

Book Club Kit Collection

Anaheim Central Library

ENGLISH

ADULT FICTION

***The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho (1993)**

Paulo Coelho's masterpiece tells the mystical story of Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd boy who yearns to travel in search of a worldly treasure. His quest will lead him to riches far different—and far more satisfying—than he ever imagined. Santiago's journey teaches us about the essential wisdom of listening to our hearts, of recognizing opportunity and learning to read the omens strewn along life's path, and, most importantly, to follow our dreams.

***Blindness* by José Saramago (1997)**

A city is hit by an epidemic of "white blindness" which spares no one. Authorities confine the blind to an empty mental hospital, but there the criminal element holds everyone captive, stealing food rations and raping women. There is one eyewitness to this nightmare who guides seven strangers—among them a boy with no mother, a girl with dark glasses, a dog of tears—through the barren streets, and the procession becomes as uncanny as the surroundings are harrowing. A magnificent parable of loss and disorientation and a vivid evocation of the horrors of the twentieth century, *Blindness* has swept the reading public with its powerful portrayal of man's worst appetites and weaknesses—and man's ultimately exhilarating spirit.

***The Book of Night Women* by Marlon James (2009)**

A true triumph of voice and storytelling, *The Book of Night Women* rings with both profound authenticity and a distinctly contemporary energy. It is the story of Lilith, born into slavery on a Jamaican sugar plantation at the end of the eighteenth century. Even at her birth, the slave women around her recognize a dark power that they- and she-will come to both revere and fear. The Night Women, as they call themselves, have long been plotting a slave revolt, and as Lilith comes of age they see her as the key to their plans. But when she begins to understand her own feelings, desires, and identity, Lilith starts to push at the edges of what is imaginable for the life of a slave woman, and risks becoming the conspiracy's weak link. But the real revelation of the book—the secret to the stirring imagery and insistent prose—is Marlon James himself, a young writer at once breath-takingly daring and wholly in command of his craft.

***The Children Act* by Ian McEwan (2014)**

Fiona Maye is a leading High Court judge who presides over cases in the family division. She is renowned for her fierce intelligence, exactitude, and sensitivity. But her professional success belies private sorrow and domestic strife. There is the lingering regret of her childlessness, and now her marriage of thirty years is in crisis. At the same time, she is called on to try an urgent case: Adam, a beautiful seventeen-year-old boy, is refusing for religious reasons the medical treatment that could save his life, and his devout parents echo his wishes. Time is running out. Should the secular court overrule sincerely expressed faith? In the course of reaching a decision, Fiona visits Adam in the hospital—an encounter that stirs long-buried feelings in her and powerful new emotions in the boy. Her judgment has momentous consequences for them both.

***Days in the History of Silence* by Merethe Lindstrom (2013)**

Eva and Simon have spent most of their adult lives together. He is a physician and she is a teacher, and they have three grown daughters and a comfortable home. Yet what binds them together isn't only affection and solidarity but also the painful facts of their respective histories, which they keep hidden even from their own children. But after the abrupt dismissal of their housekeeper and Simon's increasing withdrawal into himself, the past can no longer be repressed.

***Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury (1953)**

Ray Bradbury's internationally acclaimed novel *Fahrenheit 451* is a masterwork of twentieth-century literature set in a bleak, dystopian future. Guy Montag is a fireman. In his world, where television rules and literature is on the brink of extinction, firemen start fires rather than put them out. His job is to destroy the most illegal of commodities, the printed book, along with the houses in which they are hidden. Montag never questions the destruction and ruin his actions produce, returning each day to his bland life and wife, Mildred, who spends all day with her television "family." But then he meets an eccentric young neighbor, Clarisse, who introduces him to a past where people didn't live in fear and to a present where one sees the world through the ideas in books instead of the mindless chatter of television. When Mildred attempts suicide and Clarisse suddenly disappears, Montag begins to question everything he has ever known. He starts hiding books in his home, and when his pilfering is discovered, the fireman has to run for his life.

***The Ginger Tree* by Oswald Wynd (1977)**

In 1903, a young Scotswoman named Mary Mackenzie sets sail for China to marry her betrothed, a military attaché in Peking. But soon after her arrival, Mary falls into an adulterous affair with a young Japanese nobleman, scandalizing the British community. Casting her out of the European community, her compatriots tear her away from her small daughter. A woman abandoned and alone, Mary learns to survive over forty tumultuous years in Asia, including two world wars and the cataclysmic Tokyo earthquake of 1923.

***The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins (2015)**

Rachel takes the same commuter train every morning and night. Every day she rattles down the track, flashes past a stretch of cozy suburban homes, and stops at the signal that allows her to daily watch the same couple breakfasting on their deck. She's even started to feel like she knows them. Jess and Jason, she calls them. Their life—as she sees it—is perfect. Not unlike the life she recently lost. And then she sees something shocking. It's only a minute until the train moves on, but it's enough. Now everything's changed. Unable to keep it to herself, Rachel goes to the police. But is she really as unreliable as they say? Soon she is deeply entangled not only in the investigation but in the lives of everyone involved. Has she done more harm than good?

***The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* by Stieg Larsson (2008)**

Murder mystery, family saga, love story, and financial intrigue combine into one satisfyingly complex and entertainingly atmospheric novel, the first in Stieg Larsson's thrilling Millennium series featuring Lisbeth Salander. Harriet Vanger, a scion of one of Sweden's wealthiest families disappeared over forty years ago. All these years later, her aged uncle continues to seek the truth. He hires Mikael Blomkvist, a crusading journalist recently trapped by a libel conviction, to investigate. He is aided by the pierced and tattooed punk prodigy Lisbeth Salander. Together they tap into a vein of unfathomable iniquity and astonishing corruption.

***The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy (1997)**

Compared favorably to the works of Faulkner and Dickens, Arundhati Roy's modern classic is equal

parts powerful family saga, forbidden love story, and piercing political drama. The seven-year-old twins Estha and Rahel see their world shaken irrevocably by the arrival of their beautiful young cousin, Sophie. It is an event that will lead to an illicit liaison and tragedies accidental and intentional, exposing “big things [that] lurk unsaid” in a country drifting dangerously toward unrest. Lush, lyrical, and unnerving, *The God of Small Things* is an award-winning landmark that started for its author an esteemed career of fiction and political commentary that continues unabated.

***The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood (1985)**

Offred is a Handmaid in the Republic of Gilead, serving in the household of the enigmatic Commander and his bitter wife. She may go out once a day to markets whose signs are now pictures because women are not allowed to read. She must pray that the Commander makes her pregnant, for in a time of declining birthrates her value lies in her fertility, and failure means exile to the dangerously polluted Colonies. Offred can remember a time when she lived with her husband and daughter and had a job, before she lost even her own name. Now she navigates the intimate secrets of those who control her every move, risking her life in breaking the rules.

***The Headmaster's Wife* by Thomas Christopher Greene (2014)**

Like his father before him, Arthur Winthrop is the headmaster of Vermont's elite Lancaster School. It is the place he feels has given him his life, but is also the site of his undoing as events spiral out of his control. Found wandering naked in Central Park, he begins to tell his story to the police, but his memories collide into one another, and the true nature of things, a narrative of love, of marriage, of family, and of a tragedy Arthur does not know how to address emerges. Luminous and atmospheric, bringing to life the tight-knit enclave of a quintessential New England boarding school, the novel is part mystery, part love story, and an exploration of the ties of place and family. Beautifully written and compulsively readable, *The Headmaster's Wife* stands as a moving elegy to the power of love as an antidote to grief.

***The Help* by Kathryn Stockett (2009)**

Aibileen is a black maid in 1962 Jackson, Mississippi, who's always taken orders quietly, but lately she's unable to hold her bitterness back. Her friend Minny has never held her tongue but now must somehow keep secrets about her employer that leave her speechless. White socialite Skeeter just graduated college. She's full of ambition, but without a husband, she's considered a failure. Together, these seemingly different women join together to write a tell-all book about work as a black maid in the South that could forever alter their destinies and the life of a small town...

***The House at Riverton* by Kate Morton (2006)**

The House at Riverton is a gorgeous debut novel set in England between the wars. Perfect for fans of *Downton Abbey*, it is the story of an aristocratic family, a house, a mysterious death, and a way of life that vanished forever, told in flashback by a woman who witnessed it all and kept a secret for decades. Grace Bradley went to work at Riverton House as a servant when she was just a girl, before the First World War. For years her life was inextricably tied up with the Hartford family, most particularly the two daughters, Hannah and Emmeline. In the summer of 1924, at a glittering society party held at the house, a young poet shot himself. The only witnesses were Hannah and Emmeline and only they -- and Grace -- know the truth. In 1999, when Grace is ninety-eight years old and living out her last days in a nursing home, she is visited by a young director who is making a film about the events of that summer. She takes Grace back to Riverton House and reawakens her memories. Told in flashback, this is the story of Grace's youth during the last days of Edwardian aristocratic privilege shattered by war, of the vibrant twenties, and the changes she witnessed as an entire way of life vanished forever.

***The Illustrated Man* by Ray Bradbury (1951)**

Ray Bradbury brings wonders alive. For this peerless American storyteller, the most bewitching force in the universe is human nature. In these eighteen startling tales unfolding across a canvas of tattooed skin, living cities take their vengeance, technology awakens the most primal natural instincts, and dreams are carried aloft in junkyard rockets. Provocative and powerful, *The Illustrated Man* is a kaleidoscopic blending of magic, imagination, and truth—as exhilarating as interplanetary travel, as maddening as a walk in a million-year rain, and as comforting as simple, familiar rituals on the last night of the world.

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

It is November 25, 1960, and three beautiful sisters have been found near their wrecked Jeep at the bottom of a 150-foot cliff on the north coast of the Dominican Republic. The official state newspaper reports their deaths as accidental. It does not mention that a fourth sister lives. Nor does it explain that the sisters were among the leading opponents of Gen. Rafael Leonidas Trujillo’s dictatorship. It doesn’t have to. Everybody knows of Las Mariposas—“The Butterflies.” In this extraordinary novel, the voices of all four sisters—Minerva, Patria, María Teresa, and the survivor, Dedé—speak across the decades to tell their own stories, from hair ribbons and secret crushes to gunrunning and prison torture, and to describe the everyday horrors of life under Trujillo’s rule. Through the art and magic of Julia Alvarez’s imagination, the martyred Butterflies live again in this novel of courage and love, and the human cost of political oppression.

***Into the Beautiful North* by Luis Alberto Urrea (2009)**

Nineteen-year-old Nayeli works at a taco shop in her Mexican village and dreams about her father, who journeyed to the US to find work. Recently, it has dawned on her that he isn't the only man who has left town. In fact, there are almost no men in the village--they've all gone north. While watching *The Magnificent Seven*, Nayeli decides to go north herself and recruit seven men--her own "Siete Magnificos"--to repopulate her hometown and protect it from the bandidos who plan on taking it over. Filled with unforgettable characters and prose as radiant as the Sinaloan sun, *Into the Beautiful North* is the story of an irresistible young woman's quest to find herself on both sides of the fence.

***The Kept* by James Scott (2014)**

In the winter of 1897, a trio of killers descends upon an isolated farm in upstate New York. Midwife Elspeth Howell returns home to the carnage: her husband, and four of her children, murdered. Before she can discover her remaining son Caleb, alive and hiding in the kitchen pantry, another shot rings out over the snow-covered valley. Twelve-year-old Caleb must tend to his mother until she recovers enough for them to take to the frozen wilderness in search of the men responsible.

***The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini (2003)**

The unforgettable, heartbreaking story of the unlikely friendship between a wealthy boy and the son of his father’s servant, caught in the tragic sweep of history, *The Kite Runner* transports readers to Afghanistan at a tense and crucial moment of change and destruction. A powerful story of friendship, it is also about the power of reading, the price of betrayal, and the possibility of redemption; and an exploration of the power of fathers over sons—their love, their sacrifices, their lies.

***The Language of Flowers* by Vanessa Diffenbaugh (2011)**

The Victorian language of flowers was used to convey romantic expressions: honeysuckle for devotion, asters for patience, and red roses for love. But for Victoria Jones, it’s been more useful in communicating mistrust and solitude. After a childhood spent in the foster-care system, she is unable

to get close to anybody, and her only connection to the world is through flowers and their meanings. Now eighteen and emancipated from the system with nowhere to go, Victoria realizes she has a gift for helping others through the flowers she chooses for them. But an unexpected encounter with a mysterious stranger has her questioning what's been missing in her life. And when she's forced to confront a painful secret from her past, she must decide whether it's worth risking everything for a second chance at happiness.

***Life of Pi* by Yann Martel (2000)**

The son of a zookeeper, Pi Patel has an encyclopedic knowledge of animal behavior and a fervent love of stories. When Pi is sixteen, his family emigrates from India to North America aboard a Japanese cargo ship, along with their zoo animals bound for new homes. The ship sinks. Pi finds himself alone in a lifeboat, his only companions a hyena, an orangutan, a wounded zebra, and Richard Parker, a 450-pound Bengal tiger. Soon the tiger has dispatched all but Pi, whose fear, knowledge, and cunning allow him to coexist with Richard Parker for 227 days while lost at sea. When they finally reach the coast of Mexico, Richard Parker flees to the jungle, never to be seen again. The Japanese authorities who interrogate Pi refuse to believe his story and press him to tell them "the truth." After hours of coercion, Pi tells a second story, a story much less fantastical, much more conventional—but is it more true?

***Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel (1992)**

This classic love story takes place on the De la Garza ranch, as the tyrannical owner, Mama Elena, chops onions at the kitchen table in her final days of pregnancy. While still in her mother's womb, her daughter to be weeps so violently she causes an early labor, and little Tita slips out amid the spices and fixings for noodle soup. This early encounter with food soon becomes a way of life, and Tita grows up to be a master chef, using cooking to express herself and sharing recipes with readers along the way.

***The Maltese Falcon* by Dashiell Hammett (1930)**

A treasure worth killing for. Sam Spade, a slightly shopworn private eye with his own solitary code of ethics. A perfumed grafter named Joel Cairo, a fat man name Gutman, and Brigid O'Shaughnessy, a beautiful and treacherous woman whose loyalties shift at the drop of a dime. These are the ingredients of Dashiell Hammett's coolly glittering gem of detective fiction, a novel that has haunted three generations of readers.

***A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman (2014)**

Meet Ove. He's a curmudgeon—the kind of man who points at people he dislikes as if they were burglars caught outside his bedroom window. He has staunch principles, strict routines, and a short fuse. People call him "the bitter neighbor from hell." But must Ove be bitter just because he doesn't walk around with a smile plastered to his face all the time? Behind the cranky exterior there is a story and a sadness. So when one November morning a chatty young couple with two chatty young daughters move in next door and accidentally flatten Ove's mailbox, it is the lead-in to a comical and heartwarming tale of unkempt cats, unexpected friendship, and the ancient art of backing up a U-Haul. All of which will change one cranky old man and a local residents' association to their very foundations.

***The One-in-a-Million Boy* by Monica Wood (2016)**

The story of your life never starts at the beginning. Don't they teach you anything at school? So says 104-year-old Ona to the 11-year-old boy who's been sent to help her out every Saturday morning. As he refills the bird feeders and tidies the garden shed, Ona tells him about her long life, from first love to second chances. Soon she's confessing secrets she has kept hidden for decades. One Saturday, the

boy doesn't show up. Ona starts to think he's not so special after all, but then his father arrives on her doorstep, determined to finish his son's good deed. The boy's mother is not so far behind. Ona is set to discover that the world can surprise us at any age, and that sometimes sharing a loss is the only way to find ourselves again.

***Orphan Train* by Christina Baker Kline (2013)**

Between 1854 and 1929, so-called orphan trains ran regularly from the cities of the East Coast to the farmlands of the Midwest, carrying thousands of abandoned children whose fates would be determined by pure luck. Would they be adopted by a kind and loving family, or would they face a childhood and adolescence of hard labor and servitude? As a young Irish immigrant, Vivian Daly was one such child, sent by rail from New York City to an uncertain future a world away. Returning east later in life, Vivian leads a quiet, peaceful existence on the coast of Maine, the memories of her upbringing rendered a hazy blur. But in her attic, hidden in trunks, are vestiges of a turbulent past. Seventeen-year-old Molly Ayer knows that a community-service position helping an elderly widow clean out her attic is the only thing keeping her out of juvenile hall. But as Molly helps Vivian sort through her keepsakes and possessions, she discovers that she and Vivian aren't as different as they appear. A Penobscot Indian who has spent her youth in and out of foster homes, Molly is also an outsider being raised by strangers, and she, too, has unanswered questions about the past.

***Our Souls at Night* by Kent Haruf (2015)**

In the familiar setting of Holt, Colorado, home to all of Kent Haruf's inimitable fiction, Addie Moore pays an unexpected visit to a neighbor, Louis Waters. Her husband died years ago, as did his wife, and in such a small town they naturally have known of each other for decades; in fact, Addie was quite fond of Louis's wife. His daughter lives hours away, her son even farther, and Addie and Louis have long been living alone in empty houses, the nights so terribly lonely, especially with no one to talk with. But maybe that could change? As Addie and Louis come to know each other better—their pleasures and their difficulties—a beautiful story of second chances unfolds, making *Our Souls at Night* the perfect final installment to this beloved writer's enduring contribution to American literature.

***The Pecan Man* by Cassie Dandridge Selleck (2012)**

In the summer of 1976, recently widowed and childless, Ora Lee Beckworth hires a homeless old black man to mow her lawn. The neighborhood children call him the Pee-can Man; their mothers call them inside whenever he appears. When the police chief's son is found stabbed to death near his camp, the man Ora knows as Eddie is arrested and charged with murder. Twenty-five years later, Ora sets out to tell the truth about the Pecan Man. In narrating her story, Ora discovers more truth about herself than she could ever have imagined.

***The Readers of Broken Wheel Recommend* by Katarina Bivald (2016)**

Broken Wheel, Iowa, has never seen anyone like Sara, who traveled all the way from Sweden just to meet her book-loving pen pal, Amy. When she arrives, however, she finds Amy's funeral guests just leaving. The residents of Broken Wheel are happy to look after their bewildered visitor—there's not much else to do in a dying small town that's almost beyond repair. You certainly wouldn't open a bookstore. And definitely not with the tourist in charge. You'd need a vacant storefront (Main Street is full of them), books (Amy's house is full of them), and...customers. The bookstore might be a little quirky. Then again, so is Sara. But Broken Wheel's own story might be more eccentric and surprising than she thought. A heartwarming reminder of why we are booklovers, this is a sweet, smart story about how books find us, change us, and connect us.

***The Son* by Philipp Meyer (2012)**

Part epic of Texas, part classic coming-of-age story, part unflinching examination of the bloody price of power, *The Son* is a gripping and utterly transporting novel that maps the legacy of violence in the American west with rare emotional acuity, even as it presents an intimate portrait of one family across two centuries. Eli McCullough is just twelve-years-old when a marauding band of Comanche storm his Texas homestead and brutally murder his mother and sister, taking him as a captive. Despite their torture and cruelty, Eli--against all odds--adapts to life with the Comanche, learning their ways, their language, taking on a new name, finding a place as the adopted son of the chief of the band, and fighting their wars against not only other Indians, but white men, too--complicating his sense of loyalty, his promised vengeance, and his very understanding of self. But when disease, starvation, and westward expansion finally decimate the Comanche, Eli is left alone in a world in which he belongs nowhere, neither white nor Indian, civilized or fully wild. Deftly interweaving Eli's story with those of his son, Peter, and his great-granddaughter, JA, *The Son* deftly explores the legacy of Eli's ruthlessness, his drive to power, and his life-long status as an outsider, even as the McCullough family rises to become one of the richest in Texas, a ranching-and-oil dynasty of unsurpassed wealth and privilege.

***Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel (2014)**

Kirsten Raymonde will never forget the night Arthur Leander, the famous Hollywood actor, had a heart attack on stage during a production of *King Lear*. That was the night when a devastating flu pandemic arrived in the city, and within weeks, civilization as we know it came to an end. Twenty years later, Kirsten moves between the settlements of the altered world with a small troupe of actors and musicians. They call themselves The Traveling Symphony, and they have dedicated themselves to keeping the remnants of art and humanity alive. But when they arrive in St. Deborah by the Water, they encounter a violent prophet who will threaten the tiny band's existence. And as the story takes off, moving back and forth in time, and vividly depicting life before and after the pandemic, the strange twist of fate that connects them all will be revealed.

***The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry* by Gabrielle Zevin (2014)**

A. J. Fikry's life is not at all what he expected it to be. He lives alone, his bookstore is experiencing the worst sales in its history, and now his prized possession, a rare collection of Poe poems, has been stolen. But when a mysterious package appears at the bookstore, its unexpected arrival gives Fikry the chance to make his life over--and see everything anew.

***The Sympathizer* by Viet Thanh Nguyen (2015)**

It is April 1975, and Saigon is in chaos. At his villa, a general of the South Vietnamese army is drinking whiskey and, with the help of his trusted captain, drawing up a list of those who will be given passage aboard the last flights out of the country. The general and his compatriots start a new life in Los Angeles, unaware that one among their number, the captain, is secretly observing and reporting on the group to a higher-up in the Viet Cong. *The Sympathizer* is the story of this captain: a man brought up by an absent French father and a poor Vietnamese mother, a man who went to university in America, but returned to Vietnam to fight for the Communist cause. Viet Thanh Nguyen's astonishing novel takes us inside the mind of this double agent, a man whose lofty ideals necessitate his betrayal of the people closest to him.

***Tell the Wolves I'm Home* by Carol Rifka Brunt (2012)**

1987. There's only one person who has ever truly understood fourteen-year-old June Elbus, and that's her uncle, the renowned painter Finn Weiss. Shy at school and distant from her older sister, June can only be herself in Finn's company; he is her godfather, confidant, and best friend. So when he dies, far too young, of a mysterious illness her mother can barely speak about, June's world is turned upside

down. But Finn's death brings a surprise acquaintance into June's life—someone who will help her to heal, and to question what she thinks she knows about Finn, her family, and even her own heart. At Finn's funeral, June notices a strange man lingering just beyond the crowd. A few days later, she receives a package in the mail. Inside is a beautiful teapot she recognizes from Finn's apartment, and a note from Toby, the stranger, asking for an opportunity to meet. As the two begin to spend time together, June realizes she's not the only one who misses Finn, and if she can bring herself to trust this unexpected friend, he just might be the one she needs the most. An emotionally charged coming-of-age novel, *Tell the Wolves I'm Home* is a tender story of love lost and found, an unforgettable portrait of the way compassion can make us whole again.

***Under the Wide and Starry Sky* by Nancy Horan (2014)**

At the age of thirty-five, Fanny Van de Grift Osbourne has left her philandering husband in San Francisco to set sail for Belgium—with her three children and nanny in tow—to study art. It is a chance for this adventurous woman to start over, to make a better life for all of them, and to pursue her own desires. Not long after her arrival, however, tragedy strikes, and Fanny and her children repair to a quiet artists' colony in France where she can recuperate. Emerging from a deep sorrow, she meets a lively Scot, Robert Louis Stevenson, ten years her junior, who falls instantly in love with the earthy, independent, and opinionated “belle Americaine.” Fanny does not immediately take to the slender young lawyer who longs to devote his life to writing—and who would eventually pen such classics as *Treasure Island* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In time, though, she succumbs to Stevenson's charms, and the two begin a fierce love affair—marked by intense joy and harrowing darkness—that spans the decades and the globe. The shared life of these two strong-willed individuals unfolds into an adventure as impassioned and unpredictable as any of Stevenson's own unforgettable tales.

***Water for Elephants* by Sara Gruen (2006)**

Jacob Janowski's luck had run out--orphaned and penniless, he had no direction until he landed on a rickety train that was home to the Benzini Brothers Most Spectacular Show on Earth. A veterinary student just shy of a degree, he was put in charge of caring for the circus menagerie. It was the Great Depression and for Jacob the circus was both his salvation and a living hell. There he met Marlena, the beautiful equestrian star married to August, the charismatic but brutal animal trainer. And he met Rosie, an untrainable elephant who was the great hope for this third-rate traveling show. The bond that grew among this group of misfits was one of love and trust, and ultimately, it was their only hope for survival.

ADULT NONFICTION

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

In her first memoir, New Yorker cartoonist Roz Chast brings her signature wit to the topic of aging parents. Spanning the last several years of their lives and told through four-color cartoons, family photos, and documents, and a narrative as rife with laughs as it is with tears, Chast's memoir is both comfort and comic relief for anyone experiencing the life-altering loss of elderly parents. While the particulars are Chast-ian in their idiosyncrasies--an anxious father who had relied heavily on his wife for stability as he slipped into dementia and a former assistant principal mother whose overbearing personality had sidelined Roz for decades--the themes are universal: adult children accepting a parental role; aging and unstable parents leaving a family home for an institution; dealing with uncomfortable physical intimacies; and hiring strangers to provide the most personal care. An amazing portrait of two lives at their end and an only child coping as best she can, *Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant?* shows the full range of Roz Chast's talent as cartoonist and storyteller.

***Daughters of the Samurai: A Journey from East to West and Back* by Janice P. Nimura (2015)**

In 1871, five young girls were sent by the Japanese government to the United States. Their mission: learn Western ways and return to help nurture a new generation of enlightened men to lead Japan. Raised in traditional samurai households during the turmoil of civil war, three of these unusual ambassadors—Sutematsu Yamakawa, Shige Nagai, and Ume Tsuda—grew up as typical American schoolgirls. Upon their arrival in San Francisco they became celebrities, their travels and traditional clothing exclaimed over by newspapers across the nation. As they learned English and Western customs, their American friends grew to love them for their high spirits and intellectual brilliance. The passionate relationships they formed reveal an intimate world of cross-cultural fascination and connection. Ten years later, they returned to Japan—a land grown foreign to them—determined to revolutionize women’s education. Based on in-depth archival research in Japan and in the United States, including decades of letters exchanged between the three women and their American host families, *Daughters of the Samurai* is beautifully, cinematically written, a fascinating lens through which to view an extraordinary historical moment.

***Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia* by Elizabeth Gilbert (2006)**

In her early thirties, Elizabeth Gilbert had everything a modern American woman was supposed to want—husband, country home, successful career—but instead of feeling happy and fulfilled, she was consumed by panic and confusion. This wise and rapturous book is the story of how she left behind all these outward marks of success, and set out to explore three different aspects of her nature, against the backdrop of three different cultures: pleasure in Italy, devotion in India, and on the Indonesian island of Bali, a balance between worldly enjoyment and divine transcendence.

***The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot (2010)**

Her name was Henrietta Lacks, but scientists know her as HeLa. She was a poor Southern tobacco farmer who worked the same land as her slave ancestors, yet her cells—taken without her knowledge—became one of the most important tools in medicine. The first “immortal” human cells grown in culture, they are still alive today, though she has been dead for more than sixty years. If you could pile all HeLa cells ever grown onto a scale, they’d weigh more than 50 million metric tons—as much as a hundred Empire State Buildings. HeLa cells were vital for developing the polio vaccine; uncovered secrets of cancer, viruses, and the atom bomb’s effects; helped lead to important advances like in vitro fertilization, cloning, and gene mapping; and have been bought and sold by the billions. Yet Henrietta Lacks remains virtually unknown, buried in an unmarked grave.

***Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* by Laura Hillenbrand (2010)**

In boyhood, Louis Zamperini was an incorrigible delinquent. As a teenager, he channeled his defiance into running, discovering a prodigious talent that had carried him to the Berlin Olympics. But when World War II began, the athlete became an airman, embarking on a journey that led to a doomed flight on a May afternoon in 1943. When his Army Air Forces bomber crashed into the Pacific Ocean, against all odds, Zamperini survived, adrift on a foundering life raft. Ahead of Zamperini lay thousands of miles of open ocean, leaping sharks, thirst and starvation, enemy aircraft, and, beyond, a trial even greater. Driven to the limits of endurance, Zamperini would answer desperation with ingenuity; suffering with hope, resolve, and humor; brutality with rebellion. His fate, whether triumph or tragedy, would be suspended on the fraying wire of his will.

TEEN FICTION

***Paper Towns* by John Green (2008)**

Quentin Jacobsen has spent a lifetime loving the magnificent Margo Roth Spiegelman from afar. So when she cracks open a window and climbs back into his life—summoning him for an ingenious campaign of revenge—he follows. When their all-nighter ends and a new day breaks, Margo has disappeared. But Q soon learns that there are clues—and they’re for him. Embarking on an exhilarating adventure to find her, the closer Q gets, the less he sees the girl he thought he knew.

***Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher (2007)**

Clay Jensen returns home from school to find a strange package with his name on it lying on his porch. Inside he discovers several cassette tapes recorded by Hannah Baker—his classmate and crush—who committed suicide two weeks earlier. Hannah’s voice tells him that there are thirteen reasons why she decided to end her life. Clay is one of them. If he listens, he’ll find out why. Clay spends the night crisscrossing his town with Hannah as his guide. He becomes a firsthand witness to Hannah’s pain, and as he follows Hannah’s recorded words throughout his town, what he discovers changes his life forever.

CHILDREN’S FICTION

***Redwall* by Brian Jacques (1986)**

The question in this first volume is resoundingly clear: What can the peace-loving mice of Redwall Abbey do to defend themselves against Cluny the Scourge and his battle-seasoned army of rats? If only they had the sword of Martin the Warrior, they might have a chance. But the legendary weapon has long been forgotten—except, that is, by the bumbling young apprentice Matthias, who becomes the unlikeliest of heroes. Teeming with riddles, humor, unforgettable characters, and high-bounding adventure, the original *Redwall* was the launching point for a series that has captured the world's attention.

***The Yearling* by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings (1938)**

An instant bestseller when it was released in 1938, this Pulitzer Prize winner has been read and loved by school-age children across the nation for more than fifty years. In this classic story of the Baxter family and their wild, hard, and satisfying life in remote central Florida, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings has written one of the great novels of our times. A rich and varied tale -- tender in its understanding of boyhood, crowded with the excitement of the backwoods hunt, with vivid descriptions of the primitive, beautiful hammock country, written with humor and earthy philosophy -- *The Yearling* is a novel for readers of all ages. Its glowing picture of a life refreshingly removed from modern patterns of living is universal in its revelation of simple courageous people and the beliefs they must live by.

ESPAÑOL

FICCION PARA ADULTOS

***La Casa en Mango Street* escrito por Sandra Cisneros (1991)**

Elogiado por la crítica, admirado por lectores de todas las edades, en escuelas y universidades de todo el país y traducido a una multitud de idiomas, *La Casa en Mango Street* es la extraordinaria historia de Esperanza Cordero. Contado a través de una serie de viñetas —a veces desgarradoras, a veces

profundamente alegres— es el relato de una niña latina que crece en un barrio de Chicago, inventando por sí misma en qué y en quién se convertirá. Pocos libros de nuestra era han conmovido a tantos lectores.

***Los Minutos Negros* escrito por Martín Solares (2010)**

Para resolver el asesinato de un periodista en la calurosa ciudad de Paracuán, Tamaulipas, en el Golfo de México, un policía muy poco inteligente debe investigar un crimen ocurrido veinte años antes. Sin embargo, a medida que se sumerge en los bajos fondos del puerto, empieza a dudar de la identidad del asesino que busca. ¿Será el mismo que mató a aquel grupo de niñas a mediados de los años setenta? ¿Fue el narco incipiente? ¿Un miembro de la siniestra y casi invisible policía secreta que asoló México durante decenios? ¿O sus poco honorables colegas en la comandancia? Por extraño que parezca, el caso parece invocar a la figura del misterioso escritor B. Traven, así como a uno de los mejores detectives de América Latina, el legendario doctor Quiroz Cuarón, a un cantante de música tropical con cara de angelito, a un elemento del FBI con peculiares ideas sobre los extraterrestres y a un inspector desaparecido en tenebrosas circunstancias. Entre el testimonio de un ex policía con un sentido del humor negrísimo y el de un tímido jesuita aficionado al vodka y a la mentira en dosis elevadas, el detective deberá explorar el enigma de su misión, con un agravante: la vida, en esta ciudad tropical, funciona como una oscura sinfonía donde todos los integrantes del coro tienen deudas con la ley.

***Rumbo al Hermoso Norte* escrito por Luis Alberto Urrea (2009)**

Nayeli es una chica de diecinueve años que trabaja en una taquería de tres Camarones, un poblado mexicano. Ve en sueños a su padre, que emigró al norte cuando era niña. Recientemente se ha dado cuenta de que su padre no es el único hombre que se ha ido del pueblo, de hecho, ya casi no quedan hombres, todos se han ido al otro lado, a los Estados Unidos. Un grupo de narcotraficantes también se ha percatado de ese hecho y ven la oportunidad para apoderarse. Pero una noche, durante la exhibición de la película *Los Siete Magníficos*, Nayeli tiene una revelación: Debe dirigirse al norte a reclutar sus propios Siete Magníficos, para que la protejan de los criminales y que ayuden a repoblar Tres Camarones. Ella y sus amigas viajan al norte y en el camino hacia esa extraña y fascinante tierra de sus sueños, ese mítico lugar donde su padre desapareció, van sumando una colección de inusitados y sorprendentes aliados. La meta es un poblado del estado de Illinois, donde Nayeli espera encontrar a su padre y reclutar a sus guerreros. Con suerte, hará realidad también su destino.

(last updated on January 15, 2019)