coyotes from a Wyoming rancher. City-girl Lusa Landowski must decide whether to take up her dead husband’s farm despite the in-law’s disapproval. Long-time neighbors feud about changes and choices in the modern world.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

Spartina by John Casey (1989) **DB**

Dick Pierce is a stubborn, individualistic fisherman and boat builder. An unfinished boat is his last hope for becoming his own boss. Pierce could be viewed as heroic, refusing to give in or as a selfish, driven man who neglects his family, cheats on his wife, and gambles with their economic future.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Linda Lewis, Randee Baty, Ann Birney, Rachel Goossen, Kevin Rabas

Middle Eastern Culture and Society

The Middle East can seem so far from daily life in Kansas. The information we receive is often through images in the media that become stereotypes generalized to all people of the region – terrorists, fundamentalists, women who suffer gender inequality. Just as we in Kansas are frequently called upon to defend our state’s diversity and rich culture, so too the Middle East is a diverse region with multiple histories, cultures, and peoples of varied backgrounds. This series moves beyond stereotypes to delve into the complexities of the region’s people and cultures.

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

Living in a state frequently at war within its territories and with its neighbors, Israelis have had to adjust to a climate of fear. Young people, who face compulsory military service, lead lives that are necessarily entwined with religion and politics. A nation of immigrants, Israel is much more religiously and ethnically diverse than many would guess.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Rosemary Kolich

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

This autobiography provides a window into modern-day Iran and Iranian-American relations. Ms. 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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Gene Chávez, Rosemary Kolich

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. It is a New York Times Notable Book, Time Magazine “Best Comix of the Year,” and San Francisco Chronicle and Los Angeles Times bestseller.

Book Discussion Leaders: Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: William Clyde Brown

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Kevin Rabas

The Modern Family (NEW in 2018)

Beginning in the mid-20th century, the stereotypical American family has been comprised of mother, father and 2.5 children—the so-called nuclear family. Yet, in reality, very few families meet this standard. Adoptive, step, blended, multi-generational--families realistically come in all shapes and sizes. Relationships between family members are also complex and run the gamut from loving and nurturing to traumatic. The books in this series challenge and complicate our notion of what it means to be a family.

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

Author Elizabeth Strout crafts an engaging story about 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. A family crisis involving Susan's teenage son brings Jim and Bob back to their hometown as adults where they have to deal with the current crisis and the aftermath of the childhood tragedy that shaped their entire adult lives and family relationships.

Book Discussion Leaders: Randi Hacker

Family Man by Elinor Lipman (2009) LP

The reviewers agree this light-hearted book by Elinor Lipman is funny, clever, and whimsical. The plot begins when 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 according to both the *Washington Post* and the *Chicago Tribune*.

Book Discussion Leaders: Randi Hacker, Sara Tucker

LaRose by Louise Erdrich (2016) DB, LP

This beautifully written novel by Erdrich draws you in from page one and makes you want to read the book in one sitting. She skillfully weaves together the traumas of the present with those from the past in a narrative that glides from one era to the other. The novel opens when Landreaux Iron accidentally shoots his neighbor's son while hunting. Overcome with guilt and grief, Landreaux 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 while looking back at the life of the first LaRose beginning in 1839. With this story, Erdrich shows us a fluid notion of family in some Native American communities.

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Dennis Etzel, Rosemary Kolich, Erin Pouppirt, Nicolas Shump, Dana Waters, Kevin Rabas

Native American Mysteries

The books in this series have it all: ingenious, fast-paced plots; Native American history and culture; and resourceful, intelligent protagonists who solve mysteries, in part, because they are familiar with Native American life. Many of these authors write about a particular locale and represent its habits, speech, manners, folklore, and religion. These elements create rich and captivating stories for readers, while also teaching a thing or two about culture and community.

DreadfulWater Shows Up by Hartley Goodweather (2002)

Cherokee Thumps DreadfulWater, an ex-cop, moved to a Montana reservation to shed memories of a killer who got away. Thumps serves as the town's photographer, pursuing a relationship with Claire Merchant, head of the local tribal council. After a murder at the reservation's casino, Claire's son becomes a suspect, and Thumps reluctantly tracks the real killer.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Sara Tucker

Dance for the Dead by Thomas Perry (1996) **DB**

Seneca Jane Whitefield, a "guide" who specializes in making victims vanish, conjures up new identities for people with nowhere left to run. But when a killer stalks an eight-year-old boy, Jane faces dangerous obstacles that will put her powers – and her life – to a terrifying test.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Rosemary Kolich

Dance Hall of the Dead by Tony Hillerman (1973) **DB, BR**

Two young boys suddenly disappear. One of them, a Zuni, leaves a pool of blood behind. Lt. Joe Leaphorn of the Navajo Tribal Police tracks the brutal killer. Three things complicate the search: an archeological dig, a steel hypodermic needle, and the strange laws of the Zuni.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Sara Tucker

The Ghost Walker by Margaret Coel (1998) **DB**

Father John O'Malley, head of the mission on the Wind River Reservation, discovers a body on a remote reservation road. When the police reach the scene, the corpse has disappeared. Arapaho's believe the deceased is doomed to walk the earth, creating death and destruction until it receives a proper burial. And, indeed, that is what happens.

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Anne Hawkins, Erin Pouppirt, Tom Prasch, Randee Baty, Michaeline Chance-Reay, Dan Eells, Martha Sanchez, Kevin Rabas

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. On the Lighter Side authors do this by giving us worlds populated with off-kilter, eccentric characters thinking and doing unusual things. They make their characters funny and even lovable. Seen through the lens of warm, appreciative humor, maddening things become funny and bearable. The strange becomes the charming; local quirkiness becomes universal humanity.

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

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 ten-year-old living an idyllic postwar boyhood; his mother, Neighbor Dorothy, 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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

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.

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Erin Pouppirt, Nicolas Shump, Sara Tucker, Michaeline Chance-Reay, Rosemary Kolich, Kevin Rabas

That's Funny: Books that Make Us Laugh

We are often told that “laughter is the best medicine.” Laughter has also made for some of the best reading since the time of the ancient Greeks. Books that make us laugh are often just plain fun to read, as can be seen by their regular presence on bestseller lists. At the same time, the very best funny books are also much more. In the hands of master 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**

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Randi Hacker

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 twenty years in England. Though often bemused by surface absurdities (such as dental floss hotlines), 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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Randi Hacker

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

National Public Radio commentator White's eccentric family includes Aunt Belle, whose alligator bellows on command, Uncle Jimbuddy, and the elderly, endearing Mama, who turns road kill into gourmet meals.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

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

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

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Erin Pouppirt, Nicolas Shump, Sara Tucker, Randee Baty, Kim Stanley, Ann Birney, Kevin Rabas

Urban Indians

Until a generation ago, most books about Indians were ethnographies or biographies, often written by non-Indians. In the 1970s, a renaissance in American Indian writing produced lyrical novels set largely on the reservation and looking toward the tribal past. Now, the 1990s have brought forth a new generation of Indian writers whose works are increasingly hard-edged and urban. A common theme among these writers, many of whom are of mixed blood, is the search for identity in a world where cultural boundaries are being redefined. This series introduces three Indian writers of the 1990s: Louise Erdrich, Chippewa; Louis Owens, Choctaw; and Susan Power, Sioux.

Bone Game by Louis Owens (1994) **DB**

A murder mystery unfolds on a grand scale, as mixed-blood Indian Cole McCurtain suspects a link between his dreams of a Spanish priest slain in 1812 and a serial killer who's terrorizing California.

The Grass Dancer by Susan Power (1994) **DB**

Harley Wind Soldier, Charlene Thunder, and the Sioux dancers gathered for the powwow are swept up in romantic rivalry and a powerful journey of mystery and hope that weaves together young and old, the living and the dead.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker

Tracks by Louise Erdrich (1988) **DB**

Told in the voices of tribal patriarch Nanapush and young mixed-blood Pauline, this Chippewa saga revolves around the mysterious Fleur Pillager, sorceress, seductress, determined to save her ancestral land at all costs.

Book Discussion Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Anne Hawkins, Erin Pouppirt, Tom Prasch, Linda Lewis, Sandra Wiechert, Tom Weso, Lori Brack, Rosemary Kolich, Kevin Rabas

Westering

The westward movement of settlers and the existence of a frontier of settlement in the last century played an important role in shaping our country's character. The Old West retains its hold on our imagination as a theme in literature, film, and history, while the contemporary West still exerts a strong influence on the national culture. 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**

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: William Clyde Brown, Rosemary Kolich

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Gene Chávez, Rosemary Kolich

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 to the eastern stockyards.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Gene Chávez, Rosemary Kolich

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, William Clyde Brown

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, William Clyde Brown, Erin Pouppirt, Nicolas Shump, Sara Tucker, Randee Baty, Steven Foulke, Ann Birney, Sara Jane Richter, Kevin Rabas

Wit and Grit: Women Characters in Contemporary Fiction (NEW in 2018)

Throughout literary history, the depiction of women has varied from writer to writer. Although exceptions exist, today's female characters appear more prominently and cast from reality rather than dream.

In this series, women of contemporary literature face situations and decisions that would challenge a shipload of whalers. These women display the wit to think their way through obstacles, sometimes with humor and always with the grit to persist. Whether Cora deciding on a dangerous path to seek freedom from slavery, Amabelle facing losses and brutal killings, or Christina shouldering the load of a household and insights into her own shortcomings. In this series we meet 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**

The protagonist of this historical novel, Christina Olson, is none other than the mysterious young woman of Andrew Wyeth's painting "Christina's World." Christina reveals great strength and independence no matter the deprivation, hardship, and thwarted dreams of her life as a principal support of her family, even though her lifelong neuromuscular disease, always debilitating, progresses to the point that she has to crawl to pick blueberries or climb the stairs. The novel, written as Christina's memoir, reveals her frailties, her strengths, her flaws, and the importance of her friendship with Andrew Wyeth, who saw her as 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. The greater part of the novel follows Amabelle as she deals with the dreams and nightmares that result from her early trauma, her love for Sebastian, another Haitian immigrant, and the terror of the 1937 slaughter of Haitian immigrants when Dominicans turn on these laborers. 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**

It's hard to imagine a more daunting struggle for life and sanity than what young Cora faces as the novel's protagonist as a third-generation slave on a Georgia plantation. Nevertheless, Cora 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. This novel is long researched and deeply felt by a writer whose ancestors were enslaved, shows the human race at its worst and at its best, and portrays women of true wit and grit.

Book Discussion Leaders: John Edgar Tidwell

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Dennis Etzel, Anne Hawkins, Rosemary Kolich, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Miranda Ericsson, Ann Birney, Lori Brack, Shawn Alexander, Annette Billings, Kevin Rabas

Women Around the World

This series introduces readers to the voices of women novelists from Latin America, Africa, and Ireland, a European nation with a colonial past. The worlds these writers evoke are remarkably diverse, from the gritty South Africa of Nadine Gordimer to the magical terrain of Laura Esquivel's Mexico. They put 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: 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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

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

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**

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Randi Hacker

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Rosemary Kolich, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Sara Tucker

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Linda Lewis, Miranda Ericsson, Nancy Hope, Martha Sanchez, Kevin Rabas

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. As a result, it has proven to be an irresistible subject for literature and film. A generation of authors, including American novelists Norman Mailer, James Michener, and Kurt Vonnegut, began their writing careers by processing their experiences of World War II. Ever since, writers have continued to be drawn by the wide range of subject matter the war offers. This World War II reading 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. In accounts of the war in the Philippines, secret American military activity in Alaska and the Aleutians, and aspects of the home front, the books in this series serve to illuminate the full range of horror and hope that sprung from World War II.

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

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

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 journalistic account of North Platt, Nebraska’s citizenry 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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Tucker

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.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Gene Chávez

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Erin Pouppirt, Nicolas Shump, Steven Foulke, Nancy Hope, Kevin Rabas

TALK SCHOLARS DIRECTORY

Use this directory to contact discussion leaders for your TALK programs. *Travel* indicates how many hours discussion leaders are willing to travel from their hometown. If you're not sure about travel, contact the person and give her/him an opportunity to say "yes." You may schedule up to three scholars per book series.



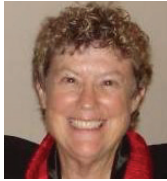
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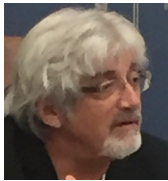
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