



BOOK CLUB BOOKS

Below are this summer's Book Club selections. Chosen to represent a range of interests, it is hoped these books will stimulate thought and discussion among our diverse group of readers. As always, your comments and suggestions are welcome.

SUMMER 2006

Acts of Faith by Philip Caputo

The Sudanese civil war of the 1990s is the setting for this sharply observed, Pulitzer Prize winning novel. It depicts the lives of several aid workers, including two Americans intent on finding new purpose in their lives. Outwardly committed to helping the starving rebels who are fighting the hard-line Islamic government, their real agenda is more self-serving. A powerful story of epic proportions.

Broken For You by Stephanie Kallos

Margaret Hughes is an elderly woman living alone in her Seattle mansion when she learns she has a brain tumor. Instead of seeking treatment, she decides to take in a young boarder for company. But Wanda is not what she bargained for. She is a tough-as-nails stage manager still seeking the man who jilted her. As the relationship between these two women blossoms, ghosts from both their pasts complicate events. An offbeat, engaging novel with many memorable characters.

First They Killed My Father by Loung Ung

This riveting memoir by the woman who is now the spokesperson for the Campaign for a Landmine-Free World, puts us right in the center of the Khmer Rouge takeover of Cambodia. Luong Ung was one of seven children of a privileged family until they were forced to flee and separate. Ung was trained as a child soldier, while her parents and several siblings went to forced labor camps. Yet she never lost hope. A courageous story of survival and triumph.

The Glass Castle by Jeannette Walls

An astonishing memoir from the daughter of a brilliant but alcoholic father and a free spirit mother who hated domesticity. Time and again this pair uproot their children, expose them to humiliations and deprivations, and leave them to find their own way in the world. Eventually the parents end up homeless on the streets of New York, by choice. Walls describes what it was like to grow up in such a dysfunctional family, but she never considers herself a victim. Her love for these neglectful, self-absorbed people shines through, and her powerful storytelling pulls us in.

The Ha-Ha by Dave King

Howard is a wounded Vietnam veteran trying to maintain a decent life in spite of his disabilities—he cannot read, write or speak. When his high school girlfriend asks him to take care of her son while she's in rehab, it turns out to be a blessing in disguise. An inspiring novel about the nature of survival and hope.

The History of Love by Nicole Krauss

Spanning a 60 year period, this haunting novel takes readers from Nazi Europe to present day Brighton Beach. At the center of the story are Leo Gursky, a retired locksmith who emigrated after escaping SS officers in Poland, and Alma Singer, a fourteen-year-old who is the center of another family that has suffered. The complex way that these two come together and the surprising plot twists chronicle the triumph of the human spirit.

The Hummingbird's Daughter by Luis Alberto Urrea

This novel recounts the true story of the author's great-aunt Teresita. In 1873, in the turbulent Mexico of that time, she was born out of wedlock. But Teresita becomes a remarkable young woman, worshiped as a "curandera", a folk healer. Dubbed "the Most Dangerous Girl in Mexico" for kindling a revolutionary spirit in her disciples, Teresita's wild, romantic life is told in vivid prose that captures the turmoil of the time.

The Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh

The treacherous but lush Sundarban islands in the Bay of Bengal are the setting for this masterful novel about a young American marine biologist. Piya arrives in the islands to study a rare species of river dolphin. Her ensuing friendship with several locals reveals the violent history of the islands, and the ever present conflict between wildness and civilization. Ghosh explores philosophical questions about man's place in nature while also brilliantly developing a suspenseful drama of romance and survival. This story is especially timely in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami.

The Jungle by Upton Sinclair

This year marks the 100th anniversary of this seminal muckraking novel about the horrors of Chicago's meatpacking industry at the turn of the century. It is the story of Jurgis Rudus, a young immigrant who finds work in the slaughterhouses, places of horrendous working conditions, poverty, disease, and despair.

Rules For Old Men Waiting by Peter Pouncey

Robert MacIver, a retired historian, is planning how to spend his last days after his beloved wife dies. He's living in an unheated, dilapidated house on Cape Cod, in the middle of winter. Realizing he'd like to live out his remaining time with dignity, he decides to formulate "Ten Commandments for Old Men Waiting". One of these is to work every morning, so he takes to writing a short story about WWI, drawing on interviews he conducted with returning veterans many years earlier. This luminous novel is "charged with the excitement of intelligent experience".

She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders by Jennifer Finney Boylan

Boylan began life as a male named James. In this autobiography, she details her lifelong struggle with her burgeoning femininity, and the path she followed to become a woman after living as a man for 40 years. Boylan married and fathered two children before making the change. Transsexuality is at the heart of this story, but don't let that get in your way. This is a story about a person finding her way in life against enormous odds.

A Sudden Country by Karen Fisher

Emma Slavin was eleven years old when her family joined the 1847 Oregon migration. In a mesmerizing novel, Fisher brings to life what it was like to be part of the great wagon trains that helped settle the American West. An amazing story of survival in a beautiful but harsh land, and the liberating feeling of beginning anew.

Take Big Bites: Adventures Around the World and Across the Table by Linda Ellerbee

The author, a TV journalist and writer, has a passion for life accompanied by an equal passion for food and all its cultural significance. She is an amazing traveler, unafraid to venture out solo (she rented a house in Santorini for a month to write this collection of essays). Garlic soup with the expats in Mexico, a celebratory dinner in Rome, and Beluga caviar with Malcolm Forbes aboard his yacht are a few of the fascinating chapters. A witty, honest memoir for foodies and globetrotters.

Voices From Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster by Svetlana Alexievich

In 1986 the worst nuclear reactor accident in history occurred. This collection of haunting, true stories from that tragedy were recorded by a Ukrainian journalist. They reveal the fear and uncertainty, but also the stoic bravery and black humor of those living in a now poisoned world. An important topic for our energy conscious times.

White Ghost Girls by Alice Greenway

This sensual novel about American teenaged sisters growing up in Hong Kong, in the shadow of the Vietnam War, is really about memory and loss. Frankie and Kate could not be more different from each other—Frankie is a rebellious risk taker, while her sister is wary and watchful. Both are caught up in the confusion and passion of their formative years. Against an alluring but dangerous background, pulsing with the vivid colors and sounds of the orient, the two girls' complex relationship plays out.



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