

Book Club in a Bag Annotated Bibliography

Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking by Malcolm Gladwell

In this best-seller, a staff writer for *The New Yorker* weighs the factors that determine good decision-making. Drawing on recent cognitive research, Gladwell concludes that those who quickly filter out extraneous information generally make better decisions than those who discount their first impressions.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Diaz

Paralleling his own experiences growing up in the Dominican Republic and New Jersey, Diaz has choreographed a family saga that confronts the horrific brutality of the reign of the dictator Trujillo. Writing in a combustible mix of slang and lyricism, Díaz loops back and forth in time and place, generating sly and lascivious humor in counterpoint to tyranny and sorrow. And his characters—Oscar, the hopeless romantic; Lola, his no-nonsense sister; their heartbroken mother; and the irresistible homeboy narrator—cling to life with the magical strength of superheroes, yet how vibrantly human they are. * **Winner of the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction**

The Camel Bookmobile by Masha Hamilton

Fiona Sweeney wants to do something that matters. By helping to start a traveling library, she hopes to bring literature to far-flung tiny communities where people live daily with drought and disease. But, encumbered by her Western values, Fi does not understand the volatile local struggle the bookmobile's presence sparks between the proponents of modernization and those who fear the loss of traditional ways.

Change of Heart by Jodi Picoult

June Nealon's life has been a ragged bundle of troubles. First, a drunken driver annihilates her happy marriage in an instant. Then, not long after she weds the police officer who saved her, tragedy reappears on an even larger scale: Seemingly without cause, a day laborer murders her new husband and her daughter. Seven months pregnant at the time of the slaughter, June somehow goes on, and homicidal carpenter Shay Bourne is led off, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death. For 11 years, he waits in his cell until, appeals exhausted, his appointed day of doom approaches. Then, strangely, even miraculously, a convergence begins to occur. Strange events unfold, leading many to believe that Shay is a shackled Messiah. Meanwhile, June must confront a crossroads decision: Can she believe or at least forgive this killer even if her only daughter's life is at stake? Jodi Picoult plunges us into another gripping story of women at extremes.

Cutting For Stone by Abraham Verghese

This debut fiction by the renowned physician takes the reader on a sweeping journey that moves from India to Ethiopia to the inner city of New York. It is the harrowing tale of Sister Mary Joseph Praise, a devout nun who leaves her home in southern India to do Missionary work in Yemen. In Yemen, she saves a man's life and in the process alters the course of her own. Amidst the political turmoil of 20th century Ethiopia, the novel introduces the reader two young boys who from an early age define their destiny by their fascination with medicine. One of the boys,

Marion, will go off to America, and in the over-stuffed hallways of a New York hospital begin to find refuge and great value in his work as a doctor. When his past catches up to him, Marion is forced to reach back into his past and reconnect with a family that had betrayed and deserted him.

The Friday Night Knitting Club by Kate Jacobs

Juggling the demands of her yarn shop and single-handedly raising a teenage daughter has made Georgia Walker grateful for her Friday Night Knitting Club. Her friends are happy to escape their lives too, even for just a few hours. And when the unthinkable happens, these women will discover that what they've created isn't just a knitting club: it's a sisterhood.

The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society by Marry Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows

The letters comprising this small charming novel begin in 1946, when single, 30-something author Juliet Ashton (nom de plume Izzy Bickerstaff) writes to her publisher to say she is tired of covering the sunny side of war and its aftermath. But everything changes when she receives a strange letter from Mr. Dawsey Adams, who happens to own a book previously owned by Ms. Ashton. Adams is a member of the Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society—no ordinary book club. Rather, it was formed as a ruse and became a way for people to get together without raising the suspicions of Guernsey's Nazi occupiers. Written in the form of letters (a lost art), this novel by an aunt-and-niece team has loads of charm, especially as long as Juliet is still in London corresponding with the society members.

The History of Love by Nicole Krauss

Leo Gursky is just about surviving, tapping his radiator each evening to let his upstairs neighbor know he's still alive. But life wasn't always like this: sixty years ago, in the Polish village where he was born, Leo fell in love and wrote a book. And though Leo doesn't know it, that book survived, inspiring fabulous circumstances, even love. Fourteen-year-old Alma was named after a character in that very book. And although she has her hands full—keeping track of her brother, Bird and taking copious notes on *How to Survive in the Wild*—she undertakes an adventure to find her namesake and save her family.

The Hours by Michael Cunningham

This novel dissects the lives of three separate women, living at three separate moments in time; Laura, a reluctant mother and housewife of the 1940s; Clarissa, an editor in the 1990s and caretaker of her best friend, an AIDS patient; and Woolf herself, on the verge of writing *Mrs. Dalloway*. The book is an ode to Woolf and her capacity to find the extraordinary in what would otherwise appear to be just another ordinary day. Jumping from one woman's life to the next, it becomes increasingly evident that the problems that one generation faces are not so dissimilar from the next. * **Winner of the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction**

Loving Frank by Nancy Horan

Fact and fiction blend in a historical novel that chronicles the relationship between seminal architect Frank Lloyd Wright and Mamah Cheney; from their meeting, when they were each married to another, to the clandestine affair that shocked Chicago society.

Major Pettigrew's Last Stand by Helen Simonson

Wry, courtly, opinionated, and completely endearing, Major Pettigrew is one of the most indelible characters in contemporary fiction. The Major leads a quiet life valuing the proper things that Englishmen have lived by for generations: honor, duty, decorum, and a properly brewed cup of tea. But then his brother's death sparks an unexpected friendship with Mrs. Jasmina Ali, the Pakistani shopkeeper from the village. Drawn together by their shared love of literature and the loss of their respective spouses, the Major and Mrs. Ali soon find their friendship blossoming into something more. Can their relationship survive the risks one takes when pursuing happiness in the face of culture and tradition?

Olive Kitteridge by Elizabeth Strout

This collection of 13 linked stories present a heart-wrenching, penetrating portrait of ordinary coastal Mainers living lives of quiet grief intermingled with flashes of human connection. The stories revolve around the life of Olive Kitteridge, a terse junior high school teacher, and the family that surround her in this tiny New England town. Each tale delves deeply into the souls of the ordinary townspeople, revealing thoughts and emotions about these individuals that make them anything by ordinary. * **Winner of the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction**

Out Stealing Horses by Per Petterson

Award-winning Norwegian novelist Petterson renders the meditations of Trond Sander, a man nearing 70, dwelling in self-imposed exile at the eastern edge of Norway in a primitive cabin. Trond's peaceful existence is interrupted by a meeting with his only neighbor, who seems familiar. The meeting pries loose a memory from a summer day in 1948 when Trond's friend Jon suggests they go out and steal horses. That distant summer is transformative for Trond as he reflects on the fragility of life while discovering secrets about his father's wartime activities.

The Road by Cormac McCarthy

In this Homeric novel, a father and son journey through what is left of a future apocalyptic world. Along the journey, the tandem comes across a humanity that is nearly undecipherable in its terror and cruelty. McCarthy pulls us along using terse dialogue to reveal an ambivalent world where cannibals roam yet where fleeting moments of compassion still exist between the father and son. * **Winner of the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction**

Sarah's Key by Tatiana de Rosnay

This piece of historical fiction begins in 1942 the Vel' d'Hiv' Paris roundup of Jews that saw many Jews deported to the now infamous death camp known as Auschwitz. In 2002, 60 years since this roundup, an American journalist, Julia Jarmond, is given an assignment to examine the history and legacy of this moment. Julia soon realizes that her connection to this story is closer than initially thought, and she begins to examine the lives of one family who endured these roundups and found themselves thrust into the atrocities of the Holocaust.

The Shack by Wm. Paul Young

Mackenzie Allen Phillips' youngest daughter, Missy, has been abducted during a family vacation and evidence that she may have been brutally murdered is found in an abandoned shack deep in the Oregon wilderness. Four years later in the midst of his Great Sadness, Mack receives a suspicious note, apparently from God, inviting him back to that shack for a weekend. Against his

better judgment he arrives at the shack on a wintry afternoon and walks back into his darkest nightmare. What he finds there will change Mack's world forever.

The Thirteenth Tale by Diane Setterfield

Reclusive author Vida Winter, famous for her collection of twelve enchanting stories, has spent the past six decades penning a series of alternate lives for herself. Now old and ailing, she is ready to reveal the truth about her extraordinary existence and the violent and tragic past she has kept secret for so long. Calling on Margaret Lea, a young biographer troubled by her own painful history, Vida disinters the life she meant to bury for good.

Those Who Save Us by Jenna Blum

For fifty years, Anna Schlemmer has refused to talk about her life in Germany during World War II. Her daughter, Trudy, was only three when she and her mother were liberated by an American soldier and went to live with him in Minnesota. Trudy's sole evidence of the past is an old photograph: a family portrait showing Anna, Trudy, and a Nazi officer, the Obersturmfuhrer of Buchenwald. Driven by the guilt of her heritage, Trudy, now a professor of German history, begins investigating the past and finally unearths the dramatic and heartbreaking truth of her mother's life.

Unaccustomed Earth by Jhumpa Lahiri

These eight stories by beloved and bestselling author Jhumpa Lahiri take us from Cambridge and Seattle to India and Thailand, as they explore the secrets at the heart of family life. Here they enter the worlds of sisters and brothers, fathers and mothers, daughters and sons, friends and lovers. Rich with the signature gifts that have established Jhumpa Lahiri as one of our most essential writers, *Unaccustomed Earth* exquisitely renders the most intricate workings of the heart and mind.

Voyage Long and Strange by Tony Horwitz

On a chance visit to Plymouth Rock, Tony Horwitz realizes he's mislaid more than a century of American history, from Columbus's sail in 1492 to Jamestown's founding in 16-oh-something. Horwitz retraces this long neglected 16th century, following the tracks of the Europeans who explored America, long before the Pilgrims arrived.

Wait Till Next Year by Doris Kearns Goodwin

Goodwin, a lifelong fan of baseball, celebrates one of the most glorious periods of the sport. At the same time, she remembers the people who have most influenced her life: her father, who gave her not only a love of baseball but the confidence to pursue her dreams, and her mother, a chronically ill woman through whom she came to worship books. *Wait Till Next Year* takes place in a suburb of New York City in an eight-year period during which one of the three New York teams — the Dodgers, the Giants, and the Yankees — competed in the World Series every year.

White Tiger by Aravind Adiga

Balram Halwai is a complicated man. Servant. Philosopher. Entrepreneur. Murderer. Over the course of seven nights, by the scattered light of a preposterous chandelier, Balram tells us the terrible and transfixing story of how he came to be a success in life, having nothing but his own wits to help him along. Set in a raw and unromanticized India, this first-person confession of a

murderer is as compelling for its subject matter as it is for the voice of its narrator: amoral, cynical, unrepentant, yet deeply endearing.

Year of Wonders by Geraldine Brooks

When an infected bolt of cloth carries plague from London to an isolated village, a housemaid named Anna Frith emerges as an unlikely heroine and healer. Through Anna's eyes we follow the story of the fateful year of 1666, as she and her fellow villagers confront the spread of disease and superstition. As she struggles to survive and grow, a year of catastrophe becomes instead an *annus mirabilis*, a "year of wonders."

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