



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 2014

After Visiting Friends by Michael Hainey

Hainey was only six when his father, the “Night Slot Man” for the *Chicago Sun Times* at a time when reporters were known for being out at all hours and drinking heavily, died under mysterious circumstances. This is the story of the son’s obsession with uncovering the reality behind all the secrecy and lies, of finding out what kind of man his father really was, and of how the truth transforms Hainey’s relationships with his mother and other family members. A beautiful memoir that reads like a great mystery while shining a light on a bygone era of hard-driving Chicago journalism. (nonfiction)

Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Ifemelu and Obinze’s schoolyard friendship blossoms into love. Then Ifemelu earns a scholarship to an American college. Obinze intends to join her after his graduation, but he’s denied a U.S. visa. He manages to get to London where his plight is typical of illegal immigrants there: he uses another man’s ID so he can find menial, under the radar work, losing his dignity and self-respect. The final blow comes when he’s arrested and deported home. Meanwhile Ifemelu confronts similar humiliations and indignities. Her decision to return home to Nigeria (where she risks being designated as an affected “Americanah”) is the turning point in this passionate love story and an illuminating portrait of a country still in turmoil. Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award. (fiction)

Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity by Katherine Boo

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Boo presents an intimate portrait of the wrenching lives of the inhabitants of Annawadi, a slum situated across from Mumbai’s spanking new airport. Among them is Abdul, a young trash picker with a profitable trade in recyclables and one-legged Fatima whose home is divided from Abdul’s by merely a sheet. The author follows the treacherous paths of these and other lives as a chain of events leads to a criminal case against Abdul and his family. Boo lived among these inhabitants for three years, allowing her and the reader to know them and admire their fierce intelligence and survival tactics in a world that wishes to forget about them. Winner of the National Book Award. (nonfiction)

The Bookman’s Tale by Charlie Lovett

A mysterious portrait captures the interest of an antiquarian bookseller who is struggling with grief at his wife’s death. When Peter Byerly stumbles across a small watercolor of a woman who looks very much like his late wife, he goes on the hunt to find the origins of the painting, leading him first to its Victorian provenance and then even further into the world of Shakespeare. A great story for anyone who enjoys a suspenseful literary mystery, a delightful love story, or is a lover of rare books. (fiction)

The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Olympics by Daniel Brown

A group of University of Washington students with working class backgrounds became the rowing team that rose from obscurity to defeat a field of elite international rivals in Nazi Berlin. Not only sports fans will love this fast-paced, emotionally charged “Cinderella story” set against the dark days of the Depression and Hitler. (nonfiction)

A Constellation of Vital Phenomena by Anthony Marra

This novel takes place during the decade from 1996 to 2004, beginning with the arrival of Russian soldiers in a small rural village in Chechnya. The three key characters are Akhmed, an incompetent doctor with a good heart, Sonja, a bone-weary surgeon who labors each day at a bombed-out hospital that serves as the only respite for those who have been injured, and Havaa, an eight-year-old girl who has already been forced to endure and lose too much. Marra’s epic tale of another historical tragedy beautifully renders the ways in which we long to connect and the lengths we will go to endure and even find love among the ruins. A National Book Critics Circle Award winner. (fiction)

Fever by Mary Beth Keane

In 1883, Irish immigrant Mary Mallon arrives in New York eager to better herself through hard work as a cook. Success seems within reach when she’s hired by a wealthy Manhattan family, but then her employers fall violently ill. She flees, but the pattern repeats itself and the death toll rises until the New York Department of Health catches up to her. Dubbed “Typhoid Mary,” the city’s notorious patient zero is placed under quarantine and spends the rest of her life alternately campaigning for her freedom and attempting to return to the work she loves, a dangerous proposition for anyone who comes in contact with her. An emotionally suspenseful historical novel that shines a light on a bygone era. (fiction)

The Girls of Atomic City by Denise Kiernan

Living and working with thousands of others in a secret city built almost overnight, the mountains of Tennessee became home to a select group of women recruited at top-dollar wages for positions from chemists to couriers. Sworn to strict secrecy protocols, they were told only that their work would ensure a swift, final World War II victory but they were unaware that they were contributing to the most revolutionary scientific discovery of the 20th century. The story moves between the individual narratives of the women workers and the development of atomic fusion. Kiernan gives readers a greater understanding of the larger historical context while capturing the spirit of women's wartime opportunities and their sacrifices. (nonfiction)

Longbourn by Jo Baker

The servants of the Bennett household are the center of the drama in this engrossing re-imagining of *Pride and Prejudice*. At the heart of the novel is the budding romance between James, the handsome new footman with a secret connection to Longbourn and Sara, the pretty housemaid. Baker vividly evokes the lives of the lower classes in nineteenth-century England and creates a moving literary tribute to Jane Austen, free of gimmickry. (fiction)

The Lowland by Jhumpa Lahiri

The young Mitra brothers are inseparable even though Subhash is serious and cautious while Udayan is a passionate risk-taker. After growing up in a quiet, comfortable Calcutta enclave they take very different paths as adults. Tragedy strikes one brother, leaving the other to pick up the pieces and forever altering the course of his own life. Lahiri raises universal issues of family love, commitment to one's beliefs, guilt, and responsibility in this lyrical, haunting and profound story. (fiction)

Mary Coin by Marisa Silver

Dorothea Lange's famous Depression era photograph entitled *Migrant Mother* is the inspiration for this remarkable novel. Silver reimagines the lives of both the photographer and her subject. Mary Coin is a young mother grappling with severe economic realities while Vera Dare, the brilliant artist, faces demons and life-altering decisions of her own. Both women are portrayed with grace and wisdom while the plot moves back and forth through time to reveal the photograph's hidden truths and its impact on later generations. (fiction)

Once We Were Brothers by Ronald H. Balson

The revered wealthy philanthropist Elliot Rosenzweig is shockingly accused of having been a Nazi SS officer. It seems preposterous but his accuser, Solomon, is dead serious and hires a lawyer to bring him to justice. This tale of two boys who were once as close as brothers and what they did to survive in war-torn Poland converges sixty years later in a tense and powerful story of love, honor, and the triumph of the human spirit. At the same time it is an entertaining legal thriller with a Chicago backdrop. (fiction)

Tenth of December: Stories by George Saunders

Saunders considers himself a disciple of Twain and Vonnegut and his stories certainly display the biting satire to prove it. In his latest collection he brings to life the fantasies of his beleaguered characters, surprising readers with the intensity of their inner emotions. In one story he taps into the secret wells of anger beneath ordinary families as he portrays parents anxious to declaw their children but also to be more loving parents than their own had been. In another a father decorates a tall pole in the front yard for holiday celebrations but when the man's wife dies he begins to decorate it in bizarre ways. These are often subtly funny, complex tales that plumb the absurdity of life. (fiction)

We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves by Karen Joy Fowler

18-year-old Rosemary has come of age in middle America, but the Cooke family is anything but ordinary. That is because Rosemary's beloved sister Fern is a chimpanzee. When Fern disappeared and then her brother also vanished, Rosemary wrapped herself in silence. Now in college, she takes up with a sexy but dangerous boyfriend who forces her to confront her strange past. This is a gripping, caustically funny, thought provoking story of loving but imperfect people whose best intentions lead to heart-breaking consequences. Winner of the PEN/Faulkner award. (fiction)



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