



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 2013

Brain on Fire: My Month of Madness by Susannah Cahalan

Journalist Cahalan details the insanity episode that changed her life. At first, the author's strange behavior, including memory loss and paranoia, seemed symptomatic of overwork. But her lack of physical control and self-destructive behavior worsened and a string of misdiagnoses only added to the horror. Luckily, a top neurologist was able to figure out what was wrong and with his help and a supportive family Cahalan recovered. This fast-paced, absorbing tale of a medical mystery includes fascinating material on the science of the brain and abnormal psychology. (nonfiction)

Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America by Gilbert King

In July 1949, four black men in Florida were accused of raping a white woman. By the time Marshall joined the case, one of the defendants - who had fled into the swamps - had been "lawfully killed." After a trial of the remaining three, two were sentenced to death, and one to life imprisonment. On Marshall's appeal, the Supreme Court ordered a new trial for the two on death row. King makes a riveting page-turner from this often overlooked but important case, with its accuser, whose testimony was false; defendants, who suffered terribly as a consequence; local police officials and lawyers who persecuted and prosecuted them; and their lawyers, who showed great courage and commitment in seeking justice. Winner of the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in nonfiction and nominated for an Edgar Award. (nonfiction)

A Disposition to Be Rich: Ferdinand Ward, the Greatest Swindler of the Gilded Age by Geoffrey C. Ward

Ward's great-grandfather established himself as the "Young Napoleon of Finance" during a time of rampant political corruption and great social inequality. He was the son of a Protestant missionary, yet his villainy grew to include bankrupting Ulysses S. Grant while running a seedy pyramid scheme. Mistresses, crooked bankers, and corrupt officials populate this timely story of a classic American con artist. (nonfiction)

The End of Your Life Book Club by Will Schwalbe

Schwalbe and his mother formed a book club while waiting for her cancer treatments. As they discuss what they're reading, their already strong relationship becomes deeper and more is revealed about each of their lives. Will's love and respect for his mother shine through in the story of a remarkable woman who at one point helped to build libraries in Afghanistan. With many years of book-publishing experience, Schwalbe quickly introduces the books themselves and lets us in on mother and son's discussions on issues of faith, family, courage, life and dying. The power of books for them eases an emotional journey. This is not a sad book, but a moving story of love, hope, and acceptance, enhanced by an eclectic selection of books. (nonfiction)

The Garden of Evening Mists by Twan Eng Tan

Winner of the 2012 Man Asian Literary Prize and a finalist for the Booker Prize, this haunting novel takes place in Malaya in 1951. An unexpected relationship develops between a war-scarred woman and an exiled Japanese gardener, leading them on a journey through painful memories to find solace and peace. Compassionate and poetic, a deceptively quiet novel whose eloquence will resonate with readers. (fiction)

The Light Between Oceans by M. L. Stedman

On a remote Australian island nearly a century ago, a lighthouse keeper and his beloved wife endure several miscarriages and see their dream of a family fade. Then miraculously a rowboat washes ashore with a baby inside. When they decide to raise the child as their own, telling no one the truth, the seeds of a powerful love and a profound tragedy are sown. Difficult moral dilemmas, achingly sympathetic characters, a riveting mystery, and a beautiful setting make this a stunning page-turner. (fiction)

The Middlesteins by Jami Attenberg

A multigenerational novel about a Chicago family. Shifting points of view tell the story of the breakup and aftermath of Edie and Richard Middlestein's 40-year marriage. Smart, generous, and voracious in every way, Edie is a lawyer who loves food and work more than her pharmacist husband. After Edie loses her job and tips past the 300-pound mark, she becomes a medical crisis waiting to happen. Finally galvanized into action, her in-denial family is both helpful and dysfunctional. Attenberg has a great capacity to create familiar, believable characters, including the chef who owns foodaholic Edie's favorite Chinese restaurant. With hilarity and anguish, romance and feuding, this is an irresistible family portrait with deeper social issues in play. (fiction)

The Orphan Master's Son by Adam Johnson

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and lauded as one of the best books of the year by many news outlets. Johnson sets his novel in North Korea, putting a human face on a place that we know so little about. Pak Jun Do was raised in an orphanage but is actually the son of the influential man who runs the place. In a nation in which every citizen serves the state, orphans routinely get the most dangerous jobs. So Jun Do enters into a life of espionage and kidnapping, only to be given a new identity as the husband of the Dear Leader's favorite actress. Johnson's hero makes his way through a minefield of corruption and violence, eventually giving his all so that the woman he loves might have a better life. The story reads like a fast-paced political thriller, with a glimpse into the amazingly conflicted world that exists in the secret confines of North Korea. (fiction)

The Sandcastle Girls by Chris Bohjalian

In 1915 Elizabeth Endicott, young and inexperienced, volunteers to help deliver food and medical aid to refugees of the Armenian Genocide. Arriving in Aleppo, Syria, she meets an Armenian engineer who has lost his family in the horror and they embark on a difficult love affair. Their story is told through the eyes of their American granddaughter. After seeing an exhibit of photographs of the Armenian victims, she discovers letters and photos and begins to piece together her great-grandparents' story. Soon "the slaughter you know next to nothing about" takes over her life, unearthing a startling secret that has been buried for generations. Bohjalian has created a powerful story of love and war and the ways in which the past informs the present. (fiction)

The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry by Rachel Joyce

Newly retired, Harold Fry has lived a life of dull routine until the arrival of an unexpected letter changes everything. This letter confronts Harold with a painful part of his past and threatens his already troubled marriage. He embarks on a 600-mile walk through the English countryside to right a wrong and events cast into doubt everything he thinks he knows about himself. Along the way Harold gains profound insights into his life. Charming and wise. (fiction)

Watergate by Thomas Mallon

A finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award, this retelling of the Watergate scandal is compelling historical fiction. Seen through an entertaining rogue's gallery of colorful characters, Mallon's human comedy delves into the weirdness and strange mysteries at the center of this shameful episode. He captures perfectly the mix of unbridled ambition, ineptitude, and hubris while portraying the 37th president's downfall in surprisingly touching ways. (fiction)

Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail by Cheryl Strayed

The author was twenty-two when her mother died and her own marriage began crumbling. Four years later, feeling like there was nothing more to lose, she made an impulsive decision; with no training or experience, she decided to hike more than a thousand miles of the Pacific Crest Trail, from the Mojave Desert to Washington State, alone. Suspenseful and humorous, terrifying and joyful, this story of one woman's strength against all odds will inspire. (nonfiction)



Wilmette Public Library
1242 Wilmette Avenue
Wilmette, IL 60091
(847)256-5025
<http://www.wilmette.lib.il.us>