

BOOK CLUB 2021

Queen of the Desert: Gertrude Bell by Janet Wallace

Nonfiction/Biography • The daughter of a wealthy British industrialist, Gertrude Bell comes of age in Victorian England. Intelligent and eager to escape society's narrow confines, Bell goes off to college and eventually becomes enamored with the Middle East. Her fluency in Arabic facilitates travel on the desert where she encounters Saudi tribes as she makes archaeological discoveries. The knowledge she gains proves valuable to the British military once WWI arrives. A fascinating life and story. ~ Recommended by Jane Rousseau

Memphis library - 3 copies; Germantown library - 0 copies

The Overstory by Richard Powers (from 2020)

Fiction • Author Richard Powers, whose books have examined such complex topics as virtual reality and genetic engineering, creates a compelling story that tries to make sense of the world's destruction by man. Trees play a pivotal role in the telling of this tale, as the cast of nine characters try various means to save the forests. Eye-opening, startling, and for some, the best read they've encountered in the last decade. Winner of 2019 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction. - Recommended by Jane Rousseau

Memphis library - 6 copies; Germantown library - 3 copies

The Library Book by Susan Orlean (from 2020)

Nonfiction • The history and present life of the Los Angeles Public Library. Orlean examines the 1986 fire that nearly destroyed the main library, the search for the arsonist, and the ways in which books were saved. She also explores the myriad of questions librarians routinely field, and reveals some of L.A. Library's more compelling staff members. A masterful tribute to libraries. ~ Recommended by Katherine Getske

Memphis library - 9 copies

Germantown library - 4 copies

From Ireland to India on a Bicycle by Dervla Murphy

Fiction. An epic journey taken by a single, adventurous Irish woman in 1964. Stories of the Arabian Nights read to her by her father when Dervla was a child planted the audacious dream she had that take her on a bike ride through nine countries at a time when women were often not seen traveling alone, particularly through countries like Iran and Afganistan (where she notes the U.S. had just gotten into a war against the U.S.S.R.) She finally made her trek at age 30 and encountered beautiful landscapes and fascinating people. It became the first of many fascinating travel books Murphy went on to pen. Recommended by Jane Schneider

The Nickel Boys by Colson Whitehead

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Fiction • Based on the real story of a reform school in Florida that operated for 111 years and whose cruel practices warped the lives of thousands of boys who were sent there. A devastating, driven narrative that showcases a great American novelist writing at the height of his powers. - Recommended by Bob and Do Kaiser
Memphis library - 10+ copies; Germantown library - 10+ copies

At Home by Bill Bryson

Nonfiction. An examination of the house evolved. Going from the kitchen to the bedroom, the dining room and beyond, Bryson examines the evolution of almost everything— from Thomas Jefferson's contribution to home architecture (it took him 30 years to build Monticello, which he meticulously oversaw), to wallpaper, lawns, plumbing, even cemeteries. You'll learn a little about a lot of interesting stuff.
Recommended by Jane Schneider

The Giver of Stars by Jojo Moyes

Fiction. From the author of *Me Before You*, set in Depression-era America, a breathtaking story of five extraordinary women and their remarkable journey through the mountains of Kentucky and beyond. NY Times Bestseller, Reese Witherspoon selection, and soon to be made a motion picture.

Jack by Marilynne Robinson

Fiction. Named a best book of 2020 by the Australian Book Review, Esquire, the Financial Times, Good Housekeeping (UK), The Guardian, the New Statesman, the New York Public Library, NPR and TIME. Jack is Robinson's fourth novel in the now-classic series of mythical world of Gilead, Iowa—(her earlier novels were *Gilead*, *Home*, and *Lila*.) In it, Robinson tells the story of John Ames Boughton, the prodigal son of Gilead's Presbyterian minister, and his romance with Della Miles, a high school teacher who is also the child of a preacher. Their deeply felt, tormented, star-crossed interracial romance resonates with all the paradoxes of American life, then and now.
Recommended by Janice Hill

The Splendid and the Vile by Erik Larsen

Nonfiction. Named one of the best books of the year by The New York Times Book Review • Time • Vogue • NPR • The Washington Post and others.
Larsen shows, in cinematic detail, how Churchill taught the British people “the art of being fearless” in the first year of WWII, the height of the air war over Britain. Drawing on diaries, original archival documents, and once-secret intelligence reports—some released only recently—Larsen provides a new lens on London's darkest year through the day-to-day experience of Churchill and his family and his closest advisers.
Recommended by Janice Hill

The Last Castle by Denise Kiernan

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Non-fiction. A New York Times bestseller with an "engaging narrative and array of detail" (The Wall Street Journal), the "intimate and sweeping" (Raleigh News & Observer) untold, true story behind the Biltmore Estate—the largest, grandest private residence in North America, which has seen more than 120 years of history pass by its front door. The story of Biltmore spans World Wars, the Jazz Age, the Depression, and generations of the famous Vanderbilt family, and features a captivating cast of real-life characters including F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe, Teddy Roosevelt, John Singer Sargent, James Whistler, Henry James, and Edith Wharton. Recommended by Kathrine Getske.

Consideration for December: Poems from Mary Oliver *Devotions* or another of her poem collections

Idea: Everyone comes to the meeting with one poem that particularly touched them, and be willing to read it and explain why they chose it. If Mary Oliver is not your cup of tea – just come with a poem that is meaningful for you. Recommended by Janice Hill