

Book Discussion Kits - Biography and memoirs

[*All Over But the Shoutin'*](#) by Rick Bragg - A dirt-poor Southern boy grows up to be a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, mainly due to the strength and determination of his remarkable mother.

[*American Bloomsbury: Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry David Thoreau: Their Lives, Their Loves*](#) by Susan Cheever - A portrait of five Concord, Massachusetts writers at the center of mid-nineteenth-century American thought and literature.

[*American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation*](#) by Jon Meacham - (Large Print) A history of a nation grappling with religion and politics, telling the human story of how the Founding Fathers viewed faith, and how they ultimately created a nation in which belief in God is a matter of choice.

[*Angela's Ashes: A Memoir*](#) by Frank McCourt - The Pulitzer Prize-winning memoir of childhood in the slums of Limerick, Ireland, told with humor, compassion and forgiveness.

[*Assassination Vacation*](#) by Sarah Vowell - (Large Print) A road trip like no other -- a journey to the pit stops of American political murder and the myriad ways they have been used for fun and profit and for political and cultural advantage.

[*The Audacity of Hope*](#) by Barak Obama - The junior senator from Illinois and future U.S. President calls for a return to America's original ideals and revealing how they can address such issues as globalization and the function of religion in public life.

[*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*](#) by Gertrude Stein – Called one of the richest, wittiest, and most irreverent biographies ever written, filled with anecdotes of Stein's friendship with famous artists and writers of early 20th century Paris.

[*The Autobiography of Malcolm X*](#) by Malcolm X - The classic collaboration of Alex Haley and Malcolm X that tells the truth about race and racism.

[*Bettyville*](#) by George Hodgeman – A laugh-out-loud memoir of a cultured gay man who leaves New York City to care for his aging, irascible mother in Paris, Missouri; examining the warm yet fraught relationship between mother and son, as well as growing up gay and small-town life in America.

[*Between the World and Me*](#) by Ta-nehisi Coates - In a letter to his adolescent son. Coates shares with his son—and readers—the story of his awakening to the truth about his place in the world through a series of revelatory experiences, asking the question of what is it like to inhabit a black body and find a way to live within it? And how can we all honestly reckon with this fraught history and free ourselves from its burden?

[*The Birth of the Pill: How Four Crusaders Reinvented Sex and Launched a Revolution*](#) by Jonathan Eig - The fascinating story of one of the most important scientific discoveries of the 20th century made possible by the unlikely bonds between a millionaire activist, a free-loving crusader, a Roman Catholic gynecologist, and a maverick scientist.

[*Blood, Bones & Butter*](#) by Gabrielle Hamilton - The owner of the prestigious Manhattan restaurant Prune describes her inadvertent education as a very reluctant chef.

[*Blood Done Sign My Name*](#) by Timothy B. Tyson - In this outstanding personal history, Tyson, a professor of African-American studies who's white, unflinchingly examines the civil rights struggle in the South.

[*Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin*](#) by Jill Lepore – -a revelatory portrait of Benjamin Franklin's youngest sister, whose obscurity and poverty were matched only by her brother's fame and wealth but who, like him, was a passionate reader, a gifted writer, and an astonishingly shrewd political commentator.

[*The Bookseller of Kabul*](#) by Asne Seierstad - Norwegian journalist Seierstad dons the burkha to live with a bookseller's family in post-Taliban Afghanistan, revealing intimate details of women's lives.

[*The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics*](#) by Daniel James Brown - The improbable, intimate account of how nine working-class boys from the American West showed the world at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin what true grit really meant.

[*Brother, I'm Dying*](#) by Edwidge Danticat - From the award-winning author of "The Dew Breaker" comes her first work of nonfiction: a deeply affecting story of home and family set in America and Haiti, of two men's lives and deaths, and of a daughter's great love for them both.

[*Call the Midwife: A Memoir of Birth, Joy, and Hard Times*](#) by Jennifer Worth - Worth was just twenty-two when she volunteered for midwifery training in London's East End in the 1950s. Coming from a sheltered background, she found that conditions for many women giving birth just half a century ago were horrifying.

[*Citizens of London: The Americans Who stood with Britain in Its Darkest, Finest Hour*](#) by Lynne Olson - The behind-the-scenes story of how the United States forged its wartime alliance with Britain, told from the perspective of three key American players in London: Edward R. Murrow, Averell Harriman, and John Gilbert Winant

[*Cleopatra*](#) by Stacy Schiff – A Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer brings to life the most intriguing woman in the history of the world: Cleopatra, the last queen of Egypt.

[*The Color of Water: a Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*](#) by James McBride - An inspirational memoir of growing up in an interracial family headed by a white Jewish mother.

[*Colored People: a Memoir*](#) by Henry Louis Gates - A rich and touching memoir of growing up in West Virginia in the 1950's by a celebrated scholar, writer and Harvard professor.

[*Daisy Turner's Kin*](#) by Jane C. Beck - A daughter of freed African American slaves, Daisy Turner became a living repository of history. The family narrative entrusted to her began among the Yoruba in West Africa and continued with her own century and more of life.

[*The Devil in the White City*](#) by Erik Larson - The true tale of two men: the brilliant architect behind the legendary Chicago 1893 World's Fair and the cunning serial killer who used the fair to lure his victims to their death.

[*Dispatches from Pluto: Lost and Found in the Mississippi Delta*](#) by Richard Grant – Adventure writer Grant takes on "the most American place on Earth"—the enigmatic, beautiful, often derided Mississippi Delta where he and his girlfriend decide on a whim to buy an old plantation house in Pluto, Miss and get to know all their neighbors - black, white, rich and poor.

[*The Ditchdigger's Daughters: a Black Family's Astonishing Success Story*](#) by Yvonne S. Thornton - The memoir of a prominent physician who recalls growing up as one of five daughters in a black family headed by a determined father.

[*Dr. King's Last Day*](#) by Georgia Davis Powers – The author, the first person of color and the first woman elected to the Kentucky State Senate, gives an eyewitness account of the hours leading up to Dr. King's 1968 death and the lives of the five friends who spent those last hours with him.

[*Dreams from My Father: a Story of Race and Inheritance*](#) by Barack Obama - The son of an African father and white American mother discusses his childhood in Hawaii, his struggle to find his identity as an African American, and his life's accomplishments.

[*Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim*](#) by David Sedaris - (Large Print) A collection of whimsical essays that inhabits Sedaris' deliriously twisted domain of hilarious childhood dramas infused with melancholy and the gulf of misunderstanding that exists between family members.

[*Eat Pray Love: One Woman's Search for Everything across Italy, India, and Indonesia*](#) by Elizabeth Gilbert - Traces the author's decision to quit her job and travel the world for a year after suffering a midlife crisis and divorce, a journey that took her to three places in her quest to learn the art of spiritual balance

[*Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Life*](#) by Alison Weir - A vibrant portrait of this truly exceptional woman, one of the great heroines of the Middle Ages. Eleanor managed to defy convention as she exercised power in the political sphere and crucial influence over her husbands and sons.

[*First Mothers: the Women Who Shaped the Presidents*](#) by Bonnie Angelo - First Mothers captures the daily lives, thoughts and feelings of the remarkable women who played such a large role in developing the characters of the modern American Presidents.

[*Flappers: Six Women of a Dangerous Generation*](#) by Judith Mackrell – Six women who defined the Jazz Age—Josephine Baker, Tallulah Bankhead, Diana Cooper, Nancy Cunard, Zelda Fitzgerald, and Tamara de Lempicka—would presage the sexual revolution by nearly half a century and would shape the role of women for generations to come.

[*For the Benefit of Those Who See*](#) by Rosemary Mahoney – Not only the story of Braille Without Borders, the first school for the blind in Tibet, and of Sabriye Tenberken, the remarkable blind woman who founded the school, but also a cultural history of blindness.

[*Founding Brothers: the Revolutionary Generation*](#) by Joseph Ellis - An illuminating study of the intertwined lives of the founders of the American republic--Adams, Franklin, Hamilton, Jefferson, Madison, and Washington.

[*Gift from the Sea*](#) by Anne Morrow Lindbergh - The author reveals her compelling meditations on youth and age, love and marriage, solitude, peace and contentment, as she set them down during a brief vacation by the sea.

[*Gilded Lives, Fatal Voyage: the Titanic's First-Class Passengers and Their World*](#) by Hugh Brewster - A haunting account of the fateful maiden crossing interweaving personal narratives of the lost liner's most fascinating people, featuring 100 rarely seen photographs

[*Girl, Interrupted*](#) by Susanna Kaysen - A sharp-edged memoir of a teenage girl and the two years she spent in a psychiatric ward.

[*The Girls from Ames: A Story of Women and a Forty-year Friendship*](#) by Jeffrey Zaslow - A moving tribute to female friendships, with the inspiring story of eleven girls and the ten women they became.

[*The Glass Castle*](#) by Jeanette Walls - The child of an alcoholic father and an eccentric artist mother discusses her family's nomadic upbringing, during which she and her siblings fended for themselves while their parents outmaneuvered bill collectors and the authorities.

[*The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris*](#) by David G. McCullough - The story of the adventurous American artists, writers, doctors, politicians, and others who set off for Paris in the years between 1830 and 1900, hungry to learn and to excel in their work. What they achieved would profoundly alter American history.

[*The Greatest Generation*](#) by Tom Brokaw - (Large Print) The real-life stories of ordinary people responding in extraordinary ways to the defining events of the Depression and World War II.

[*H is for Hawk*](#) by Helen Macdonald - When naturalist Helen Macdonald's beloved father died suddenly, she was devastated. An experienced falconer, she resolved to purchase and raise one of the most vicious predators, the goshawk, as a means to cope with her loss. Thus Mabel came into her life.

[*The Happiness Project: Or, Why I Spent a Year Trying to Sing in the Morning, Clean My Closets, Fight Right, Read Aristotle, and Generally Have More Fun*](#) by Gretchen Rubin - Rubin chronicles her adventures during the twelve months she spent test-driving the wisdom of the ages, current scientific research, and lessons from popular culture about how to be happier.

[*A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*](#) by Dave Eggers - A wrenching, hilarious, and stylistically groundbreaking story of a college senior who, in the space of five weeks, loses both of his parents to cancer and inherits his eight-year-old brother.

[*An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood*](#) by Jimmy Carter - Jimmy Carter re-creates his Depression-era boyhood on a Georgia farm before the civil rights movement forever changed the country.

[*I Am Malala*](#) by Malala Yousafzai - When the Taliban took control of the Swat Valley in Pakistan, one Malala refused to be silenced and fought for her right to an education. On October 9, 2012 she was shot in the head at point-blank range while riding the bus home from school, and few expected her to survive.

[*I Feel Bad About My Neck: And Other Thoughts on Being a Woman*](#) by Nora Ephron - From the screenwriter who brought us *When Harry Met Sally* comes a hilarious, candid look at issues that concern women.

[*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*](#) by Maya Angelou – In this first of five volumes of autobiography, poet Maya Angelou recounts a youth filled with disappointment, frustration, tragedy, and finally hard-won independence.

[*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*](#) by Rebecca Skloot - (Regular & Large Print) Scientists know her as HeLa. She was a poor Southern tobacco farmer who worked the same land as her slave ancestors, yet her cells—taken without her knowledge—became one of the most important tools in medicine.

[*The Innocents Abroad*](#) by Mark Twain - This book offers a glimpse of a major writer when he was just beginning to flex his muscles, and also serves as an enduring no-nonsense guide for the first-time traveler of Europe and the Holy Land.

[*Into the Wild*](#) by Jon Krakauer - Krakauer recounts the haunting and tragic mystery of young, idealistic Chris McCandless who disappeared in April 1992 into the Alaskan wilderness.

[*Irrepressible: the Jazz Age Life of Henrietta Bingham*](#) by Emily Bingham – Raised like a princess in one of the most powerful families in the American South, Henrietta Bingham ripped through the Jazz Age like an F. Scott Fitzgerald character: intoxicating and intoxicated, selfish and often terribly troubled.

[*Italian Love Stories: A Kentuckian's Journal of Tuscany*](#) by Donna Valtri Crane - Crane, a second generation Italian-American and first generation Kentuckian, gives a witty and observant account of life in the tiny Tuscan hill town of Volterra.

[*Just Kids*](#) by Patti Smith - National Book award winner details Smith's earlier years in New York City, where she meets Robert Mapplethorpe and they begin their journey together trying to make it as artists.

[*Kentucky Women: Their Lives and Times*](#) by Melissa McEuen – Collection of essays from 17 scholars profiling twenty-three notable women from three centuries across the state —from the story of Shawnee chief Nonhelema Hokolesqua to the lasting impact of former Gov. Martha Layne Collins.

[*The Last Lecture*](#) by Randy Pausch - Based on the extraordinary final lecture by Carnegie Mellon University professor Pausch, given after he discovered he had pancreatic cancer, this moving book goes beyond the now-famous lecture to inspire readers to live each day with purpose and joy.

[*Leap of Faith: Memoirs of an Unexpected Life*](#) by Queen Noor - (Regular and Large Print) The young American woman who became wife and partner to Lebanon's King Hussein gives an intimate account of a woman who lost her heart to a king and to his people.

[*Leaving Before the Rains Come*](#) by Alexandra Fuller - A child of the Rhodesian wars and of two deeply complicated parents, noted memoirist Alexandra Fuller turns to her African past for clues to rebuild her life after a painful divorce.

[*The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid*](#) by Bill Bryson - (Large Print) Bill Bryson's laugh-out-loud pilgrimage through his Fifties childhood in heartland America is full of insights, wit, and wicked adolescent fantasies.

[*Lit: A Memoir*](#) by Mary Karr - A memoir that traces the author's descent into alcoholism and her conflicted, piecemeal return from that numb hell—it chronicles with searching intelligence, humor and grace the author's slow, sometimes exhilarating, sometimes painful recovery.

[*Long Way Gone*](#) by Ishmael Beah - At the age of twelve, Beah fled attacking rebels in Sierra Leone and became a child soldier in the government army. Soon, he was being fed amphetamines and trained to shoot an AK-47.

[*Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time*](#) by Dava Sobel - A social history of the invention of the chronometer, which greatly aided longitude calculations, is detailed as an historical marvel that facilitated European exploration.

[*Makes Me Wanna Holler: A Young Black Man in America*](#) by Nathan McCall – An honest and searching look at the perils of growing up a black male in urban America, Washington Post reporter Nathan McCall tells the story of his passage from the street and the prison yard to the newsroom of one of America's most prestigious papers.

[*Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil: A Savannah Story*](#) by John Berendt – (Regular and Large Print) A murder mystery set in that very southern city of Savannah, where the characters are exotic, funny and intriguing

[*Monique and the Mango Rains: Two years with a midwife in Mali*](#) by Kris Holloway - Holloway blends a vivid description of her Peace Corps experiences in the West African nation of Mali from 1989 to 1991, with a warm tribute to her colleague, dear friend, and host.

[*Mountains Beyond Mountains*](#) by Tracy Kidder - A thought-provoking portrait of Harvard professor and world-renowned infectious disease expert Dr. Paul Farmer and his struggle to bring modern healthcare to Haiti and the world.

[*My Beloved World*](#) by Sonia Sotomayor - Sotomayor recounts her life from a Bronx housing project to the federal bench, a journey that offers an inspiring testament to her own extraordinary determination and the power of believing in oneself.

[*My Life in France*](#) by Julia Child - Exuberant, affectionate, and boundlessly charming, this is the delightful and highly acclaimed memoir from the woman who revolutionized American cooking in the 20th century.

[*My Love Affair with England*](#) by Susan Toth - A travel memoir of England recounting numerous trips over a lifetime.

[*My Stroke of Insight*](#) by Jill Bolte Taylor - A brain scientist's journey from a debilitating stroke to full recovery becomes an inspiring exploration of human consciousness and its possibilities.

[*Naked*](#) by David Sedaris - Whether he's taking to the road with a thieving quadriplegic, sorting out the fancy from the extra-fancy in a bleak fruit-packing factory, or celebrating Christmas in the company of a recently paroled prostitute, this collection of memoirs creates a wickedly incisive portrait of his world.

[*Night*](#) by Elie Wiesel - An autobiographical account about Wiesel's terrifying and tragic experience as a child in Nazi death camps.

[*No Ordinary Time: Franklin & Eleanor Roosevelt The Home Front in World War II*](#) by Doris Kearns Goodwin - A Pulitzer Prize-winning account of the lives of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt.

[*Nothing Daunted: The Unexpected Education of Two Society Girls in the West*](#) by Dorothy Wickenden - In the summer of 1916, two young women, bored by society luncheons, charity work, and the effete men who courted them, left their families in Auburn, New York, to teach school in the wilds of northwestern Colorado.

[*The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates*](#) by Wes Moore - Two kids named Wes Moore were born blocks apart within a year of each other. Both grew up fatherless and had difficult childhoods. But one grew up to be a Rhodes Scholar and White House Fellow, while the other ended up a convicted murderer.

[*Out of Africa*](#) by Isak Dinesen – With classic simplicity and a painter's feeling for atmosphere and detail, Isak Dinesen tells of the years she spent from 1914 to 1931 managing a coffee plantation in Kenya

[*Paris without End: The True Story of Hemingway's First Wife*](#) by Gioia Diliberto - Hadley Richardson and Ernest Hemingway were the golden couple of Paris in the twenties. Diliberto explores their passionate courtship, their family life in Paris with baby Bumby, and their thrilling, adventurous relationship.

[*A Pearl in the Storm*](#) by Tori Murden McClure – Kentuckian Tori McClure rowed across the Atlantic Ocean solo in a twenty-three-foot plywood boat with no motor or sail. A true story of high adventure -- and of her personal quest to discover that embracing her own humanity was more important than superhuman feats.

[*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*](#) by Annie Dillard - A series of essays that combines scientific observation, philosophy and personal meditation with beautifully written prose.

[*Reading Lolita in Tehran*](#) by Azar Nafisi - A glimpse into women's lives in revolutionary Iran; the story of the author and the women invited into her home to read and discuss forbidden works of Western Literature.

[*River of Doubt*](#) by Candice Millard - After his humiliating election defeat in 1912, former President Theodore Roosevelt set his sights on the most punishing physical challenge he could find, the first descent of an unmapped, rapids-choked tributary of the Amazon.

[*The Road from Coorain: An Autobiography*](#) by Jill Kerr Conway - Conway's captivating autobiography covers her childhood in Australia to her adulthood in America, where she later became the first woman president of Smith College.

[*Rocket Boys: a Memoir*](#) by Homer Hickam - An inspiring account of the author's coming of age in a West Virginia mining town, and the remarkable events that lead him to a career with NASA.

[*A Room of One's Own*](#) by Virginia Woolf - A brilliant essay on the importance of freedom for women, especially as it relates to creative writing.

[*Seabiscuit: an American Legend*](#) by Laura Hillenbrand - The spellbinding true story of this marvelous animal, the world he lived in, and the men who staked their lives and fortunes on his dazzling career.

[*The Seven Storey Mountain*](#) by Thomas Merton - In 1941, a young man decided to give up a promising literary career to enter a monastery in Kentucky, from where he proceeded to become one of the most influential writers of the 20th century.

[*Shakespeare: The World as Stage*](#) by Bill Bryson – Shakespeare's biographical information has long been a thicket of wild supposition arranged around scant facts. With a steady hand and his trademark wit, Bill Bryson sorts through this colorful muddle to reveal the man himself rather than the myths.

[*Slaves in the Family*](#) by Edward Ball - A National Book Award-winning family biography traces the Ball family history back to their arrival in America as well as the slave families owned by and related to the Ball's.

[*Spinster: Making a Life of One's Own*](#) by Kate Bolick - Journalist and cultural critic Bolick uses her own life experiences as well as those of five pioneering women from the last century in a revelatory look at the pleasures and possibilities of remaining single.

[*Subversive Southerner: Anne Braden and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Cold War South*](#) by Catherine Fosl - One of the few white people--particularly from the South--to join the southern black freedom movement in its nascent years in the 1950s, Braden became a role model and inspiration for the thousands of young white people that joined the mass movement a decade later.

[*Sum It Up: 1,098 Victories, a Couple of Irrelevant Losses, and a Life in Perspective*](#) by Pat Head Summitt / Sally Jenkins - Pat Summitt, the all-time winningest coach in NCAA basketball history tells for the first time her remarkable story of victory and resilience as well as facing down her greatest challenge: early-onset Alzheimer's disease.

[*The Sweet Potato Queens' Book of Love*](#) by Jill Conner Browne - A group of "belles gone bad" look at love, life, men, marriage and always being prepared.

[*Team of Rivals*](#) by Doris Kearns Goodwin - Team of Rivals doesn't just tell the story of Abraham Lincoln. It is a multiple biography of the entire team of personal and political competitors that he put together to lead the country through its greatest crisis.

[*Tender at the Bone: Growing up at the Table*](#) by Ruth Reichl - This book by the former restaurant critic of the New York Times is the story of a life enhanced and defined by a passion for food, unforgettable people, and the love of tales well told.

[*This Boy's Life*](#) by Tobias Wolff - This unforgettable, bestselling memoir by a gifted writer introduces the young Toby Wolff, by turns tough and vulnerable, crafty and bumbling, and ultimately winning.

[*Three Cups of Tea*](#) by Greg Mortenson - Dangerously ill after a climb in 1993, Mortenson was sheltered for seven weeks by a small Pakistani village; in return, he promised to build the impoverished town's first school, a project that has since constructed more than 50 schools across rural Pakistan.

[*Not Quite Paradise: An American Sojourn in Sri Lanka*](#) by Adele Barker – The saga of an American professor's sojourn in Sri Lanka -- or rather, her two sojourns, one teaching as a Fulbright fellow to college students in the mountains near Kandy; another, two years later, as she returns to investigate what has happened to the 'pearl' of Southeast Asia in the wake of the tsunami.

[*Traveling Mercies*](#) by Annie Lamott - A journey through Anne Lamott's often troubled past to illuminate her devout but quirky walk of faith.

[*Tuesdays with Morrie: an Old Man, a Young Man & Life's Greatest Lesson*](#) by Mitch Albom - (Large Print) The remarkable true story of Morrie's affirmation of life as he faced death and the transformation of his friend and student with whom he shared it.

[*Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*](#) by Laura Hillenbrand - A biography of World War II hero Louis Zamperini, a former Olympic track star who survived a plane crash in the Pacific theater, spent 47 days drifting on a raft, and then survived more than two and a half years as a prisoner of war in several brutal Japanese internment camps.

[*Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson & the Opening of the American West*](#) by Stephen E. Ambrose - Historian Stephen Ambrose traces the Lewis and Clark expedition and the opening of the American West.

[*A Walk in the Woods*](#) by Bill Bryson - Bill Bryson decided to reacquaint himself with his native country by walking the 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail. The AT offers an astonishing landscape --and to a writer with the comic genius of Bill Bryson, endless opportunities to witness the majestic silliness of his fellow human beings.

[*The Wall Between*](#) by Anne Braden - In 1954, Anne and Carl Braden bought a house in an all-white neighborhood in Louisville, Kentucky, on behalf of a black couple, Andrew and Charlotte Wade. The result was mob violence against the Wades, the bombing of the house, and imprisonment for Carl on charges of sedition.

[*The Water is Wide*](#) by Pat Conroy - The true story of Pat Conroy's teaching experience on an impoverished South Carolina island in 1969.

[*West with the Night*](#) by Beryl Markham - Beryl Markham, the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic from east to west, describes her childhood on a farm in Kenya, her apprenticeship as a horse trainer, and her later career as a pioneer aviator in the remote corners of Africa.

[*When You Are Engulfed in Flames*](#) by David Sedaris - A collection of essays celebrates the foibles of the author's everyday life in France and America, from an attempt to make coffee with water from a flower vase to a drug purchase in a North Carolina mobile home.

[*A Widow's Story*](#) by Joyce Carol Oates - Raymond Smith and Oates were, in every sense, true life companions: Married for nearly half a century, the couple shared a deep passion of literature. His February 2008 demise left her helpless. Her story is a soul-searing memoir of widowhood

[*Wild: from Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*](#) by Cheryl Strayed - At twenty-six, Cheryl Strayed thought she had lost everything. With nothing more to lose, with no experience or training, driven only by blind will, she hiked more than a thousand miles of the Pacific Crest Trail.

[*Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China*](#) by Jung Chang - A memoir reflecting upon the astonishing changes seen by three generations of women in 20th century China.

[*The Year of Magical Thinking*](#) by Joan Didion - Didion explores with electric honesty and passion a private yet universal experience. Her portrait of a marriage-- and a life, in good times and bad-- will speak directly to anyone who has ever loved a husband, a wife, or a child

[*You Have Given Me a Country*](#) by Neela Vaswani - Combining memoir, history, and fiction, the book follows the paths of the author's Irish-Catholic mother and Sindhi-Indian father on their journey toward each other and the biracial child they create.

[*Zeitoun*](#) by David Eggers - The tribulations of Syrian-born painting contractor Abdulrahman Zeitoun, who, while aiding in rescue efforts in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, was inexplicably arrested by military personnel and swept into a bureaucratic maelstrom of civil injustices.

[*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: an Inquiry into Values*](#) by Robert Pirsig - A narration of a summer motorcycle trip undertaken by a father and son becomes a personal and philosophical odyssey into fundamental questions of how to live.

[*The Zookeeper's Wife*](#) by Diane Ackerman - A true story--as powerful as "Schindler's List"--in which the keepers of the Warsaw Zoo saved hundreds of people from Nazi hands.