



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 2010

Both Ways is the Only Way I Want It by Maile Meloy

In these short stories, the author explores the complexity of life in the austere landscape of her native Montana. The collection features tales of loneliness and the desire to connect, ranging from the life of a young cowboy who is smitten by the harried adult education teacher he encounters, to a family whose fragile relationship is thrown into relief by an encounter with a bickering couple. (fiction)

Brooklyn by Colm Toibin

When she leaves Ireland after World War II to work as a bookkeeper in Brooklyn, Ellis discovers romance with a charming Italian. But devastating news threatens her happiness. Toibin adroitly contrasts the vast differences in customs and opportunities between small-town Ireland and big-city New York in the early 1950s. (fiction)

The Brother Gardeners: botany, empire, and the birth of an obsession by Andrea Wulf

In eighteenth-century London, six men who share a passion for plants help make Britain the epicenter of horticulture, and transform gardening from an upper class diversion to a national obsession. Wulf does a dynamic job of conveying the petty rivalries, kooky botanists, and exotic adventures that went into elevating a humble pursuit into the art of modern gardening. (nonfiction)

Cutting for Stone by Abraham Verghese

Two brothers, born in Ethiopia to a beautiful Indian nun, are forever linked through love for the same woman and a passion for medicine. As the years pass, a terrible betrayal sends one brother to work at a hospital in the poverty-stricken Bronx, where the past inevitably catches up with him. A sweeping, multi-generational saga, made even more powerful by the medical and political elements woven into the story. (fiction)

Farm City by Novella Carpenter

The author's squatter's vegetable garden in a run down section of Oakland, CA somehow evolves into adventures in bee, pig, and poultry keeping. An enchanting memoir that will remind readers of Annie Dillard's lyricism, combined with inner-city gumption. (nonfiction)

Half the Sky by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn

The Pulitzer prize-winning authors present their vision for improving the appalling treatment of women in the developing world. Instead of just presenting moral reasons, this husband and wife team, reporters for The New York Times, show the economic benefits of empowering women. Colorful stories at the grassroots level highlight both the tragedy and potential of individuals caught in our age's worst human rights violations. (nonfiction)

Land of Marvels by Barry Unsworth

A grand historical novel set in the region that would become present-day Iraq. On the eve of World War I, a British archeologist finds his precious temple excavations threatened by a new rail construction project which will open supply lines to rich oil fields and other possible war supplies. As tensions grow, so do shady dealings, ambition, and greed. In rich prose, Booker Prize-winning Unsworth has created an absorbing cautionary tale with relevance to the current problems in the Middle East. (fiction)

Lark and Termite by Jayne Anne Phillips

Teenager Lark spends her days caring for her brother, a child unable to walk and talk, but gifted when it comes to seeing and feeling. Orphaned by the Korean War, they are being raised by their aunt in a small West Virginia town where secrets and ghostly appearances leave their mark. Sensitive drawn characters and poignant themes of family ties and the power of love will keep readers enthralled. (fiction)

Little Bee by Chris Cleave

Two women from very different backgrounds form an unlikely friendship. Little Bee is a Nigerian refugee and Sarah a London magazine editor, newly widowed. They had first met in frightening circumstances on a beach in Nigeria, and the ramifications from that tragic encounter haunt their lives. This novel uses intelligence and humor to portray thorny moral dilemmas, the plight of immigrants, and the consequences of deep emotional attachments. (fiction)

Menonite in a Little Black Dress by Rhoda Janzen

Wasn't it bad enough that Janzen's husband left her for someone he met on Gay.com? Apparently not, because the next week she was injured in a car accident. So she returns to her quirky Menonite family to heal and try to get her life back on track. Written with wit and humor, touching on faith, family, love, and aging, this is a funny and moving memoir. (nonfiction)

Perfectly Imperfect: a life in progress by Lee Woodruff

As the wife of journalist Bob Woodruff, who sustained an horrific injury while reporting from Iraq, the author has certainly dealt with tragedy. In this memoir she focuses on family and parenting, bringing an extraordinary amount of wisdom and humor to stories that range from how swimming each morning has helped keep her grounded to the challenges of her daughter's early deafness diagnosis. Woodruff's self-deprecating modesty makes her seem like someone you'd want as a dear friend. (nonfiction)

Wanting by Richard Flanagan

After becoming governor of a Tasmanian penal colony, the famous Arctic explorer Sir John Franklin and his wife adopt a young Aboriginal girl, hoping to prove that all humans, even savages, can be civilized. Ten years later, in a twist of fate, Sir John's widow engages none other than Charles Dickens to help her defend her husband's honor from accusations of cannibalism. This complex historical novel takes the reader on an imaginative journey to the heart of desire. (fiction)

The Weight of Heaven by Thrity Umrigar

Losing their only child to a sudden illness, the Bentons decide to accept a job offer in India, hoping the drastic change will help heal them. But Frank Benton's relationship with the young son of their housekeeper undermines the Benton's fragile marriage, and the vast cultural divide they encounter does further damage. Umrigar is a writer of rare insight, using her storytelling gifts to fashion a novel that reaches into the depths of human emotion. (fiction)



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