

GREAT READS



2020

Presented by Justine Elliott and Michael McArthur

HIGHLIGHTED BOOKS

Dear Edward by Ann Napolitano

A 12-year-old lone survivor of a plane crash investigates the stories of his less-fortunate fellow passengers before making a profound discovery about his life purpose in the face of transcendent losses.

Such a Fun Age by Kiley Reid

A story about race and privilege is centered around a young black babysitter, her well-intentioned employer and a surprising connection that threatens to undo them both.

A Burning by Megha Majumdar

An opportunistic gym teacher and a starry-eyed misfit find the realization of their ambitions tied to the downfall of an innocent Muslim girl who has been wrongly implicated in a terrorist attack.

These Ghosts are Family by Maisy Card

A man on his deathbed reveals that he stole another man's identity decades earlier, traces the family's history from colonial Jamaica to present-day Harlem and reconnects with the firstborn daughter he never knew.

A Madness of Sunshine by Nalini Singh

Returning to her impoverished New Zealand hometown to reconnect with familiar things after a personal tragedy, Anahera Rawiri bonds with detective Will Gallagher to uncover the community secrets behind a missing-persons case.

Twenty-One Truths about Love by Matthew Dicks

Presents a novel written entirely in lists that convey the struggles of a man whose limits are tested by the risks he must take to save his family and failing bookstore.

The Vanishing Half by Brit Bennett

Twin sisters, inseparable as children, ultimately choose to live in two very different worlds, one black and one white.

Migrations by Charlotte McConaghy

A woman who has dedicated her life to protecting the environment convinces a fishing captain and his salty crew to follow the world's last flock of Arctic terns on a migration of dark revelations.

More Better Deals by Joe Lansdale

Dispatched to repossess a Cadillac from a deadbeat pet-cemetery owner and his beautiful wife, an unscrupulous used-car salesman embarks on an affair that tests the limits of his character. By the Edgar Award-winning author of *The Bottoms*.

All the Ways We Said Goodbye by Beatriz Williams, Lauren Willig, and Karen White

An heiress, a Resistance fighter and a widow find their lives intertwined by their wartime experiences and the turbulent 1960s when they seek refuge at Paris' legendary Ritz hotel.

***Vesper Flights* by Helen MacDonald**

A collection of best loved essays, along with new pieces on topics ranging from nostalgia for a vanishing countryside to the tribulations of farming ostriches to her own private vespers while trying to fall asleep. Essays about observation, fascination, time, memory, love and loss and how we make sense of the world around us.

***Once More to the Rodeo* by Calvin Hennick**

Five years into fatherhood, Calvin Hennick is plagued by self-doubt and full of questions. How can he teach his son to be a man, when his own father figures abandoned him? As a white man, what can he possibly teach his biracial son about how to live as a black man in America? And what does it even mean to be a man today, when society's expectations of men seem to change from moment to moment?

***The Exiles* by Christina Baker Kline**

In this gorgeous novel, Christina Baker Kline brilliantly recreates the beginnings of a new society in a beautiful and challenging land, telling the story of Australia from a fresh perspective, through the experiences of Evangeline, Hazel, and Mathinna.

***Deacon King Kong* by James McBride**

In the aftermath of a 1969 Brooklyn church deacon's public shooting of a local drug dealer, the community's African-American and Latinx witnesses find unexpected support from each other when they are targeted by violent mobsters.

***The Beauty in Breaking: A Memoir* by Michele Harper**

An emergency room physician explores how a life of service to others taught her how to heal herself.

***The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz* by Erik Larson**

An intimate chronicle of Winston Churchill and London during the Blitz--an inspiring portrait of courage and leadership in a time of unprecedented crisis.

***The Death of Vivek Oji* by Akwaeke Emezi**

In the wake of a southeastern Nigerian mother's discovery of her son's body on her doorstep, a family struggles to understand the enigmatic nature of a youth shaped by disorienting blackouts, diverse friendships and a cousin's worldly influence.

***The Office: The Untold Story of the Greatest Sitcom of the 2000s* by Andy Greene**

Hilarious, heartwarming, and revelatory, *The Office* gives fans and pop culture buffs a front-row seat to the phenomenal sequence of events that launched *The Office* into wild popularity, changing the face of television and how we all see our office lives for decades to come.

***Monogamy* by Sue Miller**

Derailed by the sudden passing of her husband of 30 years, an artist on the brink of a gallery opening struggles to pick up the pieces of her life before discovering harrowing evidence of her husband's affair.

***Devolution: A Firsthand Account of the Rainier Sasquatch Massacre* by Max Brooks**

A modern retelling of the Bigfoot legend is presented as a gripping journal by a woman from a high-tech Pacific Northwest community who becomes cut off from civilization by a volcanic eruption before witnessing the flight of starving humanoid beings.

MORE GREAT READS OF 2020

FICTION

Leave the World Behind by Rumaan Alam

Sheltering in a New York beach house with a couple that has taken refuge during a massive blackout, a family struggles for information about the power failure while wondering if the cut-off property is actually safe.

A Long Petal of the Sea by Isabel Allende

Sponsored by the poet Pablo Neruda to flee the violence of the Spanish Civil War, a pregnant widow and an army doctor unite in an arranged marriage, only to be swept up by the early days of World War II.

The Illness Lesson by Clare Beams

Interpreting a mysterious flock of red birds as an omen to pursue his newest venture, a once-famous philosopher opens a revolutionary school to shape the intellectual development of women, before his students' bizarre symptoms reveal otherworldly secrets.

If I had your Face by Frances Cha

In Seoul, South Korea, four young women make their way in a world defined by impossibly high standards of beauty, secret salons catering to wealthy men, strict social hierarchies and K-pop fan mania. Together, their stories tell a gripping tale at once unfamiliar and unmistakably universal—their tentative friendships perhaps these women's only saving grace.

Bestiary by K-Ming Chang

Three generations of Taiwanese American women are haunted by the myths of their homeland in this spellbinding, visceral debut about one family's queer desires, violent impulses, and buried secrets.

The New Wilderness by Diane Cook

A mother desperate to save her dying daughter in a world ravaged by climate change joins a hunter-gatherer initiative to test humanity's capacity to survive in the wilderness without destroying it.

Exciting Times by Naoise Dolan

Millennial Irish expat Ava becomes entangled in a love triangle with a male banker and a female lawyer.

The Guest List by Lucy Foley

An expertly planned celebrity wedding between a rising television star and an ambitious magazine publisher is thrown into turmoil by petty jealousies, a college drinking game, the bride's ruined dress and an untimely murder.

The Searcher by Tana French

Looking to start a new life in a small Irish village, former Chicago police officer Cal Hooper comes out of retirement to help find a missing kid and uncovers layers of darkness beneath his picturesque retreat.

Transcendent Kingdom by Yaa Gyasi

A novel about faith, science, religion, and family that tells the deeply moving portrait of a family of Ghanaian immigrants ravaged by depression and addiction and grief, narrated by a fifth-year candidate in neuroscience at Stanford school of medicine studying the neural circuits of reward seeking behavior in mice.

The Midnight Library by Matt Haig

Somewhere out beyond the edge of the universe there is a library that contains an infinite number of books, each one the story of another reality. One tells the story of your life as it is, along with another book for the other life you could have lived if you had made a different choice at any point in your life.

***The Parisian* by Isabella Hammad**

Studying medicine and falling in love in 1914 France, the son of a wealthy Palestinian textile merchant finds his loyalties tested by conflicts between the British government and the independence-minded nationalists of his community.

***The Once and Future Witches* by Alix Harrow**

In the late 1800s, three sisters use witchcraft to change the course of history in a Hugo award-winning author's novel of magic amid the suffragette movement.

***We are All the Same in the Dark* by Julia Heaberlin**

The discovery of an unknown girl found by the side of the road a decade after an unsolved disappearance compels a young police officer's investigation into dangerous local and personal secrets.

***Just Like You* by Nick Hornby**

The person you are with is just like you- same background, same age, same interests. The perfect match. And it is an unmitigated disaster. Then, when, and where, you least expect it, you meet someone new. You seem to have nothing in common and yet, somehow, it feels totally right. Nick Hornby's brilliantly observed, tender but also brutally funny new novel gets to the heart of what it means to fall surprisingly and headlong in love with the best possible person - someone who is not just like you at all.

***Ties that Tether* by Jane Igharo**

When a Nigerian woman falls for a man she knows will break her mother's heart, she must choose between love and her family.

***Sisters* by Daisy Johnson**

Moving in the aftermath of a school bullying incident to an abandoned family home near the shore, two fiercely loyal siblings find the nature of their bond changing in the wake of a series of revelatory encounters.

***Pew* by Catherine Lacey**

Racially ambiguous, genderless, mute, and of unknown age, Pew is named by where they were found -- sleeping in a church. Pew's muteness allows the townspeople to project whatever they wish; Pew's own thoughts are communicated to readers alone. But fear of the unknown is strong, and soon the town's generosity turns to suspicion and mistrust.

***Luster* by Raven Leilani**

A young black artist falls into an affair with a man in an open marriage before gradually befriendng his wife and adopted daughter against a backdrop of dynamic racial politics.

***Fifty Words for Rain* by Asha Lemmie**

Abandoned by a mother who instructs her never to fight or ask questions, an illegitimate child of mixed heritage in 1948 Kyoto forges a powerful bond with her older half-brother against the wishes of their formidable grandparents.

***Blue Ticket* by Sophie Mackintosh**

A pregnant woman in a society where females are assigned their life stations through a lottery system contends with how the system will inevitably shape her child's life.

***The Glass Hotel* by Emily St. John Mandel**

From the author of 'Station Eleven' comes a captivating novel of money, beauty, white-collar crime, ghosts and moral compromise in which a woman disappears from a container ship off the coast of Mauritania and a massive Ponzi scheme implodes in New York, dragging countless fortunes with it.

***The Mirror & the Light* by Hilary Mantel**

A tale inspired by the final years of Thomas Cromwell describes how after the execution of Anne Boleyn and childbed death of Queen Jane, the former blacksmith's son orchestrates a desperate plot to fortify England and save his own life.

***Apeirogon* by Colum McCann**

Two fathers, a Palestinian and an Israeli, navigate the physical and emotional checkpoints of their conflicted world before devastating losses compel them to work together to use their grief as a weapon for peace.

***Oona Out of Order* by Margarita Montimore**

As the countdown to the New Year begins, soon-to-be-19 Oona Lockhart faints and awakens 32 years in the future in her 51-year-old body; and, greeted by a friendly stranger in a beautiful house she's told is her own, Oona learns that with each passing year she will leap to another age at random.

***Weather* by Jenny Offill**

Hired by her famous podcaster mentor to answer letters from increasingly polarized fans, a librarian who has acquired her education from a lifetime spent reading struggles between the limits of her knowledge and growing crises in the outside world.

***House of Trelawney* by Hannah Rothschild**

Four women from an eccentric and dysfunctional family of English aristocrats navigate historical events, from wars to economic recessions, that have driven their once-grand Cornwall estate into ruin.

***My Dark Vanessa* by Kate Elizabeth Russell**

Asked to help defend an older high-school English teacher with whom she had an affair at age 15, Vanessa struggles to choose between her romantic teen illusions and harrowing adult perceptions.

***Shuggie Bain* by Douglas Stuart**

A young boy growing up in a rundown 1980s Glasgow public housing facility pursues some semblance of a normal life as his older siblings move on and his mother increasingly succumbs to alcoholism.

***Real Life* by Brandon Taylor**

Keeping his head down at a lakeside Midwestern university where the culture is in sharp contrast to his Alabama upbringing, an introverted African-American biochem student endures unexpected encounters that bring his orientation and defenses into question.

***Redhead by the Side of the Road* by Anne Tyler**

A tech expert and building superintendent finds his circumscribed routines upended by his significant other's eviction and the appearance of a teen at his doorstep who claims to be his son.

***Confessions on the 7:45* by Lisa Unger**

Befriending a stranger in an accompanying seat when their commuter train stalls, Selena confesses a personal grievance before her life is upended by her nanny's disappearance and growing fractures in her marriage.

***The Jetsetters* by Amanda Eyre Ward**

Winning the grand prize in an essay contest, a single mother reunites her estranged adult children on a 10-day cruise while confronting long-buried secrets from their dysfunctional shared past.

***How Much of these Hills is Gold* by C. Pam Zhang**

Two orphaned Chinese immigrant siblings flee the threats of their gold rush mining town across an unforgiving landscape where their survival is tested by family secrets, sibling rivalry and disparate goals.

NONFICTION

The Crying Book by Heather Christle

Told in short, poetic snippets, this book delights and surprises, as well as rigorously examines how mental illness can affect a family across generations and how crying can express women's agency—or lack of agency—in everyday life. A beautiful tribute to the power of crying, and to working through despair to tears of joy.

Untamed by Glennon Doyle

There is a voice of longing inside every woman. We strive so mightily to be good: good mothers, daughters, partners, employees, citizens, and friends. We believe all this striving will make us feel alive. Instead, it leaves us feeling weary, stuck, overwhelmed, and underwhelmed. We look at our lives, relationships, and world, and wonder: Wasn't it all supposed to be more beautiful than this?

The Third Rainbow Girl: The Long Life of a Double Murder in Appalachia by Emma Copley Eisenberg

Part "Serial"-like investigation, part Joan Didion-like meditation, the book follows the threads of a crime through the history of West Virginia, the Back-to-the-Land movement, and the complex reality of contemporary Appalachia, forming a searing portrait of America and its divisions of gender and class, and its violence.

Notes from an Apocalypse: A Personal Journey to the End of the World and Back by Mark O'Connell

We're alive in a time of worst-case scenarios: The weather has gone uncanny. Our old postwar alliances are crumbling. Everywhere you look there's an omen, a joke whose punchline is the end of the world. How is a person supposed to live in the shadow of such a grim future? What does it mean to have children—nothing if not an act of hope? What might it be like to live through the worst? And what on Earth is anybody doing about it?

Memorial Drive: A Daughter's Memoir by Natasha Trethewey

At age nineteen, Natasha Trethewey had her world turned upside down when her former stepfather shot and killed her mother. Grieving and still new to adulthood, she confronted the twin pulls of life and death in the aftermath of unimaginable trauma and now explores the way this experience lastingly shaped the artist she became.

Caste by Isabel Wilkerson

The Pulitzer Prize-winning, bestselling author of *The Warmth of Other Suns* examines the unspoken caste system that has shaped America and shows how our lives today are still defined by a hierarchy of human divisions.