

BOOK CLUB SELECTIONS for 2021-2022

All the reviews below are adapted from Amazon Reviews.

September 27, 2021

The Thursday Murder Club : Richard Osman. 2020. 368p.

In a peaceful retirement village, four unlikely friends meet weekly in the Jigsaw Room to discuss unsolved crimes; together they call themselves the Thursday Murder Club. When a local developer is found dead with a mysterious photograph left next to the body, the Thursday Murder Club suddenly find themselves in the middle of their first live case. As the bodies begin to pile up, can our unorthodox but brilliant gang catch the killer, before it's too late?

October 25, 2021

Lustrum : Robert Harris. 2010. 464p.

It is 63 BC, the year when Cicero is consul. Most of his time in office is devoted to uncovering and thwarting a violent conspiracy to overthrow the state, ostensibly led by Crassus and a group of disaffected senators. Underlying it all is the great rivalry between Cicero and Caesar who represent two different types of ambition: one orthodox, the other revolutionary. As Caesar's power grows, Cicero must face the inevitable compromises that come with power; is it justifiable to use illegal methods in order to save the Republic?

November 22, 2021

The Sympathizer : Viet Thanh Nguyen. 2015. 384p. Pulitzer Prize Winner

The winner of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, as well as seven other awards, *The Sympathizer* is the breakthrough novel of the year. With the pace and suspense of a thriller and prose that has been compared to Graham Greene and Saul Bellow, *The Sympathizer* is a sweeping epic of love and betrayal. The narrator, a communist double agent, is a "man of two minds," a half-French, half-Vietnamese army captain who arranges to come to America after the Fall of Saigon, and while building a new life with other Vietnamese refugees in Los Angeles is secretly reporting back to his communist superiors in Vietnam. *The Sympathizer* is a blistering exploration of identity and America, a gripping espionage novel, and a powerful story of love and friendship.

December 20, 2021

O Pioneers : Willa Cather. 1913. 116p.

Willa Cather's classic tale of the Bergson family, Swedish-American immigrants making their way as farmers in Nebraska at the turn of the 20th Century. O Pioneers! is the first book in Cather's so-called "Prairie Trilogy" or "Great Plains Trilogy", followed by *The Song of the Lark* and *My Antonia*.

January 24, 2022

Howard's End : E M Forster. 1910. 246p.

Howards End is a novel by E. M. Forster, first published in 1910, about social conventions, codes of conduct and relationships in turn-of-the-century England. Howards End is considered by many to be Forster's masterpiece. The book was conceived in June

1908 and worked on throughout the following year; it was completed in July 1910. The story revolves around three families in England at the beginning of the 20th century: the Wilcoxes, rich capitalists with a fortune made in the colonies; the half-German Schlegel siblings (Margaret, Helen, and Tibby), whose cultural pursuits have much in common with the Bloomsbury Group; and the Basts, an impoverished young couple from a lower-class background. The idealistic, intelligent Schlegel sisters seek to help the struggling Basts and to rid the Wilcoxes of some of their deep-seated social and economic prejudices.

February 28, 2022

Hidden Valley Road : Inside the Mind of an American Family : Robert Kolker. 2020. 400p.

Don and Mimi Galvin seemed to be living the American dream. After World War II, Don's work with the Air Force brought them to Colorado, where their twelve children perfectly spanned the baby boom: the oldest born in 1945, the youngest in 1965. In those years, there was an established script for a family like the Galvins--aspiration, hard work, upward mobility, domestic harmony--and they worked hard to play their parts. But behind the scenes was a different story: psychological breakdown, sudden shocking violence, hidden abuse. By the mid-1970s, six of the ten Galvin boys, one after another, were diagnosed as schizophrenic. How could all this happen to one family?

What took place inside the house on Hidden Valley Road was so extraordinary that the Galvins became one of the first families to be studied by the National Institute of Mental Health. Their story offers a shadow history of the science of schizophrenia, from the era of institutionalization, lobotomy, and the schizophrenogenic mother to the search for genetic markers for the disease, always amid profound disagreements about the nature of the illness itself.

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March 28, 2022

The Rose Code : Kate Quinn. 2021. 656p.

1940. As England prepares to fight the Nazis, three very different women answer the call to mysterious country estate Bletchley Park, where the best minds in Britain train to break German military codes. Vivacious debutante Osla is the girl who has everything—beauty, wealth, and the dashing Prince Philip of Greece sending her roses—but she burns to prove herself as more than a society girl, and puts her fluent German to use as a translator of decoded enemy secrets. Imperious self-made Mab, product of east-end London poverty, works the legendary codebreaking machines as she conceals old wounds and looks for a socially advantageous husband. Both Osla and Mab are quick to see the potential in local village spinster Beth, whose shyness conceals a brilliant facility with puzzles, and soon Beth spreads her wings as one of the Park's few female cryptanalysts. But war, loss, and the impossible pressure of secrecy will tear the three apart.

April 25, 2022

The Bad Muslim Discount : Syed Masood. 2021. 368p.

It is 1995, and Anvar Faris is a restless, rebellious, and sharp-tongued boy doing his best to grow up in Karachi, Pakistan. As fundamentalism takes root within the social order

and the zealots next door attempt to make Islam great again, his family decides, not quite unanimously, to start life over in California. Ironically, Anvar's deeply devout mother and his model-Muslim brother adjust easily to life in America, while his fun-loving father can't find anyone he relates to. For his part, Anvar fully commits to being a bad Muslim. At the same time, thousands of miles away, Safwa, a young girl living in war-torn Baghdad with her grief-stricken, conservative father will find a very different and far more dangerous path to America. When Anvar and Safwa's worlds collide as two remarkable, strong-willed adults, their contradictory, intertwined fates will rock their community, and families, to their core.

May 23, 2022

Facing the Mountain : A True Story of Japanese-American Heroes in WWII :

Daniel James Brown. 2021. 832p. (but many are in the biblio)

They came from across the continent and Hawaii. Their parents taught them to embrace both their Japanese heritage and the ways of America. They faced bigotry, yet they believed in their bright futures as American citizens. But within days of Pearl Harbor, the FBI was ransacking their houses and locking up their fathers. And within months many would themselves be living behind barbed wire.

Facing the Mountain is an unforgettable chronicle of war-time America and the battlefields of Europe. Based on Daniel James Brown's extensive interviews with the families of the protagonists as well as deep archival research, it portrays the kaleidoscopic journey of four Japanese-American families and their sons, who volunteered for 442nd Regimental Combat Team and were deployed to France, Germany, and Italy, where they were asked to do the near impossible.