



# 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 2009

### **Away** by Amy Bloom

After her family is killed in a Russian pogrom, Lillian Leyb journeys to New York. The year is 1924 and Lillian is 22. She gets a job as a seamstress for the Goldfaden Yiddish Theatre and is befriended by one of the actors, Yaakov. When word arrives that Lillian's young daughter may still be alive, Yaakov helps her to search throughout America in her quest to find Sophie. A familiar immigrant chronicle becomes an extraordinary saga of endurance and rebirth.

### **Breakfast with Buddha** by Roland Merullo

A road novel with a difference. When Otto's parents are killed in a car crash, his New Age sister, Cecilia, decides to sell her half of the inherited farm to her guru, and asks Otto to drive him across the country to the farm. Otto, the skeptic, is incensed, but agrees. As they travel through the small towns of middle America, secularist Otto makes discoveries about the nature of the guru, and about himself. Often hilarious, this joyous treatment of spiritual material is a delight.

### **Last Night at the Lobster** by Stewart O'Nan

O'Nan has been called the "bard of the working class" and this novel is no exception. On the last day of business for a chain restaurant, the store's dedicated manager, Manny DeLeon, wants to end by sticking by his commitment to perfection, but everything seems to conspire against him. With a cast of complex characters and a big heart, this is a story about everyday life in late 20th century America.

### **Mister Pip** by Lloyd Jones

In the early 1990s war rages on a tiny island near New Guinea. All the whites have fled except Mr. Watts, who is married to a mysterious local woman. When he offers to take over teaching duties at the village school, he begins by reading *Great Expectations* to the class. The book becomes a refuge, an escape to another place for the children. This haunting fable explores the power and pitfalls of art, while also capturing the intricacies of human relationships.

### **The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court** by Jeffrey Toobin

This absorbing group profile is based on exclusive interviews with the idiosyncratic men and women justices. From Kennedy's sense of his own importance to Souter's strange old-fashioned lifestyle, and Sandra Day O'Connor's evolution as the powerful swing-voter, the author deftly distills issues and gives us a lively view of the Court's internal workings and the impact of their personalities on important case decisions.

**Oil on the Brain: Petroleum's Long, Strange Trip to Your Tank** by Lisa Margonelli

In her smart, funny, and surreal account of the oil industry, the author takes us on a one-hundred-thousand mile journey from the local gas station to a Texas drilling rig to a Nigerian warlord who changes oil prices from his cell phone. By making the links in the global oil chain come alive through the voices of the people involved, Margonelli proves herself to be a brilliant reporter on a topic with the potential for dire consequences.

**Wandering Star** by J. M. G. Le Clezio

This year's Nobel prize winner for literature, Le Clezio is a French novelist who often writes tales of survival that are realistic and at the same time hauntingly romantic. This novel tells the story of two young women uprooted by the Holocaust. Esther survives the ordeal and makes her way to the new state of Israel. But as she nears her destination, she passes a group of equally desperate and displaced refugees, including Nejma, a Palestinian girl. Finely tuned to the paradoxes and problems of life, the author writes with deep compassion and admiration for the human spirit.

**The White Tiger** by Aravind Adiga

Winner of the Man Booker Prize, this black comedy follows the transformation of one Indian taxi driver from an honest, hardworking but poor man into an entrepreneurial murderer. Where does his rage come from? Adiga uses his philosophical protagonist to write an absorbing story about social and economic injustice, and about finding decency in a corrupt world.

**The World Without Us** by Alan Weisman

What would the earth be like if human beings suddenly disappeared? This is the premise of Weisman's astonishing, revelatory report, combining science and speculation. From New York City's subways filling with water and trees sprouting from streets, to petrochemical sites igniting, or bird and fish populations burgeoning to create another Eden, this is an environmental book that is entertaining without being overwrought or chiding.



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