

WNBA Great Group Reads 2024–2025

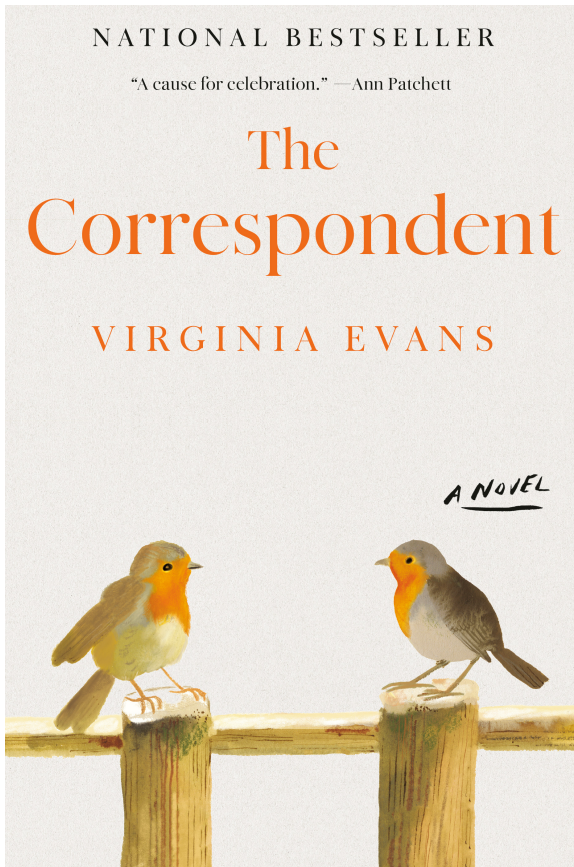
A Curated Collection for Book Clubs and Readers Everywhere

Introduction

Welcome to the Women's National Book Association's Great Group Reads 2024–2025 selections. Each year, our committee carefully reviews a wide range of titles to identify works that spark meaningful conversation, represent diverse voices, and inspire readers everywhere. This media kit provides book blurbs, covers, and key information for each selection, making it easy to share with book groups, libraries, and media partners.

The Correspondent

Virginia Evans— Penguin Random House



The story follows Sybil Van Antwerp, a charming if often set-in-her-ways woman in her 70s who understands the world the only way she can—through correspondences with everyone, from her family abroad, neighbors, and customer service representatives, to literary icons like Ann Patchett and even an unknown person to whom she never actually sends what she writes. When anonymous letters from someone from her past begin showing up at her door, Sybil is forced to confront tragedies and truths she has long avoided and open herself up to forgiveness and change, even in her later age. Readers have been falling in love with Sybil. Virginia is also such a powerhouse debut author with an incredible story of her long road to becoming a published author and even writing this whole book from the literal closet space in a rental property, just to find a private

place to devote to her craft.

Why it's a Great Group Read

The Correspondent is a brilliant example of how the epistolary form can illuminate a life. Through Sybil Van Antwerp's letters, we witness her journey as mother, wife, sister, grandmother, lawyer, and ultimately an older woman reflecting on her choices, regrets, and connections. Readers praised the novel's wit, warmth, and depth, with many calling it one of their favorites of the year. While the form itself can create distance, this distance becomes part of the story: how letters both connect and separate us. The book invites reflection on aging, family ties, the secrets we keep, and the legacy we leave. Richly layered and profoundly moving, *The Correspondent* offers book clubs endless opportunities for meaningful discussion and personal connection.

I See You've Called In Dead

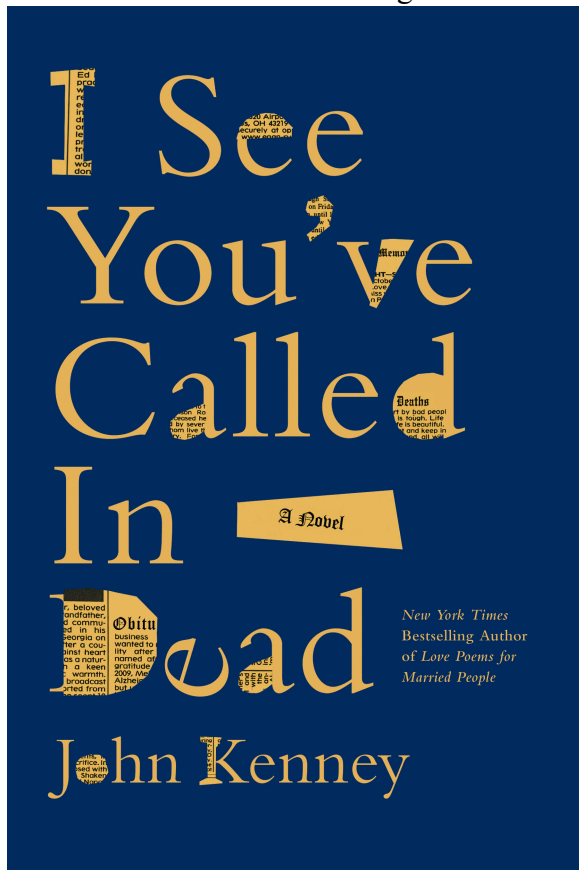
John Kenney — Zibby Publishing

New York Times bestselling author John Kenney tells a funny, touching story about life

and death, about the search for meaning, about finding and never letting go of the preciousness of life.

Bud Stanley is an obituary writer who is afraid to live. Yes, his wife recently left him for a “far more interesting” man. Yes, he goes on a particularly awful blind date with a woman who brings her ex. And yes, he has too many glasses of Scotch one night and proceeds to pen and publish his own obituary. The newspaper wants to fire him. But now the company’s system has him listed as dead. And the company can’t fire a dead person. The ensuing fallout forces him to realize that life may be actually worth living.

As Bud awaits his fate at work, his life hangs in the balance. Given another shot by his boss and encouraged by his best friend, Bud starts to attend the wakes and funerals of strangers to learn how to live.

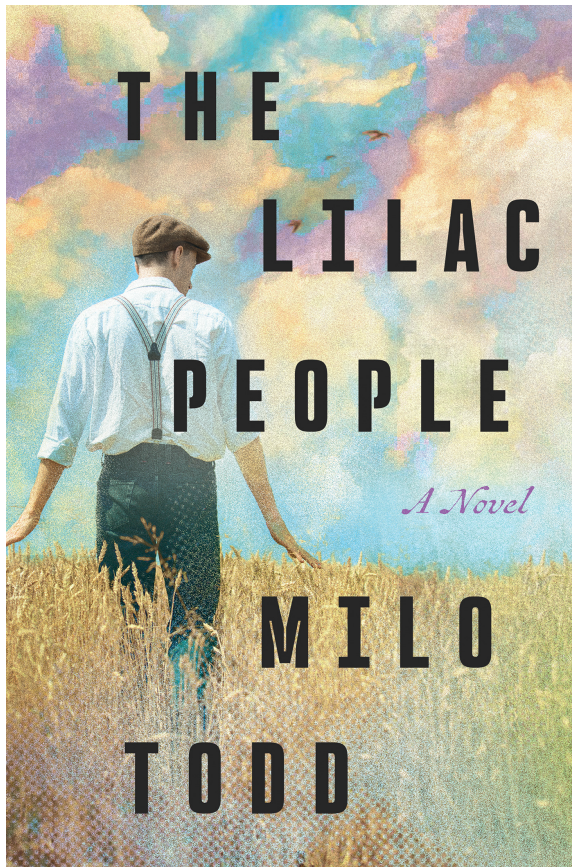


Why it's a Great Group Read

With humor and heart, *I See You've Called in Dead* offers a witty exploration of loss, resilience, and the messy business of being alive. Readers laughed out loud at John Kenney's sharp writing, even while grappling with themes of failure, grief, and reinvention. While some found the central character frustrating or self-absorbed, nearly everyone agreed the novel's mix of satire and poignancy makes it a refreshing counterpoint to heavier selections. It invites readers to talk openly about death, mistakes, change, and second chances—with laughter softening the harder edges. Perfect for sparking lively conversation, this book proves that humor can be one of the best ways into life's most serious subjects.

The Lilac People

Milo Todd — Counterpoint Press



In World War II-era Germany, a trans man mourns the freedoms of early 1930s Berlin while in hiding—first from the Nazis, and then from the Allied forces—all while staying true to his identity and protecting the people he loves. In 1932 Berlin, Bertie, an employee of the renowned Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld at the Institute of Sexual Science, works to improve queer rights in Germany and beyond. Bertie and his friends spend their nights at the Eldorado Club, the epicenter of Berlin's thriving queer community and a symbol of freedom and personal expression to visitors from around the world. But everything changes when Hitler becomes chancellor, raids the institute, and declares a pogrom against queer people. Bertie barely escapes with his girlfriend, Sofie, to a nearby farm, where they take on the identities of an elderly couple and live for more than a decade in isolation, narrowly avoiding the suspicions of

neighbors. In the final days of the war, with their freedom finally in sight, Bertie and Sophie find a young trans man who has collapsed on their property, still dressed in his Holocaust prison clothes, and vow to protect him—not from the Nazis, but from the Allied Forces who are arresting queer prisoners, while liberating the rest of the country. Moving and deeply humane, *The Lilac People* tells a story inspired by real events and recovers an occluded moment of trans history.

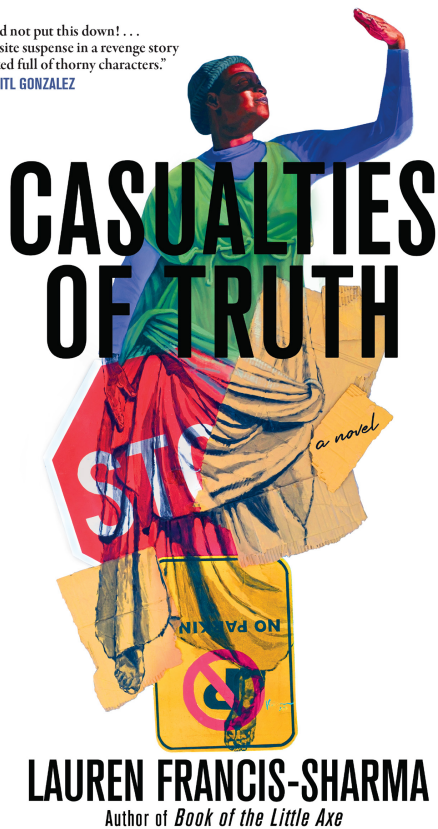
Why it's a Great Group Read

The Lilac People uncovers a powerful and little-known chapter of World War II history—the persecution of LGBTQ+ people under the Nazis and their continued mistreatment even by Allied forces after liberation. Readers described the story as both devastating and eye-opening, with some calling it one of the most important books they've encountered through Great Group Reads. While a few found the period terminology challenging, most agreed the novel's characters and themes made for an unforgettable and essential read. Its resonance with today's struggles for LGBTQ+ rights makes it timely as well as historically important. With themes of identity, resilience, erasure, and the demand to bear witness, *The Lilac People* is not just a novel but a catalyst for urgent and deeply meaningful book club discussions.

Casualties of Truth

Lauren Francis-Sharma - Simon & Schuster

"I could not put this down! . . .
Exquisite suspense in a revenge story
chocked full of thorny characters."
—XOCHITL GONZALEZ



The stunning new novel *Casualties of Truth* by Lauren Francis-Sharma, is her third book, after the novels *Book of the Little Axe* and *'Til the Well Runs Dry* and is inspired by her time in 1996 South Africa and what she saw as a witness to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Amnesty Hearings. The story opens in 2018 in Washington, D.C. with Prudence Wright and her husband Davis speeding through a summer storm to get to a dinner with Davis's new work colleague. The colleague turns out to be a man Prudence knew decades ago in South Africa who has tracked her down specifically, and the reason for his reappearance immediately turns Prudence's stable, happy life on its head. With the threat of blackmail now hanging over her, Prudence joins forces with the man, sending them on a political and personal reckoning that gives rise to a resilience and an alarming ferocity that even Prudence wasn't aware she possessed.

Why it's a Great Group Read

Casualties of Truth is a gripping, thought-provoking novel that asks unflinching questions about justice, power, and reconciliation. Set against the backdrop of apartheid and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Hearings, it confronts the violence and systemic injustice of the era while forcing readers to consider universal questions: When is violence justified? Can vengeance bring healing? What does justice truly mean? Through Prudence's journey—from law student witness to a woman forced to confront the shadows of her past—Lauren Francis-Sharma weaves a powerful story of survival, secrecy, and moral reckoning. Readers praised its beautiful writing, complex characters, and its ability to provoke urgent conversation. With themes of racism, misogyny, complicity, family, and forgiveness, *Casualties of Truth* offers book clubs a rare opportunity to wrestle with history while reflecting on their own beliefs about truth and justice.

Signs of the Imminent Apocalypse and Other Stories

Heidi Bell – Cornerstone Press



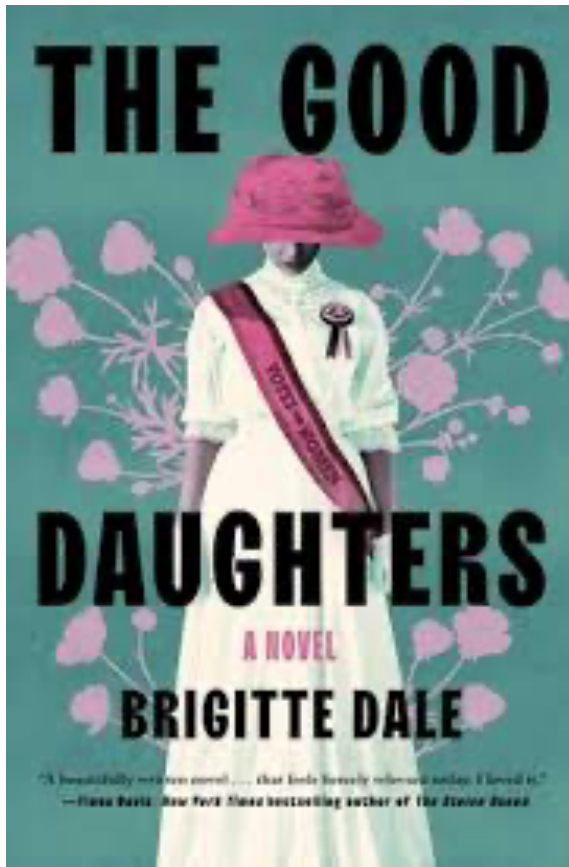
In her sensational debut collection, *Signs of the Imminent Apocalypse and Other Stories*, Heidi Bell introduces Midwestern women and men, girls and boys, all united by a yearning—for answers, for meaning, or simply for relief—that is often twisted by their baser impulses. With lyricism, darkly playful humor, and brutal clarity, Bell approaches reality sideways to reveal unsettling truths: two sisters invent a dangerous game, a child bears witness to a neighborhood's casual violence, a young professional is shaken by the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings, and a woman's ideal life unfolds through the glossy pages of a mail-order catalog. This is a bold, unforgettable collection that captures the strangeness, longing, and quiet desperation of ordinary lives.

Why it's a Great Group Read

Heidi Bell's debut story collection invites readers to explore the complexities of the human condition through sharp, inventive, and emotionally resonant tales. While often dark, these stories balance stark honesty with moments of humor and hope, leaving readers with much to reflect on. From fractured families to surreal twists of everyday life, Bell uses satire, symbolism, and lyrical prose to illuminate struggles with self-esteem, fear, resilience, and the search for meaning. Each story offers a new perspective and a fresh avenue for discussion, making this collection especially rewarding for groups interested in examining life's toughest questions through unconventional storytelling.

The Good Daughters

Brigitte Dale -Pegasus Books



A moving and vivid story set in 1912 London, where three young women from very different backgrounds become suffragettes, bound together by their fight for equality and the tests it places on their will and friendship.

Charlotte shocks her family when she moves to London to join a group of suffragettes determined to upend social norms for the right to vote.

Aristocratic Beatrice, with a law degree she cannot legally use and a fiancé she does not love, also finds herself drawn into the movement—and into a dangerous forbidden romance.

Emily, the daughter of the warden of Holloway Jail, dreams of escaping her life of drudgery, but when suffragettes are imprisoned by her father, she must weigh her family's livelihood against her own convictions.

As the suffrage campaign intensifies with violent protests, hunger strikes, and brutal forced feedings, the three women

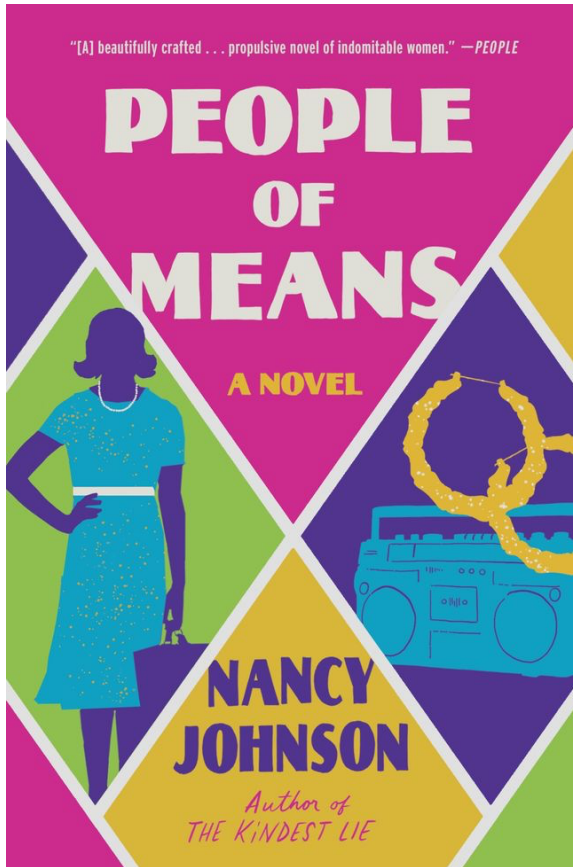
confront a system stacked against them and must decide how much they are willing to risk for freedom—and for one another.

Why it's a Great Group Read

The Good Daughters brings to life the women's suffrage movement of the early 1900s through the perspectives of three women from very different backgrounds. Their stories highlight the courage, sacrifice, and determination required to win the right to vote, while also underscoring how relevant those struggles remain today. Book clubs will find rich ground for discussion in its exploration of women's rights, activism, government oppression, and the personal costs of resistance. The novel also sparks timely questions about bodily autonomy, equality, and the barriers that still exist for many voters. Both historically grounded and emotionally resonant, this novel offers readers a chance to connect past and present in meaningful conversation.

People of Means

Nancy Johnson— Harper Collins



*Two women. Two pivotal moments.
One dream for justice and equality.*

In the fall of 1959, Freda Gilroy arrives on the campus of Fisk University full of hope, carrying a suitcase and the voice of her father telling her she's part of a family legacy of greatness. Soon, the ugliness of the Jim Crow South intrudes, and she's thrust into a movement for social change. Freda is reluctant to get involved, torn between a soon-to-be doctor her parents approve of and an audacious young man willing to risk it all in the name of justice. Freda finds herself caught between two worlds, and two loves, and must decide how much she's willing to sacrifice for the advancement of her people.

In 1992 Chicago, Freda's daughter Tulip is an ambitious PR professional on track for an exciting career, if workplace politics and racial microaggressions don't get in her way.

But with the ruling in the Rodney King trial weighing heavily on her, Tulip feels called to action. When she makes an irreversible professional misstep as she seeks to uplift her community, she must decide, just like her mother had three decades prior, what she's willing to risk in the name of justice and equality.

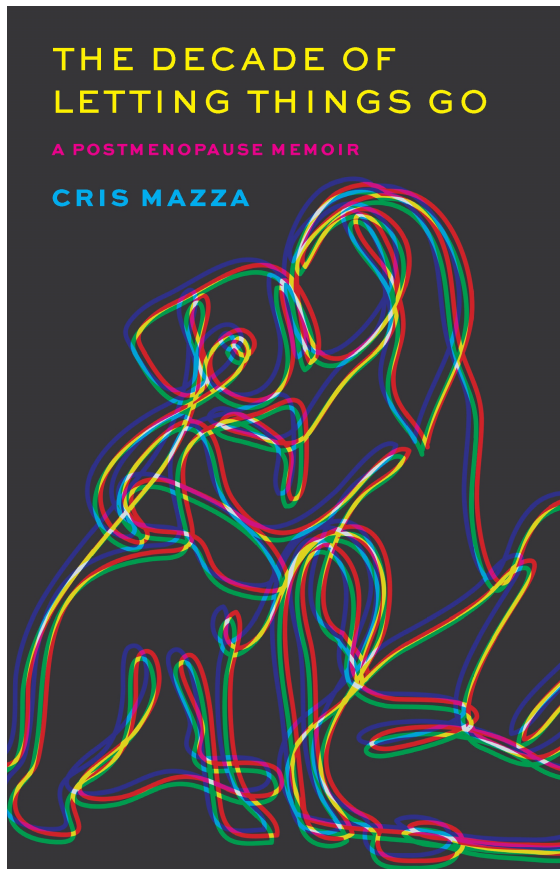
Insightful, evocative, and richly imagined with stories of hidden history, *People of Means* is an emotional tour de force that offers a glimpse into the quest for racial equality, the pursuit of personal and communal success, and the power of love and family ties.

Why it's a Great Group Read

People of Means explores the sacrifices and struggles of a mother and daughter confronting justice, equality, and their place in history. Set across generations, it examines racial injustice, family bonds, and the costs of protest—whether in the civil rights era or in our own time. Though opinions on the writing style may vary, the themes of risk-taking, activism, and complicated family relationships open the door for meaningful discussion. This novel invites reflection on how far we've come, how far we still have to go, and the choices individuals make in the pursuit of freedom.

The Decade of Letting Things Go

Cris Mazza – The University of Georgia Press



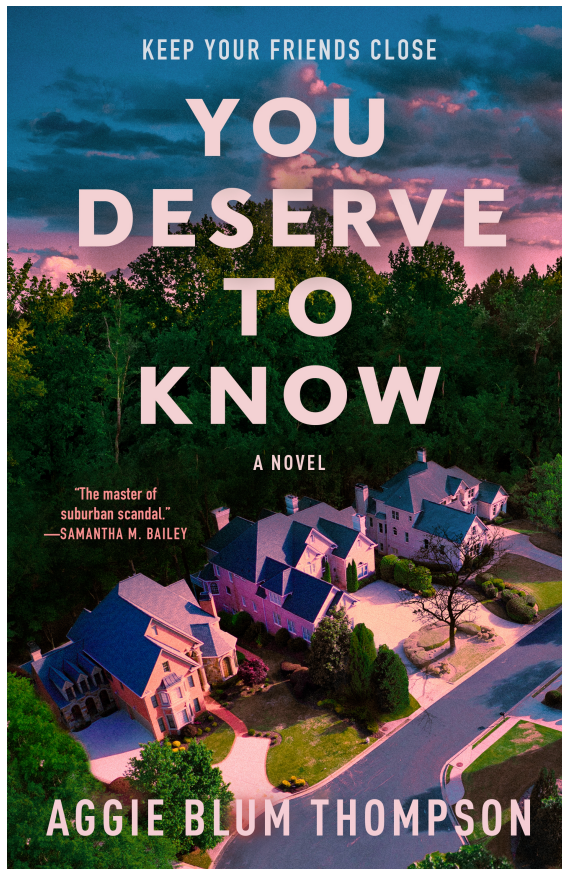
The Decade of Letting Things Go links essays containing still-relevant experiences that take place later in life. Mazza's story contains many of life's expected losses: pets, parents, and old mentors. Yet, some of her late-life experiences aren't so easily categorized: having a mentally ill neighbor try to get her to come outside and fight; unpacking the complicity in thirty-year-old #MeToo incidents; realizing a deeply trusted mentor from forty-five years ago might be declining into dementia. Ultimately, Mazza searches for contentment with either the mark one makes in the world or the identity one chooses to embrace.

Why it's a Great Group Read

This collection of essays explores themes of loss, aging, and the choices society places on women. Cris Mazza's voice is candid, raw, and sometimes confrontational, which may feel like sitting in on a private conversation. While not a traditional book club pick, it could spark meaningful dialogue about identity, anger, and resilience. A better fit for groups willing to dive into personal and sometimes uncomfortable reflections.

You Deserve to Know

Aggie Blum Thompson – Forge Books



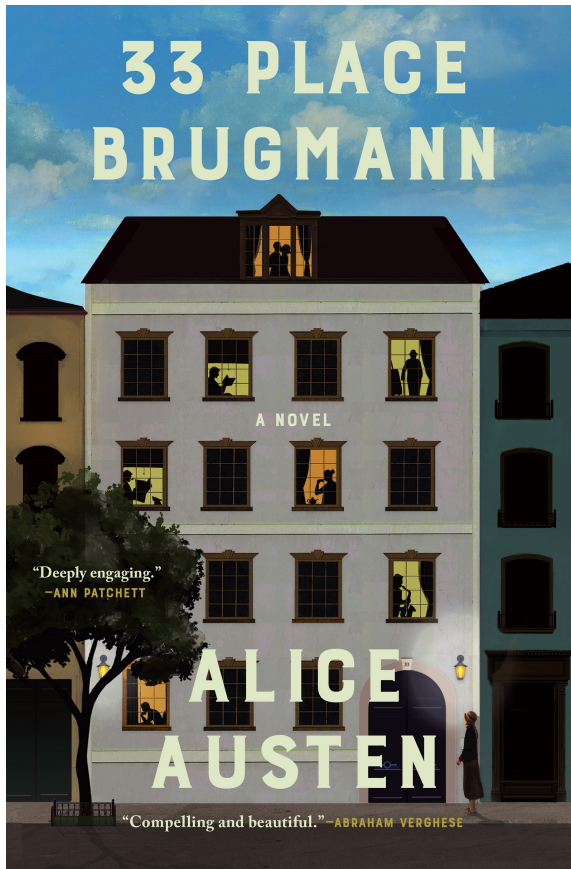
Neighbors Gwen, Aimee, and Lisa share more than playdates and coffee mornings on their tranquil street in East Bethesda. They confide their deepest secrets, navigate the challenges of motherhood together, and provide a support system that seems unbreakable. But when Gwen's husband is found murdered after one of their weekly Friday night dinners, the peaceful quiet of their cul-de-sac shatters. The seemingly idyllic world of the three close-knit mom friends becomes a web of deception, betrayal, and revenge. As the police investigate, the veneer of friendship begins to crack, revealing hidden tensions, clandestine affairs, and long-buried jealousies among the three women. With suspicions mounting and the neighborhood gripped by fear, Gwen, Aimee, and Lisa must confront the chilling truth about their husbands, and the sinister undercurrents in their own friendship.

Why it's a Great Group Read

A suburban family drama filled with intrigue, betrayal, and shocking twists. Reminiscent of *Big Little Lies* and the kind of story that begs for a Netflix adaptation, this fast-paced novel raises plenty of discussion topics for book clubs, including honesty and integrity, youthful mistakes, trust in relationships, and how little we sometimes know those closest to us. With layers of secrets to unravel, it's a book that will keep readers talking long after the final page.

33 Place Brugmann

Alice Austen – Grove Press



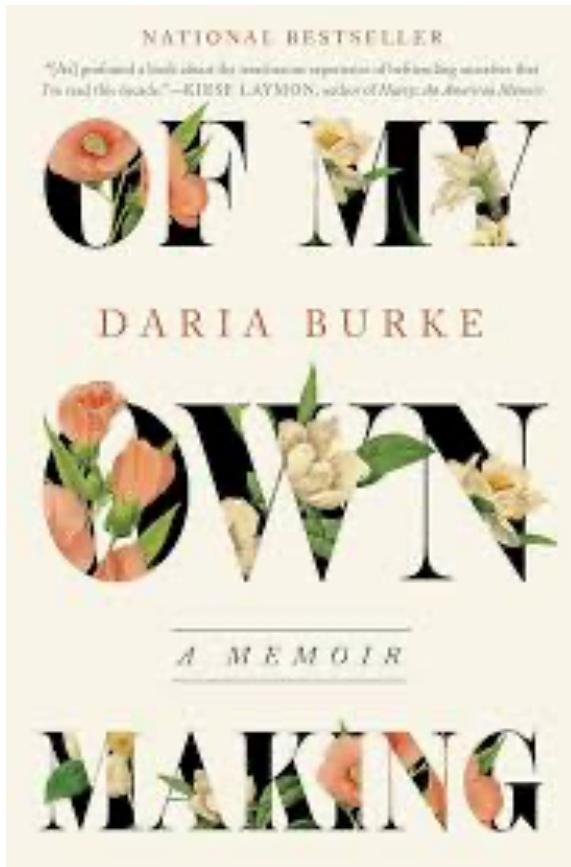
An extraordinarily accomplished debut novel, *33 Place Brugmann* by Alice Austen is a love story, mystery, and philosophical puzzle, told in the singular voices of the residents of a Beaux Arts apartment building in Belgium in 1939. On the eve of the occupation, in the heart of Brussels, life for the residents of eight apartments at 33 Place Brugmann is about to change forever. Art student Charlotte Sauvin, daughter of a prominent architect in apartment 4L, knows all the details of the building and its people, but all that's familiar begins to fracture as whispers of Nazi occupation become reality. The Raphaëls disappear—becoming refugees, nurses, soldiers, reluctant heroes. Masha, the seamstress on the 5th floor, deepens a dangerous affair with a wartime compatriot of Colonel Warlemont in 3R, a man far less feckless than he'd have his neighbors believe. When confronted with a cruel choice—submit to the regime or risk their lives to resist—each will discover the truth about what, and who, matters to them the most.

Why it's a Great Group Read

Set in Brussels on the eve of Nazi occupation, this novel follows the residents of one apartment building as their lives are upended by fear, betrayal, and unexpected acts of courage. Through multiple voices, themes of morality, resilience, art, and philosophy—particularly Wittgenstein's ideas—emerge in surprising ways. While some readers may feel fatigue with WWII novels, this story offers a fresh perspective that invites rich discussion on human behavior in times of crisis, the role of art and ideas in survival, and the choices ordinary people make under extraordinary circumstances. A haunting, thought-provoking book that will linger with readers and spark deep conversation.

Of My Own Making

Darla Burke - Grand Central Publishing



When Daria Burke discovers a photograph of the car accident that she believes altered the course of her early life, she is forced to confront the parts of her childhood she had avoided. This discovery sparked many questions, resulting in her memoir, *OF MY OWN MAKING* (on sale April 22, 2025) that details her a four-year immersion into neuroplasticity, epigenetics, the impact of adverse childhood experiences on early brain development. Burke ultimately wanted to understand why some of us remain stuck in past trauma while others experience Post Traumatic Growth, the idea that positive psychological change that can occur after a person experiences a major life crisis or trauma. From it, people can emerge from a traumatic event with a new worldview and resilience. She started her research while working in a high-demand job at Facebook where I led one of the company's largest portfolios of beauty and fashion retail advertising clients in North America.

Why it's a Great Group Read

This powerful memoir blends vivid storytelling with insights into trauma, resilience, and healing. The author writes with striking detail, pulling readers into moments of grief, survival, and triumph, while weaving in reflections that broaden the story beyond her own experience. Book clubs will find much to discuss—from family bonds and cycles of pain to the meaning of resilience, personal reinvention, and the costs of survival. It is an intimate and emotional read that invites deep, and often personal, conversation.

Palm Meridian

Grace Flahive - Avid Reader Press



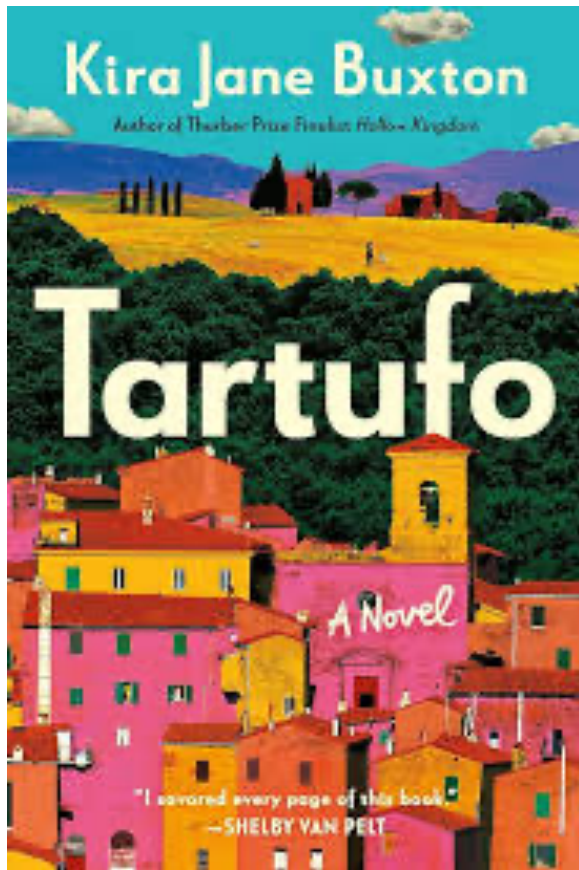
It's 2067, and at Palm Meridian Retirement Resort—a utopia for queer women in Florida's partially submerged landscape—residents revel in their twilight years with book clubs, roller-ski races, and nonstop laughter. But for Hannah Cardin, recently diagnosed with terminal cancer, tonight's wild end-of-life party will be her last. She has one final hope: to reunite with Sophie, the love she lost more than forty years ago. As the night unfolds, memories resurface, secrets come to light, and Hannah must decide if she's truly ready to say goodbye. Bursting with humor, heart, and hope, this novel is a celebration of love, resilience, and the unexpected moments that make us feel most alive.

Why it's a Great Group Read

Palm Meridian offers a moving and surprisingly joyful exploration of aging, friendship, love, and the choices we make at life's end. Hannah's last-day celebration at a queer retirement community touches on timely themes—end-of-life planning, climate change, LGBTQ+ safe spaces, jealousy, forgiveness, and the power of truth and lies in relationships. Both funny and poignant, the novel sparks discussion about what it means to live fully, how we honor friendships and loves across a lifetime, and how we choose to face death with dignity and community. Book clubs will find plenty to laugh, cry, and debate about in this heartfelt and thought-provoking story.

Tartufo

Kira Jane Buxton – Grand Central Publishing



After nearly losing the election to a geriatric donkey, newly installed Mayor Delizia Miccuci can't help but feel like the sun has finally set on the rural Italian village of Lazzarini Boscarino. Tourists only stop by to ask for directions, Nonna Amara's cherished ristorante is long shuttered, and the town hall is disgustingly overrun with glis glis poo—even Postman Duccio has been disgraced. All that's left is Bar Celebrità, a rustic establishment where weary locals gather to quibble over decades-long disputes, submit their poor stomachs to bartender Giuseppina's volcanic espresso, and wonder what will become of the place where together they've spent their entire lives.

But when local truffle hunter Giovanni Scarpazza stumbles upon something extraordinary—a truffle with the power to be either the village's greatest gift or its foulest curse—everything may change. Written with the same enchanting style

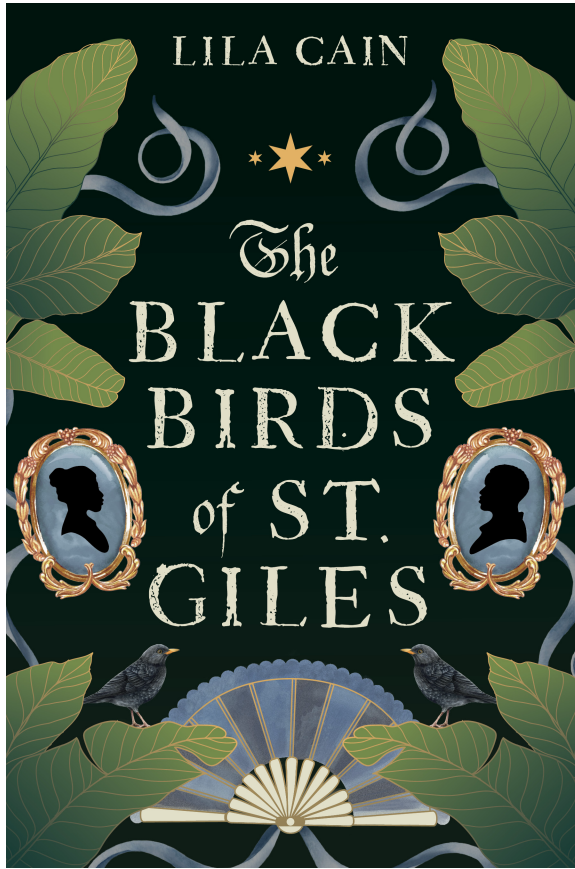
and raucous humor that defines *Hollow Kingdom* and *Feral Creatures*, *Tartufo* is a reflection on the interconnectedness of life in all its manifestations—and how holding on to harmony in the face of hardship can grow something beautiful and rare beneath the surface.

Why it's a Great Group Read

With its lush, lyrical prose and cast of quirky villagers (and their animals), *Tartufo* is both a celebration of small-town life and a meditation on love, hope, loss, and resilience. Readers will find much to savor—from quotable lines about grief and family, to questions about what truly sustains a community. Some may find the novel overly descriptive or crowded with characters, but those same qualities offer book clubs plenty to debate: the role of nature in our lives, how adversity shapes community, the fragility and joy of human (and animal) bonds, and the universal search for what's right beneath our feet.

The Blackbirds of St Giles

Lila Cain (Marcia Hutchinson & Kate Griffin) – Kensington Publishing



From the brutal horrors of Jamaican plantations to the teeming streets of 18th-century London, *The Blackbirds of St Giles* follows escaped enslaved siblings Daniel and Pearl as they survive the American War of Independence and journey across seas in search of freedom. Their path leads them to London's notorious St. Giles Rookery, the heart of a real community of more than 20,000 free Black women, men, and children who lived, worked, and struggled in Georgian England—derisively called “Blackbirds” by their contemporaries. In this page-turning tale of survival, betrayal, secrets, and resilience, readers are immersed in both the grandeur of manor houses and the deprivation of the rookery, encountering the stark inequalities of the era in a story that feels powerfully relevant today. The novel brings to life a hidden history with unflinching authenticity, contemporary resonance, and unforgettable characters.

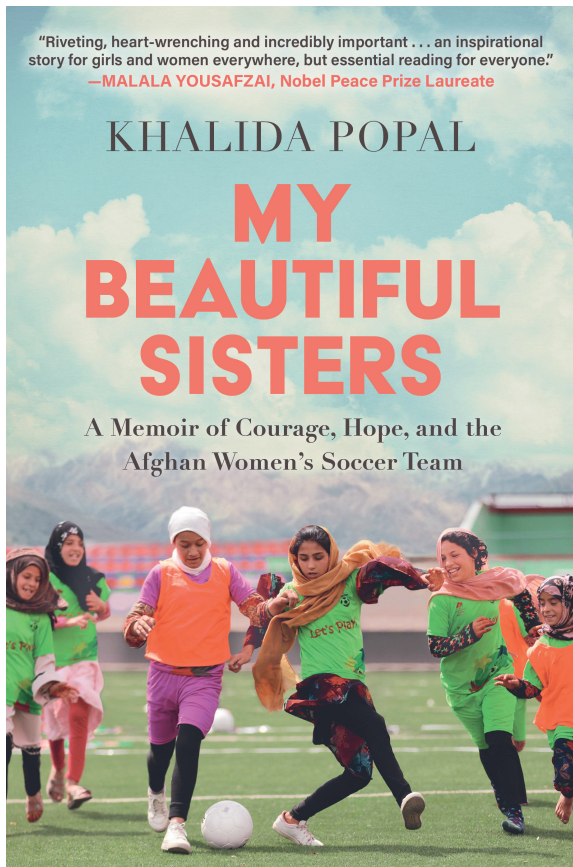
Why it's a Great Group Read

This wonderfully researched historical novel brings a fresh perspective to the genre by centering Black protagonists—Daniel and his sister Pearl, formerly enslaved in America—who struggle to find footing in 18th-century London. With Dickensian detail, a sweeping cast of characters, and vivid depictions of both resilience and suffering, the novel immerses readers in the grinding poverty and injustices of the St. Giles rookery.

Perfect for book clubs, *The Blackbirds of St Giles* raises meaty questions about betrayal, racism, family, privilege, fortitude, and redemption. Why do some rise above dire circumstances while others collapse? What is the cost of resilience? The themes of injustice, love, personal growth, and the power of community will give groups much to discuss. A rich, expansive read that lingers long after the last page.

My Beautiful Sisters

Khalida Popal - Citadel



A story of survival, sisterhood, and the fight for feminism under Taliban rule. When Kabul fell in 2021, Khalida Popal—cofounder and first captain of Afghanistan’s women’s soccer team—faced her greatest battle: helping players escape a city where playing sports could mean execution.

From kicking a ball in a refugee camp to building a national team, Popal used soccer to empower women, despite threats that forced her into exile. From Denmark, she continued her advocacy, exposing abuse in the sport and leading evacuations as the Taliban returned.

My Beautiful Sisters is a gripping memoir—harrowing yet heartening—about courage, resilience, and the unbreakable bonds of sisterhood.

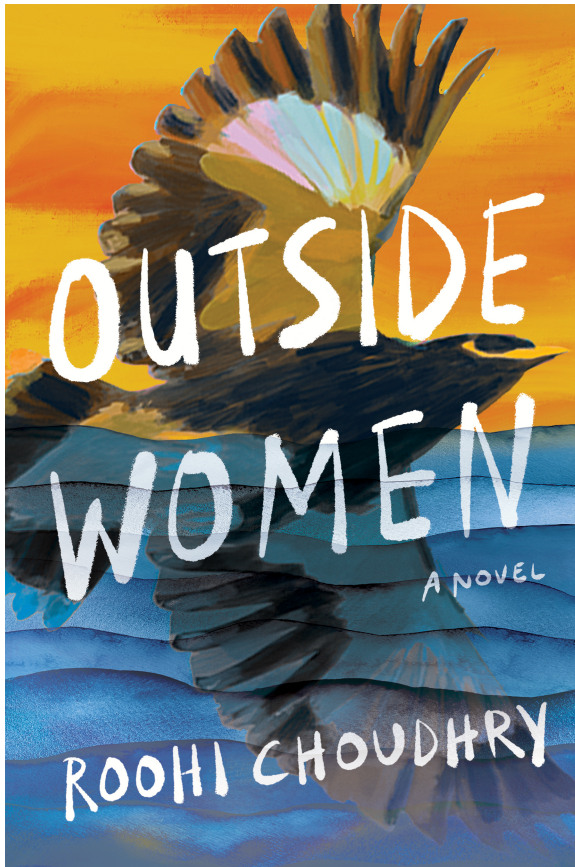
Why it's a Great Group Read

My Beautiful Sisters is a powerful memoir from Khalida Popal, cofounder and captain of Afghanistan’s women’s national soccer team. From playing secretly in refugee camps, to advocating for women’s rights under Taliban rule, to exposing abuse in the sport she loved, Popal’s story is one of resilience and unshakable courage. Forced into exile in Denmark, she continued her fight for her teammates, leading evacuation efforts as Kabul once again fell to the Taliban.

This memoir offers book clubs an abundance of meaningful discussion topics: the role of sports in empowering women, the dangers faced by those who dare to resist oppression, the trauma and hope of refugee experiences, and the global fight for gender equality. Popal’s voice is urgent, inspiring, and deeply human—her story both heartbreaking and galvanizing.

Outside Women

Roohi Choudhry – University of Kentucky Press



Lured away from her home in 1890s India, Sita is brought to South Africa as an indentured servant—one among millions funneled by the British to replace the recently abolished slave trade. One hundred years later, Hajra, a Pakistani scholar, is forced to flee to New York City from her home in Peshawar after witnessing a violent act meant to target her. She loses herself in academic research until she comes face-to-face with a photo of a laughing, defiant young woman brandishing a banner in protest. Inexorably drawn to this woman, Hajra travels to South Africa to learn more and unknowingly traces Sita's path.

With raw imagery and rich sensory detail, Roohi Choudhry's incandescent debut novel *Outside Women* intertwines the narratives of two women painfully yet valiantly carving their existences outside of patriarchal and colonial spaces as they search for kinship and strength in solidarity.

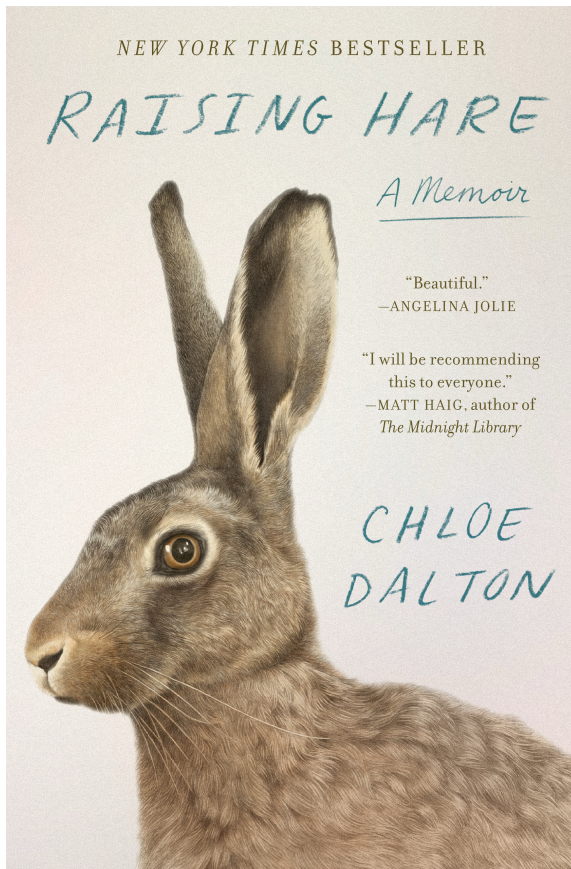
Why it's a Great Group Read

Outside Women is an engrossing dual narrative about two migrant women, separated by a century, who each fight for justice and struggle to define their place outside a patriarchal system. Sita, in 19th-century India, and Hajra, in 20th-century New York, confront injustice and isolation, revealing how little has changed for women across time and borders.

Richly detailed and immersive, the novel explores themes of migration, gender inequality, cultural identity, and resilience. It invites timely discussions on women's safety, power, and agency, as well as the echoes of history in today's struggles.

Raising Hare

Chloe Dalton – Pantheon Books



In February 2021, Chloe Dalton stumbles upon a newborn hare—a leveret—that had been chased by a dog. Fearing for its life, she brings it home, only to discover how impossible it is to rear a wild hare, most of whom perish in captivity from either shock or starvation. Through trial and error, she learns to feed and care for the leveret with every intention of returning it to the wilderness. Instead, it becomes her constant companion, wandering the fields and woods at night and returning to Dalton’s house by day. Though Dalton feared that the hare would be preyed upon by foxes, stoats, feral cats, raptors, and even people, she never tried to restrict it to the house. Each time the hare leaves, Chloe knows she may never see it again. Yet she also understands that to confine it would be its own kind of death.

Raising Hare chronicles their journey together, while also taking a deep dive into the lives and nature of hares, and the way

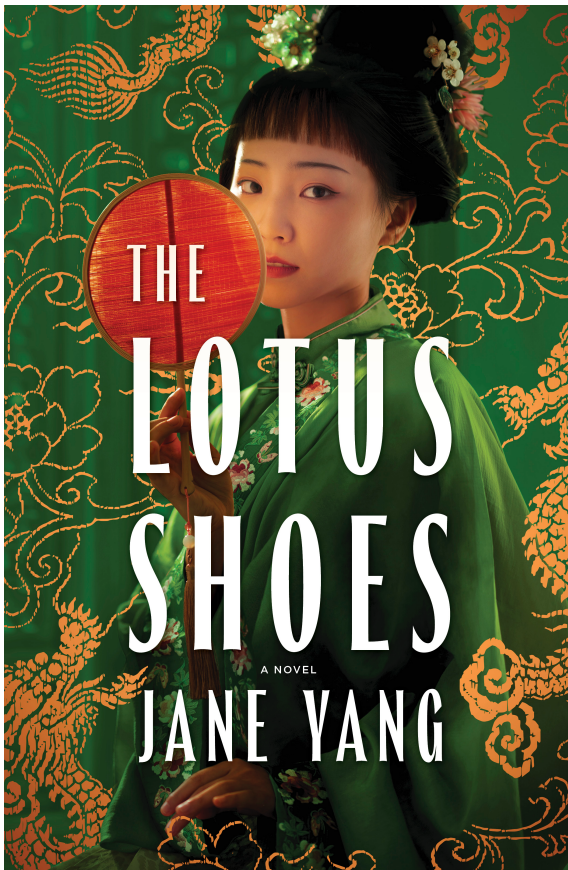
they have been viewed historically in art, literature, and folklore. We witness first-hand the joy at this extraordinary relationship between human and animal, which serves as a reminder that the best things, and most beautiful experiences, arise when we least expect them.

Why it’s a Great Group Read

Raising Hare is a beautifully written memoir about the author’s experience raising a leveret and how it transformed her relationship with nature and her own life. What begins as a story of animal care becomes a meditation on slowing down, paying attention, and rediscovering joy in simplicity. The book explores themes of conservation, coexistence, and how our constant pursuit of busyness can leave us disconnected from what truly matters. With lyrical prose and plenty of discussion points—human/animal bonds, environmental awareness, personal growth—this unique memoir offers much for book groups to reflect on.

The Lotus Shoes

Jane Yang – Harper Collins



1800s China. Tightly bound feet, or "golden lilies," are the mark of an honorable woman, eclipsing beauty, a rich dowry and even bloodline in the marriage stakes. When Little Flower is sold as a maidservant—a *muizai*—to Linjing, a daughter of the prominent Fong family, she clings to the hope that one day her golden lilies will lead her out of slavery.

Not only does Little Flower have bound feet, uncommon for a *muizai*, but she is extraordinarily gifted at embroidery, a skill associated with the highest class of a lady. Resentful of her talents, Linjing does everything in her power to thwart Little Flower's escape.

But when scandal strikes the Fongs, both women are cast out to the Celibate Sisterhood, where Little Flower's artistic prowess catches the eye of a nobleman. His attention threatens not only her improved status, but her life—the Sisterhood punishes disobedience with death. And if Linjing finds out, will she sabotage Little Flower to reclaim her power, or will she protect her?

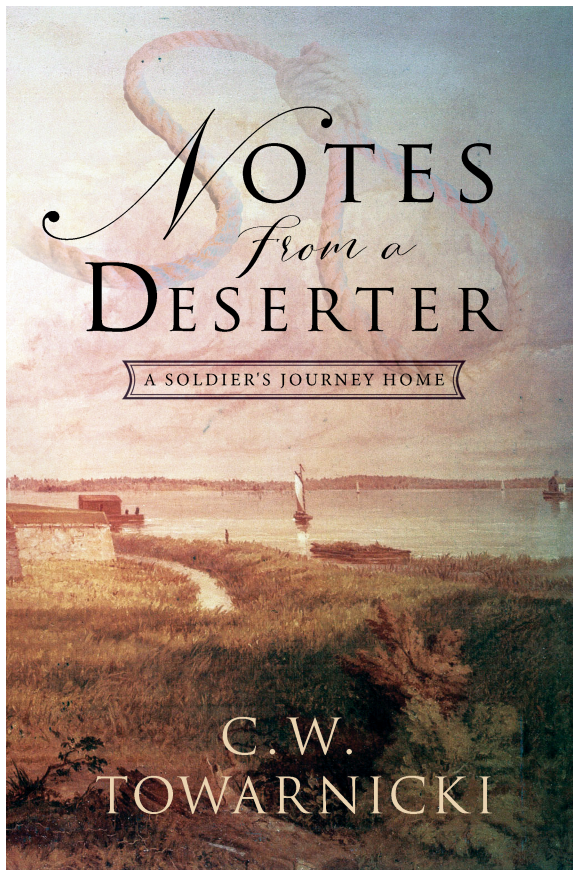
Why it's a Great Group Read

The Lotus Shoes offers an unforgettable window into 19th-century China, where issues of slavery, class, and women's roles collide with cultural traditions like foot binding and the first waves of Western influence. Told from the perspectives of both Little Flower, a purchased handmaid, and Linjin, the daughter she serves, the novel examines how power, privilege, and cruelty shape relationships on both sides.

It's a story rich with themes for discussion: the dehumanizing effects of slavery, the ways privilege can corrupt, the resilience of women in oppressive systems, and the parallels to modern-day human trafficking. The characters' emotional journeys, layered with love, betrayal, and survival, invite readers to reflect on what defines freedom and dignity. With its mix of cultural history and deeply personal storytelling, this novel provides abundant material for thoughtful, even challenging, book club conversations.

Notes from a Deserter

C.W. Towarnicki – History Through Fiction



William Henry Howe, a modest farmer, leaves his pregnant wife, Hannah, and their small family behind in pursuit of a soldier's stipend and honor. Joining the Pennsylvania 116th regiment, Howe's journey reveals a nation and culture in turmoil, each chapter punctuated by letters to Hannah written to bridge the void of his absence as war and the seasons progress.

During the brutal winter siege of Fredericksburg, Howe, weakened by dysentery, fights valiantly in a devastating defeat, emerging as one of the few survivors. As his superior officers retreat to Philadelphia and overwhelmed medical facilities crumble, Howe embarks on a grueling 275-mile journey home to Perkiomenville to recover. But his return is short-lived—local bounty hunters descend on the town seeking deserters, leading to a failed capture attempt, the death of one pursuer, and Howe's eventual imprisonment.

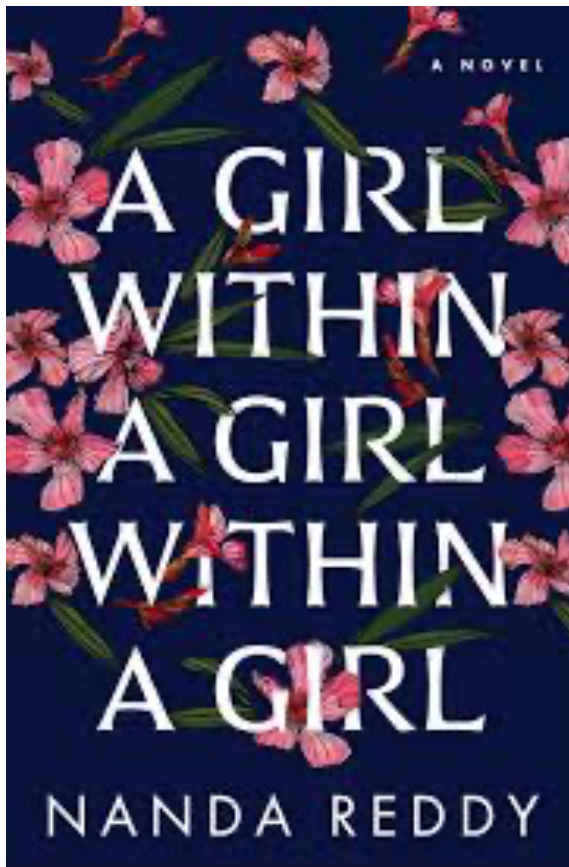
Torn from his family once more, Howe is tried, convicted, and on August 26, 1864, becomes the only soldier hanged for desertion at Fort Mifflin. His body, rejected by the local graveyard, is finally laid to rest in the family plot, where one last letter was left for the widowed Hannah. *Notes from a Deserter* is a gripping short story cycle that explores themes of duty, sacrifice, and the cost of war on individuals and communities, capturing both a nation in crisis and the tragic impact on one Pennsylvania family.

Why it's a Great Group Read

Blending meticulous research with vivid storytelling, *Notes from a Deserter* offers a fresh perspective on the Civil War through the life of William Howe, a farmer-turned-soldier whose desertion raises timeless questions about duty, honor, and survival. The novel captures not only the brutality of war but also the impact on families, communities, and a country in upheaval.

For book clubs, this story opens up rich avenues for discussion—motivation and morality in wartime, bravery versus cowardice, the role of women and families left behind, and how a nation divided then resonates with divisions today. At once brutal, tender, and thought-provoking, this novel is a timely reminder of how personal choices echo through history.

A Girl Within A Girl
Nanda Reddy – Zibby Publishing



A girl takes on a series of identities to survive, shrouding herself in secrets until, years later, she must finally reckon with her past. In suburban Atlanta, Maya's life unravels when her husband discovers a letter from her long-lost sister—forcing her to confront the truth that she is really Sunny, a child trafficked from Guyana decades earlier.

As Maya relives her harrowing past—her journey to America on the “backtrack,” her years with an abusive family, and the many names she assumed to endure—she weighs how much of her carefully built future can survive the truth. Spanning from the sugar cane fields of Guyana to immigrant Miami and affluent Atlanta, Nanda Reddy's striking debut is a wrenching exploration of identity, survival, and the resilience of the human spirit.

Why it's a Great Group Read

This novel offers book clubs a wealth of discussion topics, though it can be difficult to read at times given its focus on child trafficking, abuse, and the struggles of immigration. Through the many identities of its protagonist—Sunny, Neena, Synthia, and Maya—it traces the lifelong impact of trauma and the search for self. The dual timeline structure keeps readers engaged as past and present unfold side by side, revealing how secrets shape lives and families.

What makes it particularly powerful for group discussion is the range of themes it opens up: human trafficking as a false promise of opportunity, sexual abuse within families, the immigrant experience across decades, the resilience of survivors, and the complicated ways people reinvent themselves to survive. The writing is both lyrical and emotionally impactful, with moments that are hard to endure yet deeply rewarding. This is a challenging but ultimately worthwhile read that sparks meaningful and timely conversations.

About the Women's National Book Association

Founded in 1917, the Women's National Book Association (WNBA) is a non-profit, professional organization dedicated to supporting and promoting women in the literary world. With chapters across the country, WNBA provides a platform for writers, publishers, booksellers, librarians, and readers to connect and champion the value of books and reading.

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