

## BROWN BAG BOOKTALK RECOMMENDATIONS

NOVEMBER 3<sup>RD</sup>, 2022

**Bayard, Louis** *Jackie & Me* <2022> {historical fiction} (Fiction Bayard) - This is an interesting look at Jackie Bouvier before she became Mrs. John F. Kennedy. The story is told by one of Jack's confidants, who was enlisted to keep Jackie company and encourage her interest in Jack. Jackie was just coming into her own after graduating from college and was looking for a career and personal freedom. Her background, though not truly aristocratic, led her to contacts among the "who's who" in the social circles to which Jack belonged. She was often invited to parties that included the well knowns. After she met Jack at one of these parties, she became very interested and intrigued. Jack's interest was impinged by his busy Congress campaign schedule so her charged his friend "Lem" Billings to be a go between, and keep Jackie interested. The story is a picture of Jackie's dreams as well as the reality of Jack's lifestyle revealed to us through Lem's stories. I recommend this book to anyone interested in the Kennedys or just interested in a different method of "wooing" a woman. - recommended by CSC

**Dietz, S. Theresa** *The Complete Language of Herbs: A Definitive and Illustrated History* <2022> {nonfiction} (Nonfiction 581.63 D566c) - A truly beautiful book. In this comprehensive compendium of herbs, you can discover their meanings and hidden language. The author has researched the uses, meanings, and folklore of over 500 herbs and spices from all over the world. You can learn the historic and modern uses for the everyday herbs and spices you use in your cooking, get inspiration for new plants to cultivate in your garden, or simply enjoy learning something new. The book is designed to attract the eye of just about anyone. She includes a list of culinary herbs, an index of common herb names and another index of common meanings and powers. - recommended by JAC

**Garmus, Bonnie** *Lessons in Chemistry* <2022> {romance fiction} (Fiction Garmus) - It is the 1960s and Elizabeth Zott is a newly minted chemist who goes to work at the Hastings Research Institute. She arrives on the first day of work to find a manager who looks upon her as a mere secretary, and without the proper equipment for her chemistry experiments. Barging in on Calvin Evans, the lab's Nobel-nominated chemist, she steals both some of his beakers and his heart. Tragedy occurs when Calvin meets an untimely end. Not only must Elizabeth forge ahead without her biggest mentor, but she must cope with an untimely pregnancy on her own. But Elizabeth has plenty of spirit and determination. Along the way, she lands on television with a cooking show developed with a slant on chemistry. Full of charming and quirky characters, this book is for readers who appreciated Gabrielle Zevin's *The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry*. - recommended by SCR

**Gentill, Sulari** *The Woman in the Library* <2022> {mystery fiction} (Fiction Gentill) - Four people are isolated together after they hear a woman is found murdered at the Boston Public library. In this mystery-within-a-mystery, fictional author Hannah Tignone sets out to discover and document which of her three new acquaintances may be the murderer. - recommended by SCR

**Gurnah, Abdulrazak** *Paradise* <2022> {fiction} (Fiction Gurnah, available only on Hoopla as an ebook) - This is a strange tale based on its ironic title. The main character is Yusuf, an adolescent boy who is sent away to stay with "Uncle" Aziz because of a debt owed by his father. Yusuf does not realize that this is a permanent arrangement. Aziz is a very rich merchant and commands much respect in the small trading village in the interior of Tanzania. When he goes by caravan to other trade centers he travels with hundreds of porters, bodyguards, and scouts. After several years, Yusuf is allowed to join a safari into the dark continent. Along the way they encounter thieves, warlords, and unfriendly villagers. Just as "one man's meat can be another man's poison," the perception of paradise changes as the story progresses. To some, paradise is an enchanting, tropical island like Zanzibar; to another, paradise is an opulent mansion furnished with treasures from around the world. Gurnah, a Nobel literature laureate, provides a glimpse of Arabic culture by focusing on relationships, values, beliefs, and norms. The author's style may provide a challenge for readers accustomed to a Euro-centric literary tradition, but a diligent reading will prove very worthwhile. A surprise ending will give some food for thought. - recommended by EN

**Han, Jenny** *The Summer I Turned Pretty* <2009> {teen fiction} (Teen Fiction Han) - Written for a young adult audience, this is the first book in a series of three. Two women, Susannah Fisher and Laurel Dunne, have been spending every summer together at a cousin's beach cottage since their kids were babies. As the four children enter their teens, Susannah's sons, Conrad and Jeremiah, notice that Laurel's daughter, Isabel (AKA Belly), has matured into a beautiful young woman. The story is complicated by the boys' mother having a recurrence of her breast cancer. The second novel, *It's Not Summer Without You*, deals with the death of Susannah, and developing romance between Belly and Jeramiah. The third novel, *We'll Always Have Summer*, is the resolution of Belly's relationship with the two brothers as they enter adulthood. For those who recall the bloom of first romances. Now a television series on Amazon Prime. - recommended by SCR

**Hannah, Kristin** *Home Front* <2012> {fiction} (Fiction Hannah) - Readers will probably know Hannah for her historical fiction, especially those novels based in the Second World War. *Home Front* takes place during the Iraq War, and readers should be forewarned that this one is a real tear-jerker. Michael and Joleen Zarkades, a young couple living in the state of Washington, have two daughters, Betsy, twelve, and Lulu, three. Mike is a successful lawyer and Joleen is a military helicopter pilot. Both are concentrating on their careers and raising their family, but the marriage is suffering from work stress. The story takes an abrupt turn when Joleen's helicopter is shot down and she, her best friend, Tammy, and others suffer severe injuries. Joleen feels the guilt of having led her fellow soldiers into such danger and devastation. Her recovery is made somewhat bearable by the physical therapist, Connie, who refuses to let her mourn herself. However, family life continues to deteriorate as they all try to cope with her post-traumatic stress disorder. Betsy becomes increasingly belligerent, Lulu cries often, and Mike tries to be both father and mother. A subplot concerns Mike's upcoming trial of his client: another PTSD sufferer who shot his wife. This is a story of patriotism and honor, love and loss, and, finally, hope. - recommended by EN

**Kleiman, Kathy** *Proving Ground: The Untold Story of the Six Women Who Programmed the World's First Modern Computer* <2022> {nonfiction} (Nonfiction 004.0922 K639p) - The first modern computer was known as the ENIAC. It was developed during the 1940s by a team of researchers of the U.S. Army. The group was housed at the Moore School in Philadelphia. The primary goal was, of course, technological supremacy both during the war and after. The Army began recruiting supremely well-qualified women to work on the project. Its first goal was to calculate artillery equations taking into account all manner of variations such as weather, type of artillery gun, surface gun is mounted on, etc. Six women worked tirelessly to learn how to program the computer. Generally, historians have totally ignored their contributions. You would see pictures where the men were identified, but the women were not. Kathy Kleiman spent over a decade researching these amazing women and bringing their story to life. She was able to conduct in-depth interviews with four of the six ENIAC women who did the programming. Gradually they are being recognized, although all have since passed away. If you enjoyed *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race* by Margot Lee Shetterly, give this book a try. - recommended by JAC

**L'Engle, Madeleine** *The Summer of the Great-Grandmother* <1974> {youth nonfiction} (Youth Nonfiction 92 L'Engle, Madeleine) - Most readers know Madeleine L'Engle for her award-winning fantasy, *A Wrinkle in Time*, finally adapted for the screen in 2003 and 2018. *The Summer of the Great-Grandmother* is very different as it is a personal memoir in which the author not only tries to come to terms with her mother's Alzheimer's disease but also provides a rich autobiography. Most of the "storyline" takes place during Great-Grandmother's last summer when four generations of the L'Engle extended family gather at the residence in Crosswicks, Connecticut. The author is obviously prematurely grieving the loss of her mother and intersperses descriptions of her decline with memories of her own childhood. These include her summers at Crosswicks, boarding school in Switzerland, European travels, and early life in Jacksonville, Florida. Some chapters reveal ancestors who were artists, authors, actors, ambassadors. Married life in New York City was hectic and fulfilling. Throughout there is a fascination with the roles that mothers, grandmothers and, more and more, great-grandmothers play in families and societies. - recommended by EN

**Mackrell, Judith** *The Correspondents: Six Women Writers on the Front Lines of World War II* <2021> Nonfiction 070.4499 M159c - This is a very readable history of World War II from an aspect that I had never considered before. Mackrell tells the stories of six women who defied the odds and told the story of combat from a woman's perspective. They had to struggle to get the same courtesies that their male colleagues enjoyed, and were systematically ignored by the military, and could rarely get access to the actual fronts of combat. Martha Gellhorn outscoped her husband, Ernest Hemingway, on D-Day by stowing away on a Red Cross ship. Lee Miller went from being a *Vogue* cover girl to the magazine's official war correspondent and photographer. Sigrid Schultz hid her Jewish identity and risked her life by reporting on the Nazi regime from inside Germany. Virginia Cowles known as a society girl columnist turned combat reporter. Clare Hollingworth was the first English journalist, man or woman, to break the news of World War II. Helen Kirkpatrick was the first woman to report from an Allied war zone with equal privileges to men. I think it is wonderful that we are gradually being treated to stories of women who were equally important to men in a myriad of fields. - recommended by JAC

**Newmark, Elle** *The Sandalwood Tree* <2011> {historical fiction} (Fiction Newmark) - This historical novel takes place in India during two landmark events in the country's history. The story of two young Englishwomen, Adela and Felicity, takes place during the 1850s when some Indians begin to reject British rule during the Sepoy rebellion. Almost one hundred years later, in 1947, American Evie Mitchell and her family arrive. Her husband is an historian/anthropologist there to study the effects of the imminent departure from India of the British. The two timelines share a bungalow and an ancient sandalwood tree. Evie is bound and determined to discover the hidden story of the two young British women. I loved the descriptions of India with its sights and sounds and odors so different from our own experience. - recommended by JAC

**O'Farrell, Maggie** *Hamnet: A Novel of the Plague* <2020> {fiction} (Fiction O'Farrell) - Ostensibly the story of William Shakespeare and his wife Anne as they cope with the loss of their son Hamnet to the Black Plague. Winner of *National Book Critics Circle Award*, an unnamed Latin tutor escapes his overbearing father by marrying the free-spirited healer, Agnes. Despite having three young children with the tutor, Agnes sacrifices her family life by encouraging her husband to follow his dreams to act and write in London. Tragedy arises as the plague enters the household while he is away, and Agnes is unable to heal her child. - recommended by SCR

**Osman, Richard** *The Thursday Murder Club* <2020> {Mystery fiction} (Fiction O'Farrell) - This story is about a group of four octogenarians living in an adult community who have decided to review police "cold cases." Each Thursday they meet to pick a case. The members each have a unique talent to bring to the mystery. When a current murder occurs at their village focus changes and the four set forth to solve this murder. The characters are sharp and endearing. The story includes twists and turns that keep it fresh but tends to wander a bit. New characters are introduced at unusual times. This is the author's first book in this genre, and I hope he will refine his next books more. - recommended by CSC

**Picoult, Jodi** *Wish You Were Here* 2021 EN <2021 > {fiction} (Fiction Picoult) - This story takes place in New York City, during the Covid pandemic, and the Galapagos Islands, or so we think. Diana and Finn have been together for some years: she is a sales manager at Sotheby's and he is a medical doctor. They are about to embark on a long-planned trip to the Galapagos during which Diana is sure that he will present her with an engagement ring. Suddenly Covid strikes and Finn is unable to travel to their apartment from the hospital let alone travel to the middle of the Pacific Ocean. He encourages her to take the trip alone. "Wish you were here." Who has not written that on a postcard? It is usually jotted quickly while enjoying countless adventures on vacation. It is what Diana scribbles while touring St. Isabela Island with the handsome guide, Gabriel. She also meets the troubled young woman, Beatriz, who becomes a person of interest and a complex companion. There is also the grandmother, Abuela, who rents Diana a room when the island goes into Covid lockdown. Soon what started as an exotic holiday turns into a survival saga. This is a fast-moving story, with lots of detail and good characterization. A twist in the plot will surprise all readers. - recommended by EN

**Rader-Day, Lori** *Death at Greenway* <2021> {mystery fiction} (Fiction Rader-Day) - This suspense novel is set at Agatha Christie's real-life country home. It takes place during World War II. Bridey Kelly is a disgraced nurse-in-training, who is assigned to help take care of a group of ten children seeking safety from war-torn London. Rader-Day creates a very believable story of danger and unseen evil lurking in England during the Blitz. *Greenway* is a beautiful home full of riddles, wondrous curios not to be touched, and restrictions on rooms not to be entered. Bridey is, however, permitted to go into the library which, of course, is filled with books about murder. When a body washes ashore near the estate, Bridey is horrified to realize this is not a victim of war, but of a brutal murder. She partners with her mysterious co-worker (with dangerous secrets of her own), to try and unravel the truth. - recommended by JAC

**Raven, Catherine** *Fox and I: An Uncommon Friendship* <2021> {memoir nonfiction} (Nonfiction 599.775 R253f) - This is an unforgettable memoir about the friendship between a solitary woman and a wild fox. In many ways it reminds me of Thoreau. Raven writes beautifully about animals and birds and insects, flowers and weeds, stones and dirt, and weather, and everything you can imagine about nature in the high desert wilderness. When Raven finished her PhD in biology, she built herself a tiny cottage on an isolated plot of land in Montana. She was emotionally and physically isolated, and viewed the house as a temporary rest shop, where she could gather her nerves and fill out applications for what she hoped would be a real job that would help her fit into society. One day she realized a mangy-looking fox was showing up on her property every afternoon at 4:15 p.m. How do you even talk to a fox? She sat as close to him as she dared in her camping chair and began to read to him from the *Little Prince*. This is a remarkable and poignant tale of friendship, growth, and coping with inevitable loss. We are never alone when we are connected to the natural world. - recommended by JAC

**Reid, Taylor Jenkins** *Carrie Soto Is Back* 2022 <2020> {fiction} (Fiction Reid) - After retiring as the grand dame of tennis six years ago, Carrie Soto decides she is going to re-enter the world of professional competition at the ripe old age of 37. Motivated by witnessing her long-standing streak of 20 Grand slam titles fall to younger Nicki Chan, Carrie convinces her dad Javier to become her coach. Using former boyfriend, Bowe Huntley, Carrie begins the arduous task of getting back into shape against all odds. Along the way, Carrie learns a lot about herself and what is really important in life. - recommended by SCR