

Book Discussion Kits – History and Current Events

[1776](#) by David McCullough -(Large Print) Esteemed historian David McCullough details the 12 months of 1776 and shows how outnumbered and supposedly inferior men managed to fight off the world's greatest army.

[Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths](#) by Bruce Feiler - In this timely and uplifting journey, the bestselling author of *Walking the Bible* searches for the man at the heart of the world's three monotheistic religions -- and today's deadliest conflicts.

[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 Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies at the Founding of the Republic](#) by Joseph J. Ellis - An account of the early years of the Republic, the most politically creative era in American history, when a dedicated group of men undertook a bold experiment in political ideals.

[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.

[Animals in Translation](#) by Temple Grandin - (Large Print) Why would a cow lick a tractor? Why do dolphins sometimes kill for fun? How can a parrot learn to spell? *Animals in Translation* will forever change the way we think about animals.

[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.

[At Home](#) by Bill Bryson - With his signature charm, and seemingly limitless knowledge, Bill Bryson takes us on a room-by-room tour through his own house, using each room as a jumping off point into the vast history of the domestic artifacts we take for granted.

[Behind the Beautiful Forevers](#) by Katherine Boo - A bewildering age of global change and inequality is made human through the dramatic story of families striving toward a better life in Annawadi, a makeshift settlement in the shadow of luxury hotels near the Mumbai airport.

[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 Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America](#) by Timothy Egan - A tale of the 1910 blaze that burned across Montana, Idaho and Washington and put the fledgling U.S. Forest Service through a veritable trial by fire and laying the foundation of the National Park system.

[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 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.

[*The Body Project: an Intimate History of American Girls*](#) by Joan Jacobs Brumberg - An examination of how teenage girls have come to view their bodies as a projection of their worth.

[*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.

[*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 Covenant with Black America*](#) by Tavis Smiley - A collection of essays that plot a course for African Americans to improve their circumstances in areas ranging from health and education to crime reduction and financial well-being.

[*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.

[*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.

[*Fast Food Nation: the Dark Side of the All-American Meal*](#) by Eric Schlosser - Schlosser explains how the development of fast-food restaurants has led to the standardization of American culture, widespread obesity, urban sprawl and more.

[*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.

[*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

[*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.

[*Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*](#) by Jared Diamond - Diamond offers a convincing explanation of the way the modern world came to be and stunningly dismantles racially based theories of human history.

[*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.

[*The Harlot by the Side of the Road: Forbidden Tales of the Bible*](#) by Jonathan Kirsch - Sex. Violence. Scandal. These are words we rarely associate with the Bible. Kirsch places each story within the political and social context of its time with eye-opening analysis.

[*Hell's Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga*](#) by Hunter S. Thompson - In the mid-1960s, Thompson spent almost two years living with the controversial Angels. His book successfully captures a singular moment in American history, when such countercultural movements were electrifying and horrifying America.

[*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.

[*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.

[*In Cold Blood*](#) by Truman Capote - On November 15, 1959, in the small town of Holcomb, Kansas, four members of the Clutter family were savagely murdered. Capote yields poignant insights into the nature of American violence, as he reconstructs the murder and the investigation.

[*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.

[*Isaac's Storm*](#) by Erik Larson - This absorbing narrative of the 1900 hurricane that inundated Galveston, Texas, conveys the sudden, cruel power of the deadliest natural disaster in American history.

[*The Johnstown Flood*](#) by David McCullough - The story of one of the most devastating national disasters America has ever known told by a National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize winning author.

[*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 Hokeslesqua to the lasting impact of former Gov. Martha Layne Collins.

[*Krakatoa: the Day the World Exploded*](#) by Simon Winchester - (Regular and Large Print) An erudite, fascinating account of the underlying causes, utter devastation and lasting effects of the cataclysmic 1883 eruption of the volcano island Krakatoa.

[*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.

[*Lost Mountain: a Year in the Vanishing Wilderness: Radical Strip Mining, and the Devastation of Appalachia*](#) by Erik Reece - A groundbreaking work of literary nonfiction that exposes how radical strip mining is destroying one of America's most precious natural resources and the communities that depend on it

[*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

[*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.

[*Nickel and Dimed: On \(Not\) Getting by in America*](#) by Barbara Ehrenreich - Determined to find out how anyone could make ends meet on \$7 an hour, the author left behind her middle class life as a journalist to try to sustain herself as a low-skilled worker.

[*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.

[*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.

[*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 Omnivore's Dilemma: a Natural History of Four Meals*](#) by Michael Pollen - Pollan follows each of the food chains--industrial food, organic or alternative food, and food we forage ourselves--from the source to the final meal, always emphasizing our co evolutionary relationship with the handful of plant and animal species we depend on.

[*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.

[*Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*](#) by Robert Putnam – The author examines the family, the community, the school and the support networks in key communities across America, presenting proof that in every case the upper classes are moving forward with ease, while the lower classes and the poor are trapped in a world of violence, debt, and lack of resources.

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

[*The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity & the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary*](#) by Simon Winchester - Although confined to a British insane asylum, an American civil war veteran contributes to the Oxford English Dictionary

[*Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*](#) by Susan Cain - Cain argues that we dramatically undervalue introverts and shows how much we lose in doing so. She charts the rise of the Extrovert Ideal throughout the twentieth century and explores how deeply it has come to permeate our culture.

[*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.

[*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.

[*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.

[*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.

[*The State Boys Rebellion*](#) by Michael D'Antonia - A Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist tells the amazing story of how a group of imprisoned boys won their freedom, found justice, and survived one of the darkest and least-known episodes of American history.

[*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.

[*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.

[*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.

[*Thunderstruck*](#) by Erik Larson - (Large Print) Larson tells the interwoven stories of two men—Hawley Crippen, a very unlikely murderer, and Guglielmo Marconi, the obsessive creator of the wireless - whose lives intersect during one of the greatest criminal chases of all time.

[*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.

[*Under the Banner of Heaven*](#) by Jon Krakauer - This chilling story of murder explores the nature of radical Mormon sects and poses some striking questions about the closed-minded, closed-door policies of many religions in general.

[*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.

[*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 Books Went to War*](#) by Molly Guptill Manning (Large Print) –The uplifting story of the Armed Forces Editions, small, lightweight paperbacks carried by American GIs in WWII. While the Nazis were burning millions of books across Europe, America printed and shipped 140 million books to its troops.

[*Where God Was Born*](#) by Bruce Feiler - (Large Print) Weaving together strands of theology, biblical exegesis, physical exploration, history and personal reflection, Feiler continues his journey of discovery, looking at the common roots of Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

[*White Like Me: Reflections on Race From a Privileged Son*](#) by Tim J. Wise – Wise examines white privilege as a social institution in America and how that it can ultimately harm its recipients in the long run and make progressive social change less likely.

[*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.

[*The World is Flat*](#) by Thomas L. Friedman - (Large Print) China and India are taking advantage of systems of communications, production, and distribution that can connect the entire globe instantaneously. With this "flattening" of the globe, can human beings and their political systems adjust in a stable manner?

[*The Worst Hard Time*](#) by Timothy Egan - Timothy Egan's critically acclaimed account of the dust storms that terrorized the High Plains in the darkest years of the Depression, following a dozen families and their communities through blinding black dust blizzards, crop failure, and the death of loved ones.

[*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.

[*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.