



## Book Discussion in a Bag

updated September 2022

\*indicates a new title

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**GOOD TO KNOW!** - Kits check out for a total of 6 weeks.

All kits contain 8 regular print copies and supplement discussion materials. Some kits may also include 1 large print edition and 1 audiobook on cd edition where available. Please review each kit's inventory tag to make sure all kit materials are included when checking out and returning.

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***Beautiful Ruins*** (fiction) by Jess Walter

The story began in 1962. On a rocky patch of the sun-drenched Italian coastline, a young innkeeper, chest-deep in daydreams, looks out over the incandescent waters of the Ligurian Sea and spies an apparition: a tall, thin woman, a vision in white, approaching him on a boat. She is an actress, he soon learns, an American starlet, and she is dying. And the story begins again today, half a world away when an elderly Italian man shows up on a movie studio's back lot—searching for the mysterious woman he last saw at his hotel decades earlier.

***\*Code Breaker: Jennifer Doudna, Gene Editing and the Future of the Human Race*** (biography) by Walter Isaacson

When Jennifer Doudna was in sixth grade, she came home one day to find that her dad had left a paperback titled *The Double Helix* on her bed. As she sped through the pages, she became enthralled by the intense drama behind the competition to discover the code of life. Even though her high school counselor told her girls didn't become scientists, she decided she would. Driven by a passion for understanding how nature works and for turning discoveries into inventions, she would help to make what the book's author, James Watson, told her was the most important biological advance since his codiscovery of the structure of DNA. After helping to discover CRISPR, Doudna became a leader in wrestling with these moral issues and, with her collaborator Emmanuelle Charpentier, won the Nobel Prize in 2020. Her story is an “enthralling detective story” (Oprah Daily) that involves the most profound wonders of nature, from the origins of life to the future of our species.

***Dinner List*** (fiction romance) by Rebecca Serle

At one point or another, we've all been asked to name five people, living or dead, with whom we'd like to have dinner. Why do we choose the people we do? And what if that dinner was to actually happen? These are the questions Rebecca Serle contends with in her utterly captivating novel, THE DINNER LIST, and a story imbued with the same delightful magical realism as *One Day* and the life-changing romance of *Me Before You*. When Sabrina arrives at her thirtieth birthday dinner, she finds at the table not just her best friend but also three significant people from her past, and well, Audrey Hepburn. As the appetizers are served, wine poured, and dinner table conversation begins, it becomes clear that there's a reason these six people have been gathered together. Delicious but never indulgent, sweet with just the right amount of bitterness, *The Dinner List* is a romance for our times. Bon appetit.

**\*The Dressmakers of Auschwitz: The True Story of the Women Who Sewed to Survive** (non-fiction history) by Lucy Adlington

At the height of the Holocaust, twenty-five young inmates of the infamous Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp—mainly Jewish women and girls—were selected to design, cut, and sew beautiful fashions for elite Nazi women in a dedicated salon. It was work that they hoped would spare them from the gas chambers. This fashion workshop—called the Upper Tailoring Studio—was established by Hedwig Höss, the camp commandant's wife, and patronized by the wives of SS guards and officers. Drawing on diverse sources—including interviews with the last surviving seamstress—*The Dressmakers of Auschwitz* follows the fates of these brave women. Their bonds of family and friendship not only helped them endure persecution but also played their part in camp resistance.

**Fly Girls: How five daring women defied all odds and made aviation history** (non-fiction history) by Keith O'Brien

A *New York Times* Bestseller \* An Amazon Best Book of the Year \* A *New York Times Book Review* Editors' Choice \* A *Time* Best Book for Summer

Between the world wars, no sport was more popular or more dangerous than airplane racing. While male pilots were lauded as heroes, the few women who dared to fly were more often ridiculed—until a cadre of women pilots banded together to break through the entrenched prejudice. *Fly Girls* weaves together the stories of five remarkable women: Florence Klingensmith, a high school dropout from Fargo, North Dakota; Ruth Elder, an Alabama divorcée; Amelia Earhart, the most famous but not necessarily the most skilled; Ruth Nichols, who chafed at her blue blood family's expectations; and Louise Thaden, the young mother of two who got her start selling coal in Wichita. Together, they fought for the chance to fly and race airplanes—and in 1936, one of them would triumph, beating the men in the toughest air race of them all.

**Good and Mad: The revolutionary power of woman's anger** (non-fiction political) by Rebecca Traister

Long before Pantsuit Nation, before the Women's March, and before the #MeToo movement, women's anger was not only politically catalytic—but politically problematic. The story of female fury and its cultural significance demonstrates its crucial role in women's slow rise to political power in America, as well as the ways that anger is received when it comes from women as opposed to when it comes from men. "Urgent, enlightened...realistic and compelling...Traister eloquently highlights the challenge of blaming not just forces and systems, but individuals" (*The Washington Post*). In *Good and Mad*, Traister tracks the history of female anger as political fuel—from suffragettes marching on the White House to office workers vacating their buildings after Clarence Thomas was confirmed to the Supreme Court. Traister explores women's anger at both men and other women; anger between ideological allies and foes; the varied ways anger is received based on who's expressing it; and the way women's collective fury has become transformative political fuel. She deconstructs society's (and the media's) condemnation of female emotion (especially rage) and the impact of their resulting repercussions. Highlighting a double standard perpetuated against women by all sexes and its disastrous, stultifying effect, *Good and Mad* is "perfectly timed and inspiring" (*People*, Book of the Week). This "admirably rousing narrative" (*The Atlantic*) offers a glimpse into the galvanizing force of women's collective anger, which, when harnessed, can change history.

**Great Believers** (fiction) by Rebecca Makkai

2019 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction

In 1985, Yale Tishman, the development director for an art gallery in Chicago, is about to pull off an amazing coup, bringing in an extraordinary collection of 1920s paintings as a gift to the gallery. Yet as his career begins to flourish, the carnage of the AIDS epidemic grows around him. One by one, his friends are dying, and after his friend Nico's funeral, the virus circles closer and closer to Yale himself. Soon the only person he has left is Fiona, Nico's little sister. Thirty years later, Fiona is in Paris, tracking down her estranged daughter, who disappeared into a cult. While staying with an old friend, a famous photographer who documented the Chicago crisis, she finds herself finally grappling with the devastating ways AIDS affected her life and her relationship with her daughter. The two intertwining stories take us through the heartbreak of the eighties and the chaos of the modern world, as both Yale and Fiona struggle to find goodness in the midst of disaster.

\***The Guncle** (fiction family life) by Steven Rowley

Bestselling author of *Lily and the Octopus* and *The Editor* brings us this warm and deeply funny novel. Patrick O'Hara has always loved his niece, Maisie, and nephew, Grant — from a safe distance. His Palm Springs home and reclusive lifestyle aren't exactly welcoming to children. But when tragedy strikes, Patrick finds himself suddenly taking on the role of primary guardian. Patrick has no idea what to expect, having spent years barely holding on after the loss of his own great love and managing a stalled career. He regrets his decision to take them in until he starts to recognize that his outsized lifestyle and unusual life wisdom could bring about a season of healing that redefines their understanding of family and finally lead Patrick back to himself.

**In the Midst of Winter** (literary fiction) by Isabel Allende

*In the Midst of Winter* begins with a minor traffic accident—which becomes the catalyst for an unexpected and moving love story between two people who thought they were deep into the winter of their lives. Richard Bowmaster—a 60-year-old human rights scholar—hits the car of Evelyn Ortega—a young, undocumented immigrant from Guatemala—in the middle of a snowstorm in Brooklyn. What at first seems just a small inconvenience takes an unforeseen and far more serious turn when Evelyn turns up at the professor's house seeking help. At a loss, the professor asks his tenant Lucia Maraz—a 62-year-old lecturer from Chile—for her advice. These three very different people are brought together in a mesmerizing story that moves from present-day Brooklyn to Guatemala in the recent past to 1970s Chile and Brazil, sparking the beginning of a long-overdue love story between Richard and Lucia.

\***In the Shadow of the Mountain** (biography) by Silvia Vasquez-Lavado

In her page-turning, pulse-raising memoir, Silvia Vasquez-Lavado chronicles her journey to Mount Everest. Deep in the throes of alcoholism, hiding her sexuality from her family, and repressing the abuse she'd suffered as a child, she started climbing. Something about the brute force required for the ascent--the risk and spirit and sheer size of the mountains and death's close proximity--woke her up. She then took her biggest pain as a survivor to the biggest mountain: Everest. She gathered a group of young female survivors and led them to base camp alongside her. It was never easy. Silvia remembers the acute anxiety of leading a group of novice climbers to Everest's base, all the while coping with her own nerves about sumitting. But, there were also moments of peace, joy, and healing, with the strength of her fellow survivors and community propelling her forward. In the *Shadow of the Mountain* is a remarkable story of heroism, one which awakens in all of us a lust for adventure, an appetite for risk, and faith in our own resilience.

***Invention of Wings*** (historical fiction) by Sue Monk Kidd

This novel is the riveting, inspiring story of the Grimke sisters, Sarah and Angelina, who were at the forefront of the abolitionist and women's rights movements. The novel interweaves the narrative of a determined, inventive young slave, Hetty or Handful, who was given to Sarah as a gift on her 11<sup>th</sup> birthday. Sarah despises slavery and rejects the gift. Hetty still remains in the Grimke household and forms a remarkable friendship with Sarah in a state that places a price on slaves in the same way it does a bolt of cloth or side of beef. Much of the Grimke story is historically based and crafted into an elegantly written first-person account of Sarah and Hetty's struggle for freedom and voice in a time where women and certainly slaves had little chance to develop their talents and articulate and act on their beliefs and passions.

***John E. Fetzer and the Quest for the New Age*** (non-fiction) by Brian C. Wilson

*Michigan author*

*John E. Fetzer and the Quest for the New Age* follows the spiritual sojourn of John E. Fetzer, a Michigan business tycoon. Business success was never enough for Fetzer. His deep spiritual yearnings led him from the Christianity of his youth to a restless exploration of metaphysical religions and movements ranging from Spiritualism, Theosophy, Freemasonry, UFOology, and parapsychology, all the way to the New Age as it blossomed in the 1980s.

**\**The Last White Man*** (fiction) by Mohsin Hamid

One morning, a man wakes up to find himself transformed. Overnight, Anders's skin has turned dark, and the reflection in the mirror seems a stranger to him. At first, he shares his secret only with Oona, an old friend turned new lover. Soon, reports of similar events begin to surface. Across the land, people are awakening in new incarnations, uncertain how their neighbors, friends, and family will greet them. Some see the transformations as the long-dreaded overturning of the established order that must be resisted to a bitter end. In many, like Anders's father and Oona's mother, a sense of profound loss and unease wars with profound love. As the bond between Anders and Oona deepens, change takes on a different shading: a chance at a kind of rebirth--an opportunity to see ourselves, face to face, anew. In Mohsin Hamid's "lyrical and urgent" prose (O Magazine), *The Last White Man* powerfully uplifts our capacity for empathy and the transcendence over bigotry, fear, and anger it can achieve.

***Lisette's List*** (historical fiction) by Susan Vreeland

In 1937, young Lisette Roux and her husband, André, moved from Paris to a village in Provence to care for André's grandfather, Pascal. Lisette regrets having to give up her dream of becoming a gallery apprentice and longs for the comforts and sophistication of Paris. But she soon develops strong ties to the land and people of her new village and a new appreciation for the power of art. As a pigment salesman and frame maker selling his pigments in Paris, Pascal befriended Pissarro and Cézanne and received some of their paintings. When war breaks out, André goes off to the front, but not before hiding Pascal's paintings from the Nazis' reach. With German forces spreading across Europe, the sudden fall of Paris, and the rise of Vichy France, Lisette sets out to locate the paintings. Her search takes her through the stunning French countryside and introduces her to Marc and Bella Chagall. Throughout the novel, Vreeland explores the power of art as a way to persevere the sorrow, loss, and tragic destruction of war.

***Little Fires Everywhere*** (fiction) by Celeste Ng

In Shaker Heights, a placid, progressive suburb of Cleveland, everything is planned – from the layout of the winding roads to the colors of the houses to the successful lives its residents will go on to lead. And no one embodies this spirit more than Elena Richardson, whose guiding principle is playing by the rules. Enter Mia Warren – an enigmatic artist and single mother – who arrives in this idyllic bubble with her teenage daughter Pearl and rents a house from the Richardsons. Soon Mia and Pearl become more than tenants: all four Richardson children are drawn to the mother-daughter pair. But Mia carries with her a mysterious past and a disregard for the status quo that threatens to upend this carefully ordered community. When old family friends of the Richardsons attempt to adopt a Chinese-American baby, a custody battle erupts that dramatically divides the town--and puts Mia and Elena on opposing sides. Suspicious of Mia and her motives, Elena is determined to uncover the secrets of Mia's past. But her obsession will come at unexpected and devastating costs. *Little Fires Everywhere* explores the weight of secrets, the nature of art and identity, the ferocious pull of motherhood – and the danger of believing that following the rules can avert disaster.

**\**The Lost Apothecary*** (fiction) by Sarah Penner

Nella is the proprietor of a secret apothecary shop in London where she has been vending poisons, known only by word-of-mouth by the women of the city. One day, Eliza, a young girl with a curiosity about her trade, enters the store. In the present day, Caroline has just discovered her husband's infidelity and comes upon a clue about the past existence of the apothecary shop while on holiday in London. Soon, she finds herself absorbed in a historical investigation. In this vivid novel, the past and the present collide, resulting in a story about female relationships, full of bitter betrayals and intrigue.

***Manhattan Beach*** (fiction) by Jennifer Egan

*2017 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction*

Anna Kerrigan, nearly twelve years old, accompanies her father to visit Dexter Styles, a man who, she gleans, is crucial to the survival of her father and her family. She is mesmerized by the sea beyond the house and by some charged mystery between the two men. Years later, her father has disappeared, and the country is at war. Anna works at the Brooklyn Naval Yard, where women are allowed to hold jobs that once belonged to men, now soldiers abroad. She becomes the first female diver, the most dangerous and exclusive of occupations, repairing the ships that will help America win the war. One evening at a nightclub, she meets Dexter Styles again and begins to understand the complexity of her father's life, and the reasons he might have vanished.

**\**Moonlight and the Pearler's Daughter*** (fiction historical) by Lizzie Pook

Western Australia, 1886. After months at sea, a slow boat makes its passage from London to the shores of Bannin Bay. From the deck, young Eliza Brightwell and her family eye their strange new home. Here is an unforgiving land where fortune sits patiently at the bottom of the ocean. A land where pearl shells bloom to the size of soup plates. Where men are coaxed into unthinkable places and unspeakable acts by the promise of unimaginable riches. Ten years later, the pearl diving boat captained by Eliza's eccentric father returns after months at sea without Eliza's father on it. Whispers from the townsfolk point to mutiny or murder. Headstrong Eliza knows it is up to her to discover who or what is really responsible

**Saints for All Occasions** (historical fiction) by J. Sullivan Courtney

*Harper's Bazaar Best Book of 2017*

Nora and Theresa Flynn are twenty-one and seventeen when they leave their small village in Ireland and journey to America. Nora is the responsible sister; she's shy and serious and engaged to a man she isn't sure that she loves. Theresa is gregarious; she is thrilled by their new life in Boston and besotted with the fashionable dresses and dance halls on Dudley Street. But when Theresa ends up pregnant, Nora is forced to come up with a plan—a decision with repercussions they are both far too young to understand. Fifty years later, Nora is the matriarch of a big Catholic family with four grown children: John, a successful, if opportunistic, political consultant; Bridget, quietly preparing to have a baby with her girlfriend; Brian, at loose ends after a failed baseball career; and Patrick, Nora's favorite, the beautiful boy who gives her no end of heartache. Estranged from her sister, Theresa is a cloistered nun living in an abbey in rural Vermont. Until, after decades of silence, a sudden death forces Nora and Theresa to confront the choices they made so long ago. A graceful, supremely moving novel from one of our most beloved writers, *Saints for All Occasions* explores the fascinating, funny, and sometimes achingly sad ways a secret at the heart of one family both breaks them and binds them together.

**\*Sparks Like Stars** (fiction) by Nadia Hashimi

Kabul, 1978: The daughter of a prominent family, Sitara Zamani lives a privileged life in Afghanistan's thriving cosmopolitan capital. The 1970s were a time of remarkable promise under the leadership of people like Sardar Daoud, Afghanistan's progressive president, and Sitara's beloved father, his right-hand man. But the ten-year-old Sitara's world is shattered when communists stage a coup, assassinating the president and Sitara's entire family. Only she survives. Smuggled out of the palace by a guard named Shair, Sitara finds her way to the home of a female American diplomat, who adopts her and raises her in America.

New York, 2008: Thirty years after that fatal night in Kabul, Aryana's world is rocked again when an elderly patient appears in her examination room—a man she never expected to see again. It is Shair, the soldier who saved her, yet may have murdered her entire family. Seeing him awakens Aryana's fury and desire for answers.

Bold, illuminating, heartbreaking, yet hopeful, *Sparks Like Stars* is a story of home—of America and Afghanistan, tragedy and survival, reinvention and remembrance, told in Nadia Hashimi's singular voice.

**Thirteenth Tale** (fiction) by Diane Setterfield

Biographer Margaret Lea returns one night to her apartment above her father's antiquarian bookshop. On her steps, she finds a hand-written request from one of Britain's most prolific and well-loved novelists. Vida Winter, who is gravely ill, wants to recount her life story to Margaret before it is too late. The request takes Margaret by surprise since she doesn't know the author or her work. After accepting the request, Margaret learns Miss Winter's dark family secrets surrounding Angelfield, the now burnt-out estate that was her childhood home. As Margaret records Miss Winter's history, she finds herself more deeply immersed in the strange and troubling story that introduces her to her own ghosts from the past.

**\**This Time Tomorrow*** (fiction time travel) by Emma Straub

On the eve of her 40th birthday, Alice's life isn't terrible. She likes her job, even if it isn't exactly the one she expected. She's happy with her apartment, her romantic status, her independence, and she adores her lifelong best friend. But something is missing. Her father, the single parent who raised her, is ailing and out of reach. How did they get here so fast? Did she take too much for granted along the way? When Alice wakes up the next morning somehow back in 1996, it isn't her 16-year-old body that is the biggest shock or the possibility of romance with her adolescent crush. It's her dad: the vital, charming, 49-year-old version of her father with whom she is reunited. Now armed with a new perspective on her own life and his, is there anything that she should do differently this time around? What would she change, given a chance?

***Underground Railroad*** (fiction) by Colson Whitehead

*Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award*

Life is hell for all the slaves, but especially bad for Cora; an outcast even among her fellow Africans, she is coming into womanhood—where even greater pain awaits. When Caesar, a recent arrival from Virginia, tells her about the Underground Railroad, they decide to take a terrifying risk and escape. In Whitehead's ingenious conception, the Underground Railroad is no mere metaphor—engineers and conductors operate a secret network of tracks and tunnels beneath the Southern soil. Cora and Caesar's first stop is South Carolina, in a city that initially seems like a haven. But the city's placid surface masks an insidious scheme designed for its black denizens. And even worse: Ridgeway, the relentless slave catcher, is close on their heels. Forced to flee again, Cora embarks on a harrowing flight, state by state, seeking true freedom.

**\**Untamed*** (biography) by Glennon Doyle

For many years, Glennon Doyle denied her discontent. Then, while speaking at a conference, she looked at a woman across the room and fell instantly in love. Three words flooded her mind: There She Is. At first, Glennon assumed these words came to her from on high. But she soon realized they had come to her from within. This was her own voice—the one she had buried beneath decades of numbing addictions, cultural conditioning, and institutional allegiances. This was the voice of the girl she had been before the world told her who to be. Glennon decided to quit abandoning herself and to instead abandon the world's expectations of her. She quit being good so she could be free. She quit pleasing and started living. Soulful and uproarious, forceful and tender, *Untamed* is both an intimate memoir and a galvanizing wake-up call. It is the story of how one woman learned that a responsible mother is not one who slowly dies for her children but one who shows them how to live fully.

**\**We Are the Brennans*** (fiction family life) by Tracey Lange

Five years after Sunday, Brennan deserted her family without explanation. She is injured in a drunk driving accident. Sunday returns home to meet her resentful brothers and ex-fiancée. When a dangerous man from her past brings her family's pub business to the brink of financial ruin, the only way to protect the Brennans is to upend all their secrets. In the aftermath, the Brennans are forced to confront painful mistakes and find a way forward together.

***What the Eyes Don't See*** (Non-Fiction) by Mona Hanna-Attisha

*2019-2020 Great Michigan Read*

By the crusading pediatrician who brought the fight for justice in Flint to the national spotlight, *What the Eyes Don't See* is a powerful first-hand account of the Flint water crisis, a signature environmental disaster of our time, and a riveting narrative of personal advocacy. Here is the dramatic story of how Dr. Mona used science to prove Flint kids were exposed to lead, and how she courageously went public with her research and faced a brutal backlash. With persistence and single-minded sense of mission, she spoke truth to power. The book explores the horrific reality of how misguided austerity policies and callous bureaucratic indifference placed an entire city at risk. A medical and scientific thriller, the book grapples with our country's history of environmental injustice while telling the inspiring personal story of Dr. Mona—an immigrant, a doctor, and a scientist—whose family roots in social justice activism helped her turn the Flint crisis around.