



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 2008

Grace (Eventually): thoughts on faith by Anne Lamott

In this collection of essays, the best-selling author delivers a funny and wise primer on faith and what it means to be fully alive to life's blessings. Never preachy or self-righteous, she knows how to write honestly, with fresh insights into the human condition. Whether discussing the ravages of age, child rearing, or world peace, Lamott pulls you in with her warmth and common sense.

The House That George Built by Wilfrid Sheed

This eloquent homage to the Golden Age of American song will have you wanting to listen to Gershwin and Berlin and Porter all over again. Sheed writes with authority and love, making for a delightful insider's history from one who mingled with the famous and shared their gossip.

How Doctors Think by Jerome Groopman

For every patient who wants to get the best care from their physician, Groopman is a godsend. He is chief of experimental medicine at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, teaches at Harvard Medical School, is a staff writer for the *New Yorker*, and knows how to write with compassion and understanding for the lay person. In this book he offers a window into the mind of the physician and insights into the doctor/patient relationship. He shows why doctors succeed and why they make errors. He also gives practical advice to help patients avoid pitfalls and communicate effectively with their doctor.

Infidel by Ayaan Hirsi Al

In this very affecting memoir, the author tells her extraordinary life story. She takes us on her journey from a traditional Muslim childhood in Somalia to her intellectual awakening in the Netherlands, where she is elected to Parliament, and finally to her life under armed guard after her life is threatened. A courageous, inspiring tale and a powerful feminist critique of Islam from one who has first-hand experience.

The Invisible Wall by Harry Bernstein

The author wrote this moving memoir at the age of ninety-five, about growing up impoverished in an English mill town in the early 1900s. Harry's father spends his meager wages on drink while his mother bravely does everything possible to keep her children warm and clothed and believing in a better future. Then Harry's oldest sister does the worst possible thing: she falls in love with a non-Jew. Subtitled "a love story that broke barriers", it's a tale of family, neighbors, working class struggles, heartache, and the power of dreams.

Little Heathens: hard times and high spirits on an Iowa farm during the great depression by Mildred Armstrong Kalish

Charming and infused with real joy, Kalish's story of growing up on her grandparents' farm in a simpler time is a pleasure. Filled with stories of a close family who flourished despite daily struggles, it also revels in the remembered pleasures of cherished recipes, homemade beauty products, animal husbandry, and plain hard work.

The Maytrees by Annie Dillard

Dillard's novel is the poetic story of an uncommon family living at the very tip of Cape Cod. Toby and Lou Maytree and their circle of friends inhabit mid-century bohemian Provincetown and are one with the dunes and sea surrounding them. They lead simple lives until there is a wrenching betrayal. Nature is rendered in loving prose, while the characters come alive with understated elegance. This is a quiet, lovely meditation on living a life of goodness and being fully aware of the vast beauty of our physical world.

Out Stealing Horses by Per Petterson

Aging widower Tron Sanders, who lives alone on the Norwegian tundra, just wants to take life one step at a time after his wife's death. But his peaceful solitude is broken by the appearance of his only neighbor who he hasn't seen in 50 years. Memories bubble to the surface, centering on his father's World War II activities and a tragic accident in the summer of 1948. The novel shows how one summer can shape a person's life, and how the past informs the present.

The Shadow Catcher by Marianne Wiggins

A *Chicago Tribune* “best book of the year”, this fictionalized account of the life of enigmatic photographer Edward Curtis is luminous. The mysterious, obsessive Curtis was known for his beautiful, brooding photos of the vanishing North American Indians. He also hobnobbed with the rich and famous, like Teddy Roosevelt. Wiggins has written a fast-moving novel with a range of viewpoints and interpretations, from the author’s own alter ego to Curtis’s wife Clara who loved the man and suffered for it.

Strange as This Weather Has Been by Ann Pancake

This novel takes place against the horrific destruction of land and people in the Appalachian coalfields. Lace Ricker finds herself battling both outside forces of ruin and divisive developments within her own family. The mining companies are turning her beloved mountains into dust and toxic sludge but her husband refuses to fight the union bosses and her sons seem destined to get sucked into the maelstrom. The environmental tragedy of modern coal mining is beautifully juxtaposed against the anguish of one family.

Then We Came to the End by Joshua Ferris

A National Book Award finalist, this comic novel explores contemporary office life as one might dissect a family. It’s about survival in one of life’s weirdest environments, a satirical send-up of cubicle culture, but also a very affecting story about work, trust, relationships, and happiness.

The Tin Roof Blowdown by James Lee Burke

Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath provide the backdrop for Burke’s enthralling detective novel of sin and redemption in Louisiana. Detective Robicheaux is assigned the task of investigating the shooting of two looters in a devastated wealthy neighborhood of New Orleans. He soon learns that they have ransacked the home of a mob boss. Burke is adept at creating rich prose and powerful images for a story that pulls the reader in while showcasing all that was wrong or right with the way we responded to this national disaster.

The Vanishing Act of Esme Lennox by Maggie O’Farrell

A young girl disappears. Many years later her great-niece Iris, who never knew she existed, gets a phone call that she is being released from a psychiatric hospital after sixty-one years. Why did Iris’s grandmother claim to be an only child? What other secrets will be uncovered with Esme’s reappearance? O’Farrell weaves a haunting tale of mystery, revenge, and family malice.



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