

## BROWN BAG BOOKTALK RECOMMENDATIONS

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

**Cabot, Meg** *No Words (Little Bridge Island #3)* <2021> {romance fiction} (Fiction Cabot) - At Little Bridge Island's first annual literary festival, the attending authors create enough drama to fill several novels. Jo Wright, author of popular children's book series Kitty Katz, Kitten Sitter, is not feeling as perfectly "pawsitive" as her plucky feline heroine. She's been dealing with terrible writer's block ever since Will Price, author of several supersuccessful maudlin romances, bad-mouthed her books to a reporter from the New York Times. Now prone to wearing all black and embracing a less-than-sunny approach to life, Jo is way behind on her deadline for Kitty Katz No. 27 and in need of funds to move her ailing father out of New York City and to a warmer climate. So, when Jo receives an unexpected invitation--complete with \$10,000 stipend--to the Florida Keys for Little Bridge Island's first literary festival, she can't really justify turning it down. There's only one downside: Will Price is not only attending the festival, but he's also its largest donor. Jo, along with a zany cast including magician/fantasy author Garrett Newcombe and her best friend, YA novelist Bernadette Zhang, are all charmed by the island's hospitality and the festival's fancy events. But when Jo and Will's past animosity seeps into the present and unsavory rumors come to a head, Little Bridge finds itself in the eye of a "purr-fect" storm. - review from *Kirkus Reviews*, recommended by NCM

**Chan, Jessamine** *The School for Good Mothers* <2022> {science fiction} (Fiction Chan) - Just after Frida Liu gives birth to her first baby, her husband moves in with another woman. Though the two parents share custody, Frida finds it difficult to juggle her grief, shared custody, and a full-time career. In a moment of extreme duress, Frida leaves her toddler, Harriet, alone to grab a quick cup of coffee and check her work emails in peace and quiet. She returns to find Child Protective Services at her apartment. Set in the near future, CPS has just implemented a year-long program to re-educate negligent mothers like Frida. Each mother in the program has been matched with a lifelike doll that has most of the capabilities of a real child. The mothers are never alone as these dolls also harvest and analyze data to be used by CPS. Needless to say, life will never be the same for any of these mothers. This novel will appeal to Margaret Atwood fans. - recommended by SCR

**Dray, Stephanie** *The Women of Chateau Lafayette* <2021> {historical fiction} (Fiction Dray) - I love historical fiction, especially when it tells the story of women who have so long been left out of our official histories. This novel takes us to the Chateau or castle Lafayette in Chavaniac, France. Most of us probably are very familiar with the marquis de Lafayette and his immense influence on the war for American independence. I had no idea that his wife Adrienne was her husband's equal as a political partner and was even more heroic in the French Revolution. The next war in Dray's saga is the Great War of 1914-1918. Once again, the Chateau is the backdrop for the story of American Beatrice Chanler. While there are many gaps in her real history, the author has recreated a heroine who convinces America to fight for what is right. The third heroine is totally fictional, but Marthe Simone is based on an amalgam of the many heroic French women (and men) who did their best to save Jewish Frenchmen. It is true that the Chateau was an orphanage where many lives were saved during World War II. - recommended by JAC

**Gaynor, Hazel and Heather Webb** *Three Words for Goodbye* <2021> {historical fiction} (Fiction Gaynor) - These authors were also partners in the popular historical fiction *Meet Me in Monaco*. This story takes place in 1937 but was initially inspired by Nellie Bly's trip around the world in 72 days back in 1892. Violet Bell has unfinished business and needs the help of her two granddaughters. Estranged sisters Clara and Madeline Sommers eventually and reluctantly agree to travel together to Paris, Venice, and Vienna. They are recreating a journey that Violet took some forty years earlier. In each city they are to deliver a letter in which Violet will say goodbye to one of the most important people in her life. The sisters travel on the Queen Mary and the Orient Express and explore the sights while carrying out their assignment. Of course, Europe is in turmoil, and another world war seems inevitable. The sisters are glad to return to America, but fate has a final detour as they are traveling aboard the Hindenburg. - recommended by JAC

**Goodall, Jane and Douglas Abrams** *The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide for Trying Times* <2021> (Nonfiction 234.25 G646b) - Jane Goodall is the world renowned biologist who made a name for herself over decades studying chimpanzees in Africa. Her groundbreaking studies have influenced scientists and changed our attitudes about animal behavior. In a series of dialogues with Douglas Abrams she shares her life views in this guide for pandemic-stricken humans. Hope is such an abstraction. Goodall approaches the concept not as a philosopher or theologian but as a zoologist and humanitarian. The four main chapters discuss her reasons for hope: the amazing human intellect, the resilience of nature, the power of young people, and the indomitable human spirit. The book is reminiscent of Abrams' earlier work, *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*, in which he interviews the Dalai Lama and the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu, both of whom also preached a hope in humankind. - recommended by EN

**Gorton, Stephanie** *Citizen Reporters: S. S. McClure, Ida Tarbell, and the Magazine That Rewrote America* <2020> (Nonfiction 051 G675c) - This is a fascinating history of the beginnings of investigative journalism. *McClure's Magazine* was one of the most influential magazines in American history, with a circulation of more than 400,000 readers. S.S. McClure was an Irish immigrant who sought out an education, and then pursued stories that needed to be told. He had bouts of mania and would lose focus but was ultimately one of the most influential editors of a magazine. His star reporter was Ida Tarbell, who did the massive research and incisive writing that toppled the Standard Oil monopoly leading to the anti-trust laws. The magazine also introduced Americans to such authors as Willa Cather, Arthur Conan Doyle, Robert Louis Stevenson, Joseph Conrad, and many others. - recommended by JAC

**Hammer, Joshua** *The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu: and Their Race to Save the World's Most Precious Manuscripts* <2016> (Nonfiction 025.820966 H183b) - Most people do not think of Africa as the continent rich with manuscripts and written knowledge let alone libraries. Some might know the sad story of the library of Alexandria, Egypt which was burned by Julius Caesar in 48 B.C. Ten years ago a similar story about the loss of a library in Mali, West Africa appeared in international news reports for several weeks. Joshua Hammer tells the heroic story of Abdel Kader Haidara, a mild-mannered librarian, who traveled the Sahara Desert for decades collecting ancient Islamic texts and storing them in the old trading city of Timbuktu. In 2021 Al Qaeda militia from northwest Africa seized control of Mali. They imposed Sheria Law, maiming thieves, and stoning bigamists; they also threatened to destroy the great manuscripts held in the library at Timbuktu. Haidara boldly organized

a group of scholars who over a period of many months, smuggled over 350,000 manuscripts to hiding places in southern Mali. Joshua Hammer not only tells the facts about saving this vast heritage of Africa but also includes a lot of Islamic history, including how knowledge is valued and venerated in Islamic culture. Once again, the world is seen as a better place because of depositories of learning and knowledge. Wisdom and the belief in shared information and knowledge triumph over fanaticism and terrorism. This is a valuable read. - recommended by EN

**Jamail, Dahr** *The End of Ice: Bearing Witness and Finding Meaning in the Path of Climate Disruption* <2019> (Nonfiction [577.276 J271e](#)) - We have so much written and spoken about climate change these days. Most of it is gloom and doom, leaving the average consumer depressed and anxious. Jamail began his writing career as a war correspondent in Iran decades ago. When he returned to the United States, he wanted to renew his love of hiking and mountaineering. He describes his many travels in this book, and these include Denali, the Pribilof Islands, and various national parks. Along the way, he describes how climate disruption has affected glaciers, coral, sequoias and other trees, biodiversity, fur seals, fish, permafrost, southern Florida and the Everglades, and the Amazon rainforest. Although much of the data are, indeed, alarming, the author's love for Planet Earth permeates the text throughout. The melting glaciers are affecting all of life on earth; Jamail shares this urgency with the reader in hopes that we might engage more with nature and hence cherish what we have. - recommended by EN

**Kaufman, Amie and Jay Kristoff** *Aurora Rising (The Aurora Cycle #1)* <2019> {science fiction} (Teen Fiction [Kaufman](#)) - In 2380, Aurora Academy's Tyler Jones has it all. He's the most decorated cadet in his year, in line for the best missions with peacekeeping group Aurora Legion, and ready to recruit his dream squad-he just has to get through the Draft. But when a late-night flight reveals a ship that disappeared more than 200 years ago, he follows protocol and rescues a cryogenically frozen human girl, missing the Draft entirely. Stuck with his twin sister and a squad of misfits no one else wants, Tyler resigns himself to making supply runs for the foreseeable future. Then Auri, the girl he rescued, turns up as a stowaway. Now on the run from the Global Intelligence Agency, which will stop at nothing to capture Auri, Tyler and his squad must bring her to safety and probe deeper into her visions of Octavia, a lost human colony in a different solar system. The story is told from seven perspectives, which can make for uneven character development, but coauthors Kaufman and Kristoff (*the Illuminae Files* series) maintain an exciting, fast pace; a steadily coalescing band of crewmates; and plentiful romantic tension in this entertaining space opera. - review from *Publisher's Weekly*, recommended by NCM

**Kimmerer, Robin Wall** *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* <2013> (Nonfiction [970.3 P859k](#)) - As the subtitle says, this book contains indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teachings of plants. The author combines an almost addictive American lyricism with an analytical look at life on earth. Kimmerer is a biologist who uses her Native American heritage as a member of the Potawatomi (northeast United States) to examine and explain the natural history around us. This work is scientific, emotional, and cultural and could be considered a handbook for people who are trying to heal the rift between humans and nature. Some might find it reminiscent of Barbara Kingsolver's novel, *Animal Dreams*, set in Arizona. - recommended by EN

**Kline, Christina Baker** *The Exiles* <2020> {historical fiction} (Fiction Kline) - This is the latest of Kline's bestsellers. Most of the story takes place in 19th century Australia but it begins in Newgate Prison, England. Evangeline, one of the three main characters, has been wrongfully accused of stealing a ruby ring; she is also jailed because her employer's son has impregnated her. In jail she meets Hazel who supposedly stole a silver spoon. Evangeline, an orphan, had been working as a tutor, and Hazel has learned the skills of midwifery from her mother. They are both sentenced to a penal colony in Van Diemen's Land (present-day Tasmania). While aboard the *Medea*, these two dissimilar women form an endearing friendship and assist Olive to give birth to a daughter, Ruby, who is soon adopted by Evangeline. The third main character is another orphan, Mathinna, the daughter of an aboriginal chief. She has been adopted by an English lady who is intent on "civilizing" her. The threesome assist one another through some harrowing experiences which give the reader a look at colonial Australia. -recommended by EN

**Patchett, Ann** *State of Wonder* <2011> {fiction} (Fiction Patchett) - Patchett is the greatly respected and award-winning author of essays, children's books, and fiction. We have talked about her *Bel Canto* (2001), *The Dutch House* (2019) and *Commonwealth* (2016) in our Brown Bag Booktalks before. In *State of Wonder* Patchett takes us on an adventure-filled trip to the Amazon. Marina Singh is a pharmaceutical researcher who left behind her promising medical career when she was still an intern. She works with Anders Eckman in a cutting-edge pharmaceutical company in Minnesota. Eckman was sent to the Amazon to check on the progress of an anti-malarial drug being researched by Dr. Annick Swenson. When the drug company receives word that Eckman died of a fever and was buried somewhere along the Amazon River they decide to send Marina to find out what really happened. She doesn't want to go but her CEO demands that she go. It turns out that Swenson was her attending physician back when she was an intern and was the reason why she left medicine behind. Marina's odyssey includes losing her luggage, cannibals, spiders, snakes, and other dangers. She cannot find the grave of Eckman, but finally does find Swenson who has virtually abandoned her research into the anti-malarial drug in order to research why the women of the Lakashi tribe are able to bear healthy children in their seventies. The book is very entertaining and will also leave readers pondering several ethical questions by the end. - recommended by JAC

**Perrin, Valérie** (translated from the French by Hildegard Serle) *Fresh Water for Flowers* <2020> {fiction} (Fiction Perrin) - This is an engrossing story about Violette Toussaint who, though unlucky in her choice of partners, manages to live in hope which leads to ultimate happiness. Violette and Phillippe Toussaint begin their married life working as crossing guards for the railroad in a small town in northern France. When the signal sounds in their meagre cottage one or the other must run out and manually operate the road/street barriers to ward off automobile drivers. Usually, Violette does the work as Phillippe's numerous infidelities take him away from home. When the railways move into the technological age, Violette and Phillippe are out of work. They quickly find a similar job as caretakers in the local cemetery. Soon Phillippe leaves forever and Violette is left to tend the flowers as well as the mourners of this small village who often stop for tea or something stronger in her humble parlor. One day Inspector Seul appears as he is there to bury his mother, but he seems to have other things on his mind. All of the characters have secrets to hide, and motives are not always clear. The interpersonal relations and mysteries will keep the reader engaged. - recommended by EN

**Picoult, Jodi** *Wish You Were Here* <2021> {fiction} (Fiction Picoult) - Diana and her fiancé have been planning a trip to the Galapagos Islands when COVID-19 begins to strike New York City in its' first wave. As her fiancé, Finn, works at New York Presbyterian Hospital as a resident; he has been designated as essential personnel. Diana decides to go to the islands by herself, and as things get worse, she becomes stranded on the Isabela Island. Fortunately, local families are kind to Diana, and she gets to know the families and the island as they do. But just as you think you know where the novel is going, Picoult inserts her trade-mark plot twist. - recommended by SCR

**Skeslien Charles, Janet** *The Paris Library* <2021> {historical fiction} (Fiction Skeslien Charles) - Based upon a true story set in 1939, Odile Souchet has just been hired as a librarian at the American Library in Paris. Over the course of the war, as the Nazis move into Paris, the librarians fight to keep the library open and work hard to deliver to the patrons who have been banned from using the facility. Set in two different time periods and places, Odile's story ends up in rural Montana, where she befriends a young girl. Lily has just lost her mother and life has been turned upside down when her father remarries, and a new baby enters their lives. This novel is recommended to readers who enjoyed Kristen Hannah's *The Nightingale*. - recommended by SCR

**Waal, Frans B de** *Mama's Last Hug: Animal Emotions and What They Tell Us about Ourselves* <2019> (Nonfiction 599.8851 W111m) - Frans De Waal is a man who will travel halfway across the world during pandemic times to say good-bye to his favorite chimpanzee, Mama. He is an animal behavioralist; she was his first research subject for over three decades. It is a heart-warming scene that he describes: Mama senses him as soon as he enters, runs to tightly embrace him, and utters all manner of matronly and soothing syllables. Thus follows De Waal's treatise on animal behavior. Anyone who has ever had a pet will appreciate the anthropomorphic allusions and all the ways in which our pets become part of our families. Studying and living closely with animals allows scientists to observe their actions and witness some surprisingly emotional revelations. This book is a must for animal lovers. And it teaches us about ourselves. Finally, it is a plea for animal (and even plant) rights. - recommended by EN

#### *Also Recommended*

**Epstein, Allison** *A Tip for the Hangman* <2021> {historical fiction} (Fiction Epstein) - Christopher Marlow was a brilliant young playwright when he was recruited to be an international spy by the government of Queen Elizabeth I. The munificent salary he earns enables Marlowe to mount his first play, and he becomes the toast of London's raucous theater world. This well-researched novel of sixteenth century is most entertaining and informative. - recommended by JAC

**Naigle, Nancy** *The Shell Collector* <2021> {fiction} (Fiction Naigle) - Amanda Whittier has two children to raise alone after the death of her Marine husband. They are living on Whelk's Island in a fixer-upper cottage before school begins in the fall and they all must go back to school. Paul Grant is also a relative newcomer to the island where he works with former military dogs needing rehabilitation. Elderly widowed Maeve Lindsay was born on Whelk's Island. She is spirited, kind and a little mischievous. These three people find encouragement in the most mysterious places by collecting shells and discover a love that is ultimately bigger than their pain. Fans of Debbie Macomber will enjoy this book. - recommended by JAC

**Winn, Raynor** *The Salt Path: A Memoir* <2019> {memoir} (Nonfiction Biography [92 Winn, Raynor](#))

**Winn, Raynor** *The Wild Silence: A Memoir* <2021> {memoir} (Nonfiction Biography [92 Winn, Raynor](#)) -

In *The Salt Path*, Winn writes about the time after her husband is diagnosed with corticalbasal degeneration and they have lost both their home and business in Wales after an investment goes bad. Instead of giving up, the pair pack up minimal supplies and begin to walk the rugged 630-mile Southwest Coastal Path along the Bristol and English Channels. This is a beautiful tale of grief, acceptance, and newfound strength.

In *The Wild Silence*, life beyond *The Salt Path* awaits and they come back to four walls, but the sense of home is illusive and returning to normality is proving difficult - until an incredible gesture by someone who reads their story changes everything. A chance to breathe life back into a beautiful farmhouse nestled deep in the Cornish hills; rewilding the land and returning nature to its hedgerows becomes their saving grace and their new path to follow. *The Wild Silence* is a story of hope triumphing over despair, of lifelong love prevailing over everything. - both recommended by SCR