

2026 Summer Reading List

"What if?"

Dear Maverick Collective community,

What if the most powerful thing we could do this summer was let ourselves believe in something that doesn't yet exist?

We have been sitting with that question, not as a thought experiment, but as a genuine provocation for how we move through this moment. At Maverick Collective, we refuse to accept that the world's problems can't be fixed. We are driven by the power of possibility. We are ignited by the belief that the answers are already out there, if only we widen our imaginations and ask questions in different ways.

SO MUCH OF WHAT WE NOW CONSIDER INEVITABLE WAS ONCE CONSIDERED IMPOSSIBLE. RIGHTS THAT WERE WON, SYSTEMS THAT WERE REMADE, FUTURES THAT WERE BUILT. BEFORE ANY OF IT CHANGED, SOMEONE HAD TO IMAGINE THAT IT COULD AND DARE TO ASK, "WHAT IF?"

This year's summer reading list opens with our spotlight pick: *What If We Get It Right? Visions of Climate Futures* by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson. This is not a book about what we are losing, but about what we are capable of building. We think that is exactly the right place to start.

From there, the books on this list provoke us to keep asking what if? in different ways. Some slow us down to find the astonishing in the ordinary; some question the rules and who made them; and some inspire us to imagine what doesn't yet exist, but is entirely within reach. There is also a shelf for the young readers in our lives. At the end, our favorite part, we have recommendations from our Maverick members — generous and wide-ranging, just like this community.

Read one. Read all. Read with your kids, your book club, your best friend, or your own quiet self somewhere with good light and good vibes. And if something cracks open, tell us. These lists are always better when they become a conversation.

Here's to a summer full of questions.

With love,

Darley & Rena
Maverick Collective

P.S. If you're purchasing books, we encourage you to support your local bookstore or use [Bookshop.org](https://bookshop.org), where all titles are linked and every purchase supports indie shops. Or check out your local library, another place of wonder and possibilities.

Our 2026 Book Spotlight

What If We Get It Right?: Visions of Climate Futures

by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson

What if the story we have been telling about the climate crisis, the one full of doom, grief, and impossible odds, is simply the wrong story? Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, marine biologist, policy expert, and one of the most recognized climate voices of our time, asks us to try a different question: not what are we losing, but what could we build?

Drawing together scientists, economists, artists, Indigenous thinkers, and activists from around the world, Johnson moves beyond fear and into possibility. She doesn't look away from the scale of the challenge. Instead, she argues, with rigor and warmth, that most of what we

need to address it already exists. The tools are real. The solutions are knowable. What she examines is the gap between what is possible and what we have collectively chosen to pursue.

This is a book about climate solutions told through the voices of people working on them. Johnson's central premise is itself a What If?: that we already have enough to get this right, if we choose to believe it is worth fighting for. Read it and feel something shift.



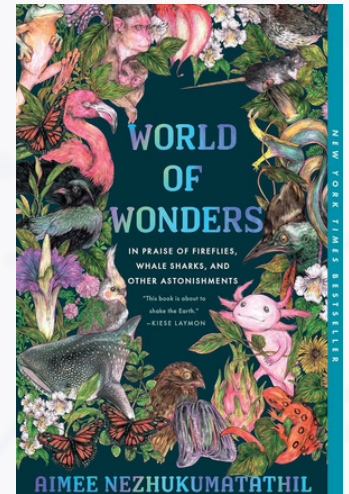
We'll be hosting a special session with Ayana Johnson **this fall** to dive into her book and explore the power of reimagining and possibility. You won't want to miss it!

What if we saw things differently?

Questioning what we think we already know. The discipline of looking at something familiar long enough to find the extraordinary hidden inside it.

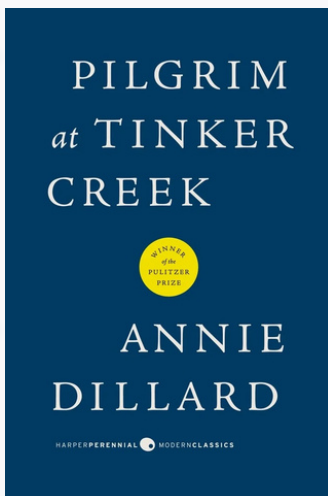
World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks, and Other Astonishments by Aimee Nezhukumatathil

Written by a poet with a naturalist's eye, this essay collection pairs the natural world, including catalpa trees, axolotls, and narwhals, with the experience of growing up as a woman of color in America. Each short chapter focuses on one plant, animal, or natural phenomenon and connects it to her own life. A book about devoted attention to the earth and what it reveals.



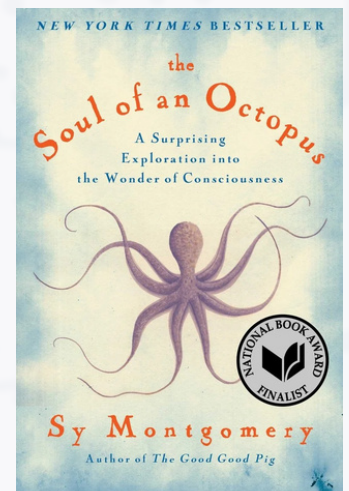
Pilgrim at Tinker Creek by Annie Dillard

For one year, Annie Dillard walked the same patch of land in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains and wrote down everything she found there. The result is a Pulitzer Prize-winning account of sustained observation: what the natural world offers up when you refuse to stop looking. One of the defining works of American nature writing.

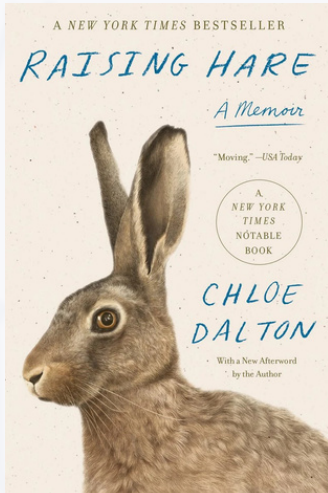


The Soul of an Octopus by Sy Montgomery

At the New England Aquarium, naturalist Sy Montgomery gets to know four individual octopuses, each with a distinct personality and set of preferences, and writes about what close observation of them reveals about intelligence, consciousness, and animal life. Accessible and grounded in Montgomery's direct experience with the animals.



What if we saw things differently?



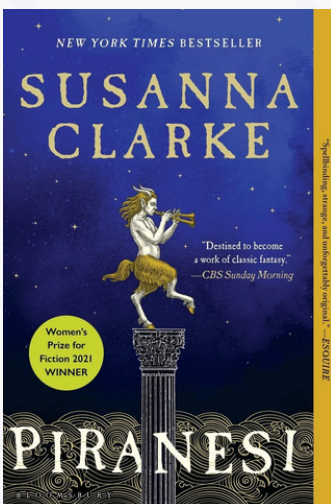
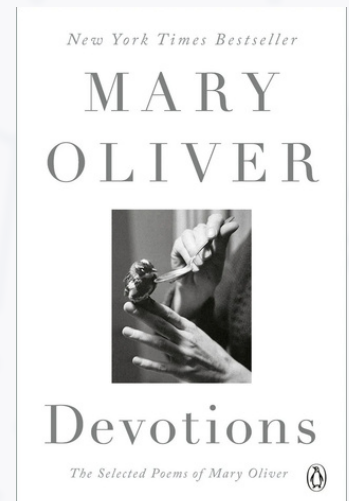
Raising Hare by Chloe Dalton

When a wild leveret wanders into her garden during lockdown, Chloe Dalton does something unexpected: she slows down and stays. What follows is a year of close attention to a creature that cannot be tamed and will not be owned, and a memoir about what becomes visible when we stop rushing past the natural world. Quiet and beautifully observed.

Devotions by Mary Oliver

Five decades of poems about the natural world, gathered into one collection. Mary Oliver spent her life writing about the practice of paying close attention to ordinary things: a grasshopper, a field, a single morning walk. This is her definitive selected works, spanning fifty years of writing that made her one of the most widely read poets in America.

Pair with: *Possibilities* by Wislawa Szymborska, a single poem by the Nobel laureate in which listing one's own preferences becomes an act of philosophical self-examination. Find it online or in her *Collected Works*.



Piranesi by Susanna Clarke

A man lives alone in a vast, labyrinthine House filled with statues and tidal halls, keeping careful journals of everything he observes. He believes the House is the whole world. A mystery slowly unravels around him. Part literary mystery, part philosophical fable, told entirely through Piranesi's journal entries, which are meticulous and full of wonder for his world.

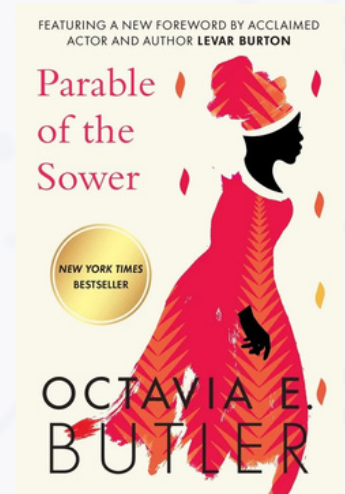
What if the “rules” didn’t exist?

Questioning systems, assumptions, and who made them. The willingness to hold in your mind something that doesn't exist yet and refuse to let it go.

Parable of the Sower by Octavia E. Butler

Set in a near-future collapsed America, a young Black woman named Lauren Olamina develops an entirely new belief system called Earthseed and builds a community around it from scratch. Written in 1993 and told through Lauren's journal entries, the novel follows her journey north through a dangerous landscape while she works to keep her community alive and her vision intact.

Content note: Contains graphic violence and mature subject matter, including sexual violence.



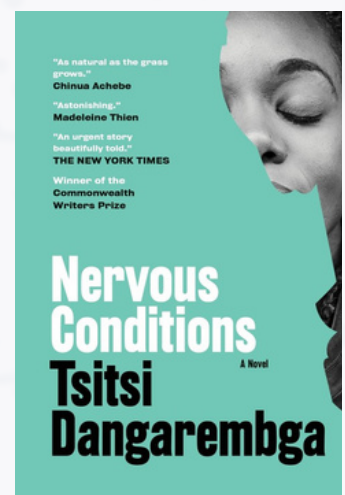
March (Trilogy) by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell

A three-volume graphic memoir chronicling John Lewis's life and activism during the Civil Rights Movement, from his childhood in rural Alabama through the lunch counter sit-ins, the Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, and Bloody Sunday on the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Told in Lewis's own words, illustrated by Nate Powell, and co-written with Andrew Aydin. One of the most complete first-person accounts of the Civil Rights Movement in print.

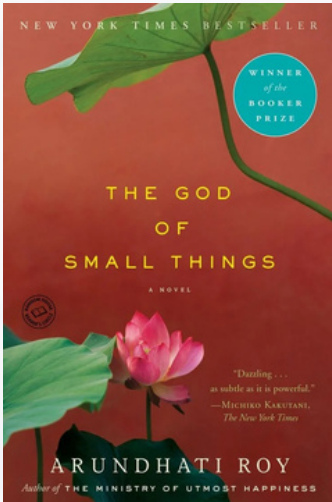
Nervous Conditions by Tsitsi Dangarembga

Set in colonial Rhodesia in the 1960s and early 1970s, this novel follows Tambu, a young girl who fights her way into an education in a world that has assigned her a much smaller life. The first novel published in English by a Black Zimbabwean woman, it centers on several female characters as they navigate, and variously resist or accommodate, the intersecting constraints of colonialism, patriarchy, and class. Named by the BBC as one of 100 books that shaped the world.

Content note: Includes depictions of disordered eating.



What if the “rules” didn’t exist?



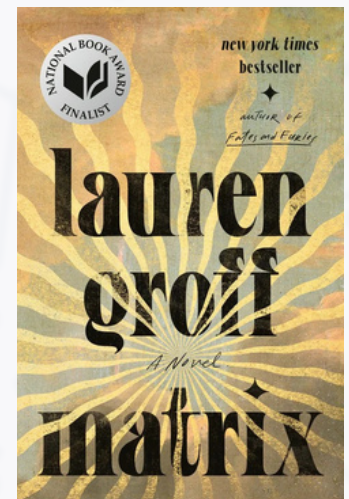
The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy

Set in Kerala in 1969, this Booker Prize-winning debut follows twins Rahel and Estha as they navigate the social laws, around caste, family, and love, that govern their world, and what happens when those laws are crossed. Roy moves between past and present, gradually assembling the events of one pivotal summer. The novel examines how large systems of power play out in the smallest details of everyday life.

Content note: Contains mature and difficult subject matter, including the abuse of children.

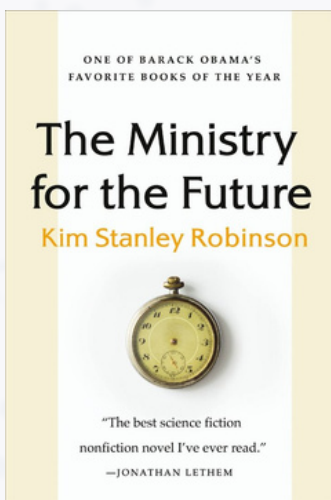
Matrix by Lauren Groff

Based loosely on the life of 12th-century poet Marie de France, this novel follows a woman exiled to run a crumbling abbey who proceeds, over decades, to transform it entirely, building an independent world within the constraints of medieval religious life. Told in spare, close prose across the arc of her life.



The Ministry for the Future by Kim Stanley Robinson

Near-future fiction following a small UN agency tasked with advocating for future generations as climate change accelerates. Told through interconnected vignettes across many characters and perspectives, it examines climate solutions in policy, economic, and human detail. Structured more as a series of linked episodes than a traditional novel.

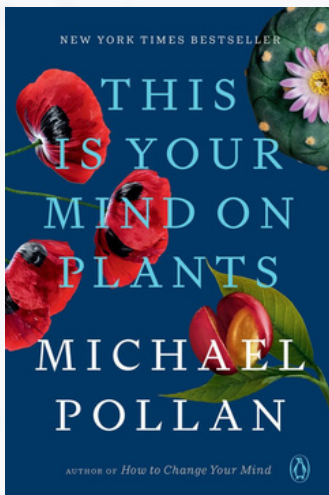
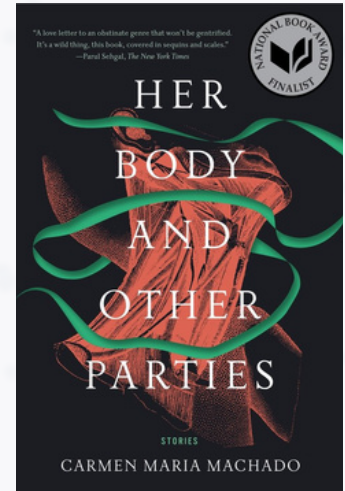


What if the “rules” didn’t exist?

Her Body and Other Parties by Carmen Maria Machado

Eight short stories that examine women navigating social conventions and expectations, mixing genres across fairy tale, post-apocalyptic fiction, science fiction, and body horror. A National Book Award finalist. Each story takes a different form and approaches questions of women's bodies, relationships, and experience from a different angle.

Content note: Adult in nature, with explicit and at times graphic content.



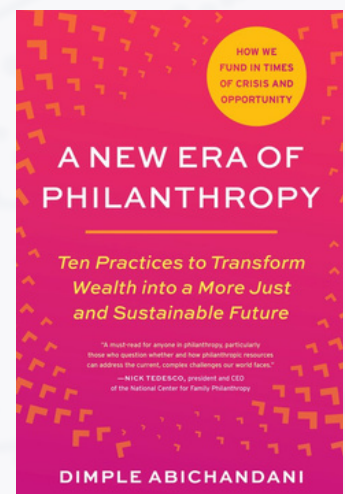
This Is Your Mind on Plants by Michael Pollan

Michael Pollan examines three plant-derived substances — opium, caffeine, and mescaline — through the combined lenses of history, science, and memoir. Each has been used across cultures for centuries; each is treated entirely differently under the law. Pollan's approach is participatory: he grows, consumes, and researches each one, using them to examine what our relationship to these plants reveals about how we think about consciousness, nature, and the rules we build around both.

Content note: Engages substantively with psychoactive and controlled natural substances.

A New Era of Philanthropy by Dimple Abichandani

With \$84 trillion set to move between generations over the next two decades, this book asks a direct question: what if that transfer of wealth were guided by something other than the norms and assumptions that have always governed philanthropy? Abichandani, a nationally recognized philanthropic leader, offers ten concrete practice shifts for donors, foundations, and nonprofit leaders, moving from critique of how philanthropy has worked into specific proposals for how it could work differently. A practical and values-driven guide for anyone who believes these resources can do more than they currently do.



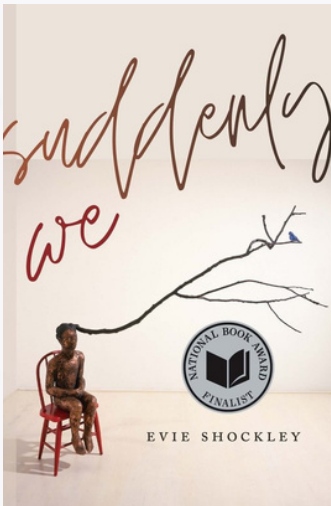
What if we dared to imagine it?

Dreaming bigger than the evidence currently allows. Refusing to stop picturing something bigger than yourself and what could be possible.

The Feminist Utopia Project

Edited by Alexandra Brodsky and Rachel Kauder Nalebuff

Fifty-seven essays, stories, poems, and artworks by writers including Melissa Harris-Perry, Janet Mock, and Sheila Heti, imagining a world of freedom and equality, covering everything from rewriting the Constitution to redefining the economy's relationship to domestic work. Published in 2015, each piece is a direct answer to the question: what would you build if you could build anything?



Suddenly We by Evie Shockley

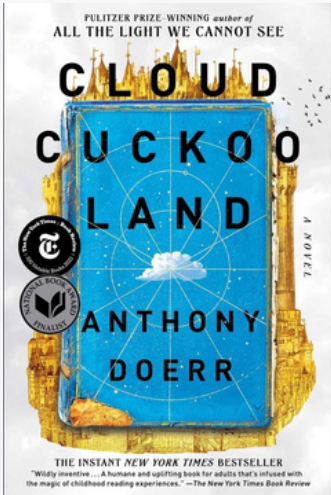
A National Book Award finalist, this poetry collection draws on visual art, sound, and multilayered language to explore collective identity, interdependence, and possibility. Shockley's poems engage with the work of Black women artists and writers across disciplines, using formal innovation, including visual and sound-based elements, to push at the boundaries of what a poem can do and who it can speak to.

Lagoon by Nnedi Okorafor

When an alien spacecraft crashes into the ocean off the coast of Lagos, three strangers, a marine biologist, a soldier, and a rapper, find themselves at the center of first contact. Okorafor, who coined the term Africanfuturism for speculative fiction rooted in African history, cosmology, and point of view, sets her story entirely in Lagos, drawing on Nigerian mythology and the realities of the city as it navigates the arrival of something entirely new.



What if we dared to imagine it?



Cloud Cuckoo Land by Anthony Doerr

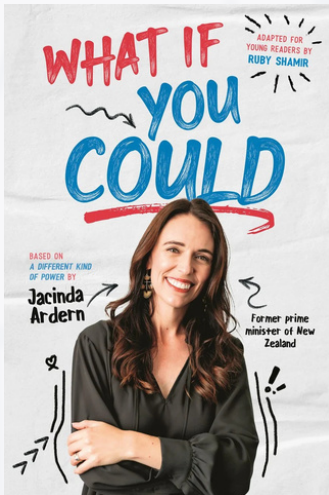
Five characters across five centuries are connected through their relationship to a single ancient text, a fragmentary Greek story about a shepherd who dreams of a magical city that doesn't exist. Doerr moves between a Byzantine siege, a small American town in the 1950s, and a generation ship in deep space, weaving together a novel about how stories survive across time and what people do to preserve them.

Atmosphere by Taylor Jenkins Reid

Set against the backdrop of NASA's 1980s Space Shuttle program, this novel follows Joan Goodwin, one of the first women selected as a candidate for spaceflight. As she trains alongside the other astronauts and prepares for her first flight, she finds herself questioning what she wants from her life and her relationships. A character-driven novel about ambition, love, and what it means to reach for something beyond your previous limits.



Great Reads at Every Age



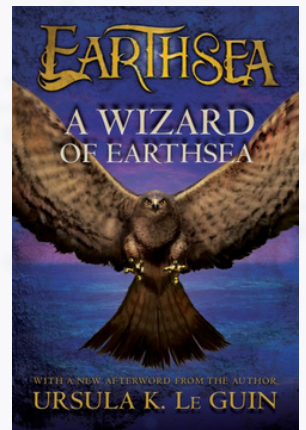
What If You Could by Jacinda Ardern

What if the things you've always seen as weaknesses — your anxiety, your kindness, your tendency to second-guess yourself — were actually your greatest strengths? Jacinda Ardern, one of the world's youngest heads of government, asks readers to imagine a different kind of power: one built on empathy, listening, and showing up exactly as you are. The writing is honest, grounded, and gently fierce.

It reminds us that the world changes when people stop waiting until they feel "ready" and start leading with what they already have. If you've ever talked yourself out of something because you didn't feel worthy enough, this book will speak directly to that voice. Be ready to reconsider everything you thought it meant to be strong. *(Reading age: 8 - 12+ years)*

A Wizard of Earthsea by Ursula K. Le Guin

A boy with great magical ability trains at a school for wizards and accidentally unleashes a dangerous shadow creature, one he must then pursue and face. Le Guin's beloved 1968 novel uses the language of fantasy to explore identity, ego, and what it means to know yourself. The first in her Earthsea series and the foundation of one of the most enduring worlds in speculative fiction. *(Reading age: 11+ years)*



When You Reach Me by Rebecca Stead

A girl in 1970s New York City begins receiving mysterious notes from someone who seems to know the future. As she tries to figure out who is sending them, small details of her everyday life, her neighborhood, her friendships, her after-school routines, begin to add up to something larger. A Newbery Medal winner. *(Reading age: 9 - 12 years)*

Great Reads at Every Age

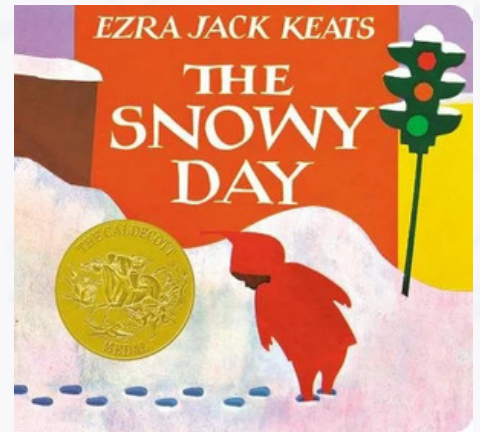


The Girl Who Drank the Moon by Kelly Barnhill

A witch who collects abandoned babies accidentally gives one of them magical powers by feeding her moonlight. Years later, as the child grows and the magic begins to surface, the story moves between the girl, the witch, and the frightened town that set this all in motion. A Newbery Medal winner told in layered, interwoven perspectives. (Reading age: 8 - 12 years)

The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats

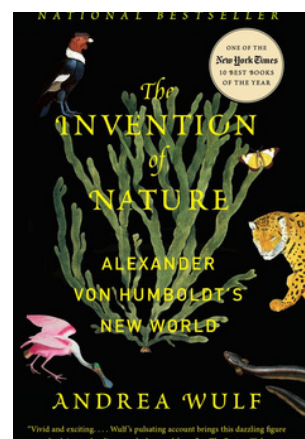
A young boy in the city spends a morning exploring the snow, every footprint, every sound, every small discovery. Published in 1962, it was the first picture book to feature a Black child as the sole protagonist. A quiet book about a quiet morning, and one of the most influential picture books in American publishing history. (Reading age: 3 - 6 years)



Community Favorites

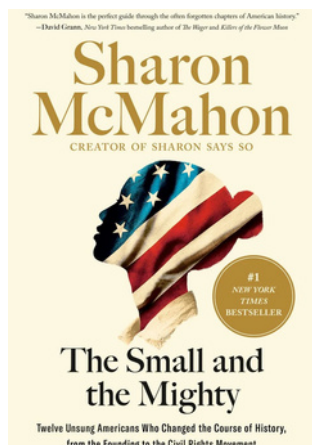
The Invention of Nature by Andrea Wulf

"Alexander von Humboldt was the Beyoncé of 19th century naturalists; everyone who shaped our modern understanding of nature and art was a fangirl. In this biography, learn about Humboldt's world expeditions, his philosophy of the unity of nature, gain an appreciation of the interconnectedness of all things, and understand how this person's legacy continues to live on in the zeitgeist through evangelization by the likes of Charles Darwin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau. This book will teach you that without awe, there is no true awareness of this magical world around us." ~ Erin



The Small and the Mighty: Twelve Unsung Americans Who Changed the Course of History, from the Founding to the Civil Rights Movement by Sharon McMahon

"I love this book, because it tells real stories that show the power that we have individually. Every good thing starts with someone, and we can be those someones." ~ Amanda

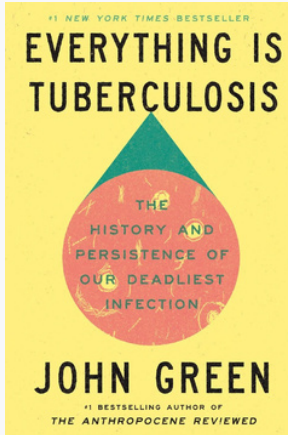


Control: Why Big Giving Falls Short by Glen Galaich

"I read this book because Glen wrote it but it humbled me, blew my mind, and certainly made me look at philanthropy through a completely different prism." ~ Kathy



Community Favorites

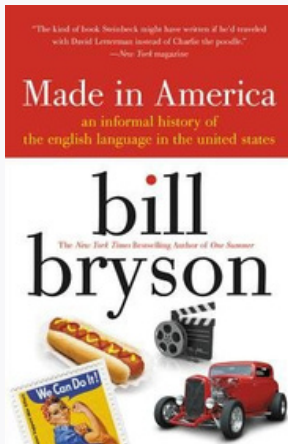
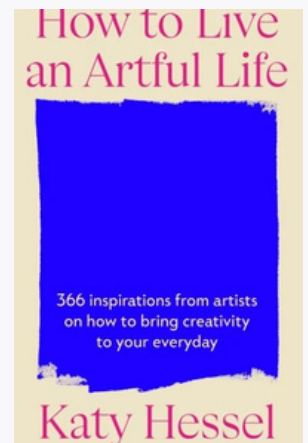


Everything Is Tuberculosis by John Green

"I didn't expect to find a book about tuberculosis very interesting, but John Green (who also wrote The Fault in Our Stars) adeptly conveys his fascination with this ever-present malady in a way that captured my attention and shed light on the history of TB in surprising and humorous ways. It was illuminating and it compelled me to undertake further research into how this disease is still plaguing developing countries today." ~ Marike

How to Live an Artful Life by Katy Hessel

"A year of daily inspirations from artists past and present on bringing creativity, attention, and beauty into everyday life. From the author of The Story of Art Without Men." ~ Cristina

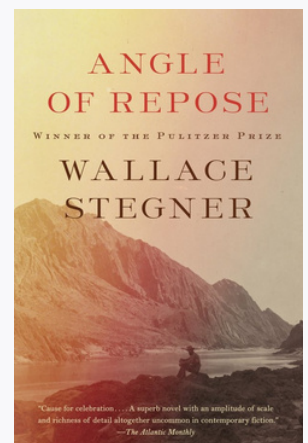


Made in America by Bill Bryson

"This book is a really cool history of American linguistics and how our language came to be." ~ Lisa

Angle of Repose by Wallace Stegner

"I read this book every few years and it never gets old. It's about love, regret, and the American West." ~ Becky



Community Favorites

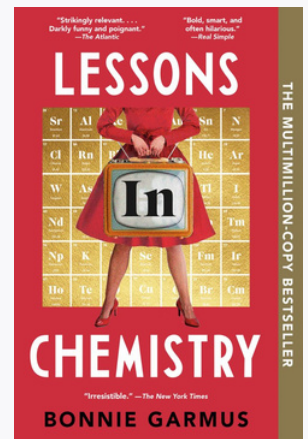


Becoming Madam Secretary by Stephanie Dray

"I just finished this book, while it is a historical fiction, the character Frances Perkins was actually the first woman to serve in a US presidential cabinet. The story talks about her lifelong work against child labor, creating better systems to eliminate poverty, and better working conditions. All while being a woman in a man's world and supporting her husband and child." ~ Amanda

Lessons in Chemistry by Bonnie Garmus

"Fun, feminist fiction" ~ Sarah



The Women on Platform Two by Laura Anthony

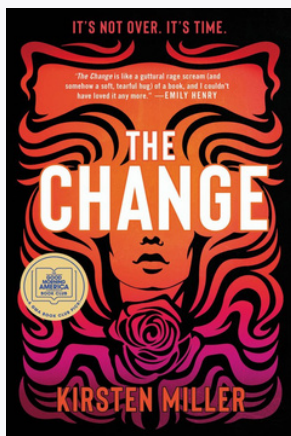
"Set in Dublin in the 1970s, I loved this beautiful story of strong female friendship that evolves into a fight for women's right to birth control before it was legal in Dublin." ~ Kendra

Violeta by Isabel Allende

"Following the 100 year life of Violeta spanning the 20th century, grief, joy, exploring family bonds, betrayals, love and the turbulent history of South America. I always love a book by Isabel Allende, but this one resonates even more with its autobiographical approach, and spanning the last century of Chilean and South America's tumultuous history." ~ Vibeke



Community Favorites

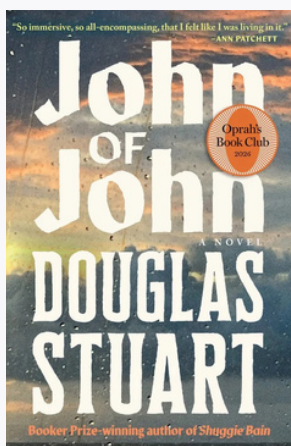
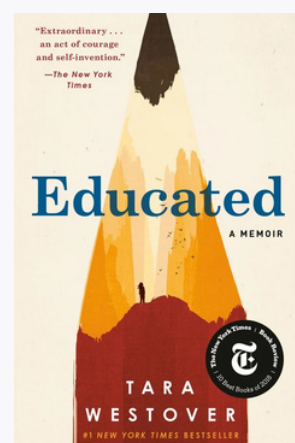


The Change by Kirsten Miller

"Three women discover their own empowerment, and literal powers, in the wake of one husband's death, with menopause and reproductive health woven through. I loved the unlikely female bonds that develop as they come into their strengths and fight to find out what happened to missing girls." ~ Kendra

Educated by Tara Westover

"I'm a sucker for memoirs that show how education and new vistas can be deeply transformative." ~ Sarah

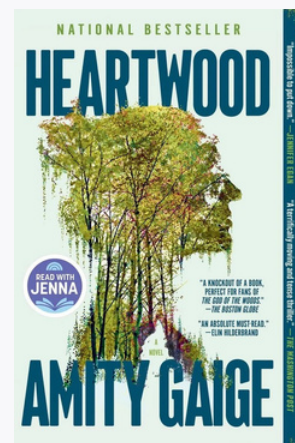


John of John by Douglas Stuart

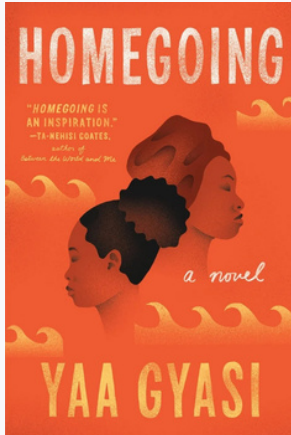
"A moving, beautifully written book about love, family obligation, and self-acceptance. It felt a little more accessible than Stuart's earlier two novels (though I liked both of those as well)." ~ Becky

Heartwood by Amity Gaige

"Page turner, will she survive?, whodunnit, female centric characters. Excellent, suspenseful story; heartfelt." ~ Sarah



Community Favorites



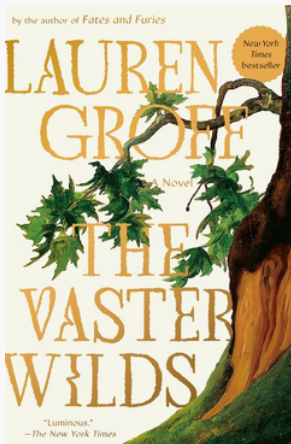
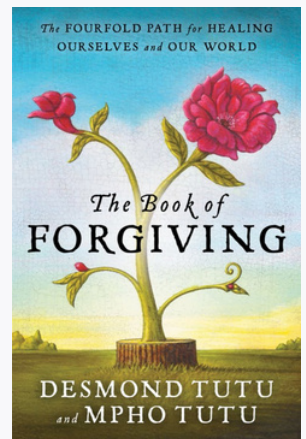
Homegoing by Yaa Gyasi

"Follows the lives and generation of two women, starting the 1770s in colonial Africa through their descendants in the US. Still reading this book now, it's beautifully written, encapsulates the suffering of their people, the resilience and the history of early slaves in the US." ~ Vibeke

The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World by Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu

"Drawing on Archbishop Tutu's experience chairing South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this father-daughter collaboration lays out a practical four-step path to forgiveness, in our own lives and in the world."

~ Cristina

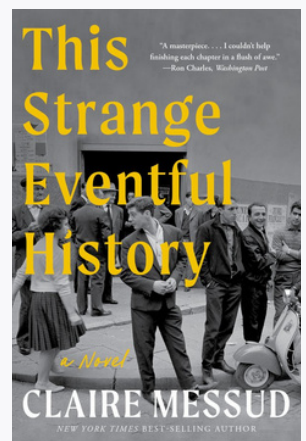


The Vaster Wilds by Lauren Groff

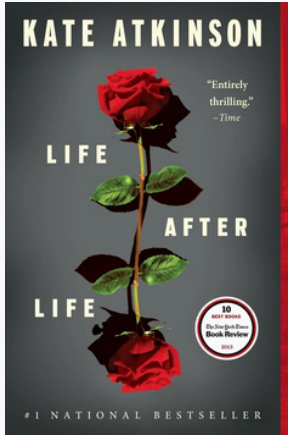
"Another page turner, will she survive?, early/mid 17th century Jamestown, strong female lead. Beautiful. Poetic." ~ Sarah

This Strange Eventful History by Claire Messud

"A multigenerational family saga (the best of all genres!) set during WWII, and I learned a ton about the French colonial history of Algeria." ~ Becky



Community Favorites

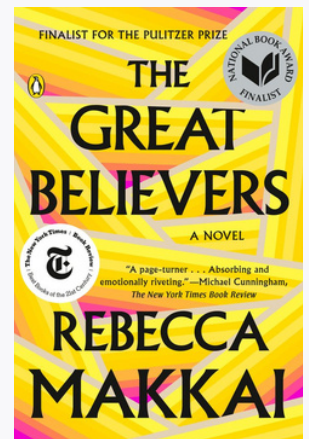


Life After Life by Kate Atkinson

"A sliding door story, following the protagonist as she lives through the early part of the 20th century. I really loved it because of the powerful description of the Blitz in London and the thought-provoking exercise of knowing how life can change in just a minute..." ~ Vibeke

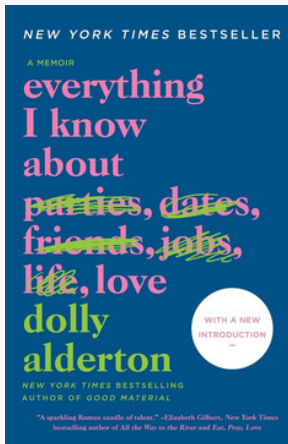
The Great Believers by Rebecca Makkai

"Wonderful story – heartfelt, touching. Hard to believe the author didn't live through the 80s as an adult herself. Fantastic." ~ Sarah



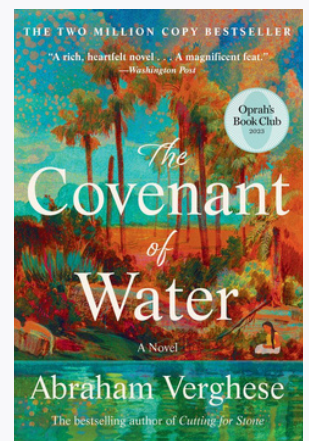
Everything I Know About Love by Dolly Alderton

"A millennial memoir, beachy-read but with depth. She's also hilarious. Her other books are good, too." ~ Becky



The Covenant of Water by Abraham Verghese

"I was completely absorbed in this. Beautiful. Moving." ~ Sarah



Revisit Past Summer Reads





*“For my part I know
nothing with any
certainty, but the
sight of the stars
makes me dream.” –
Vincent van Gogh*