



# BOOK CLUB BOOKS

*Below are this winter'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.*

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## WINTER 2008

### **Climbing the Mango Trees** by Madhur Jaffrey

The actress and authority on Indian food writes of her own childhood as one of six children in a well-to-do family in Delhi. Starting with her grandmother's placing honey on her tongue when she was born, Jaffrey's memories center around the food that was part of her Hindu culture. She also vividly remembers scenes from India's history, the turbulent partition in the 1940s, the political strife that made friendships between Hindus and Muslims impossible, and the exotic monsoon climate. She includes favorite recipes.

### **The Echo Maker** by Richard Powers

Set in rural Nebraska, Powers' novel, which won the National Book Award, has several ambitious themes: how the cognitive brain works and can be damaged, the majesty of nature, complicated human relationships, and how we perceive ourselves. The story revolves around Mark Schluter, a young man whose head injuries from a mysterious car accident leave him unable to recognize his sister, Karin. She is desperate to cure him, so enlists the help of a famous neurologist, Gerald Weber (think Oliver Sachs). As he becomes involved in Mark's case, his own personal and academic journey become an important part of the story. A fascinating look at the complexity of human life, the brain, and the forces of nature.

### **The Eighth Promise** by William Poy Lee

If you enjoyed *The Color of Water* by James McBride, you'll want to read this beautifully written memoir of another mother and son relationship, this time from the Chinese American immigrant experience. Lee's rich story covers events from the ancient Chinese farming village of his mother's youth to the housing projects of San Francisco's Chinatown. Told in the voices of both mother and son, it is a gripping tale of betrayal, survival, triumph, and love.

### **The Emperor's Children** by Claire Messud

As three friends from their days at Brown University near 30, they struggle to find their places in the larger canvas of New York around the time of September 11. Danielle hopes to make it as a television producer, Julius barely makes a living as a gay freelance critic, and beautiful Marina, daughter of a famous social activist, can't seem to complete her book on the cultural significance of children's clothing.

When Marina's idealistic cousin "Bootie" arrives, he threatens to blow everything apart. Messud is a witty and wicked observer of pretensions in this comedy of manners.

**The Ghost Map** by Steven Johnson

Both medical thriller and vivid evocation of the city of London in the mid-1800s, Johnson tells the terrifying story of an unstoppable cholera outbreak. As the epidemic widened, an ingenious doctor and a local curate worked to solve the mystery of how the disease spreads. It is a colorful tale, from Dickensian squalor to how modern cities evolved, and how scientific inquiry has shaped the world we live in.

**Imperial Life in the Emerald City** by Rajiv Chandrasekaran

This bestseller is a revealing account of the postwar administration of Iraq, by a former Baghdad bureau chief for the *Washington Post*. He focuses on the Green Zone, the American enclave that is an oasis in the middle of chaos. Here an occupational administration, selected for its loyalty to the Bush government, gets most things wrong, like having the Muslim staff serve pork at every meal, spending time revamping the Iraqi tax code, and mounting an anti-smoking campaign while Baghdad burns. The author's portrait of misplaced idealism is evenhanded, using personal touches to bring home the larger implications of this story of disillusionment.

**My Latest Grievance** by Elinor Lipman

Known for her sharp wit and keen social observations, here Lipman takes on the subject of coming of age in the radical 1960s and 70s. Frederica's parents are college professors and have raised her to be a free spirit and the school pet. But when she becomes a teenager, she feels they are "the most annoyingly evenhanded parental team in the history of civilization", and she longs to escape her stifling life. Then everything changes with the arrival on campus of a new dorm mother, the glamorous Laura Lee French. The author delivers an enchanting story of conflicting moralities and allegiances.

**Restless** by William Boyd

This novel won the Costa (formerly Whitbread) Prize. It is an absorbing historical thriller, based on the story of a covert branch of British intelligence, created to try to get the United States to enter World War II. Someone tries to kill Sally Gilmartin, three decades after she worked as a spy. She now lives a quiet life in the Cotswolds, but is compelled to tell her daughter, Ruth, the truth about her past. She does so in written installments that describe how she was recruited and trained by another spy who becomes her lover. Ruth barely has time to process the shock of her mother's true identity before she too is drawn into the race to find out who wants her mother dead.



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