

Book Discussion Kits – Shorter Reads less than 200 pages

[*The Alchemist*](#) by Paulo Coelho - A fable about undauntingly following one's dreams, listening to one's heart, and reading life's omens features dialogue between a boy and an unnamed being.

[*All the Living*](#) by C. E. Morgan - Moving to a remote tobacco farm that her lover inherited when the rest of his family was killed in a terrible accident, a young woman in 1984 Kentucky struggles with their isolated life, her lover's grief, and a budding friendship with a dynamic young preacher.

[*The Awakening*](#) by Kate Chopin - The story of a woman, unhappy with her indifferent husband and family, who gives in to her adulterous desires regardless of Victorian religious and social pressures.

[*Away*](#) by Amy Bloom - Arriving in America alone after her family is destroyed in a Russian pogrom, Lillian Leyb receives word that her daughter might still be alive and embarks on a risky odyssey that takes her from New York's Lower East Side to Siberia.

[*Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*](#) by Dai Sijie - Two hapless city boys are exiled to a remote village for re-education during China's infamous Cultural Revolution where they discover a hidden stash of Western classics.

[*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 Blue Notebook*](#) by James Levine - Sold into sexual slavery as a young girl, fifteen-year-old Batuk spends her days in a cage on Mumbai's child-prostitute district while recording thoughts and stories in a diary.

[*The Bluest Eye*](#) by Toni Morrison - Eleven-year-old Pecola Breedlove, an African-American girl in an America whose love for blonde, blue-eyed children can devastate all others, prays for her eyes to turn blue, so that she will be beautiful, people will notice her, and her world will be different.

[*The Bridge of San Luis Rey*](#) by Thornton Wilder - In this Pulitzer Prize winning classic, a bridge collapses in eighteenth-century Peru and five die. Who were they? And what cosmic ironies led them to their fate?

[*The Buddha in the Attic*](#) by Julie Otsuka – The story of a group of young women brought from Japan to San Francisco as “picture brides” from their arduous journeys by boat, and their tremulous first nights as new wives; from their experiences raising children who would later reject their culture and language, to the deracinating arrival of war.

[*Cannery Row*](#) by John Steinbeck - A timeless American classic. Cannery Row is only a few blocks long, but the story it harbors is suffused with warmth, understanding and a great fund of human values.

[*Carrie*](#) by Stephen King - The Master of Horror's debut novel, Carrie is the story of a misunderstood high school girl, her extraordinary telekinetic powers, and her violent rampage of revenge.

[*A Christmas Carol*](#) by Charles Dickens - Miserly Ebenezer Scrooge is visited by the ghosts of past, present and future in the Victorian story of the meaning of redemption and benevolence.

[*Confessions of a Pagan Nun*](#) by Kate Horsley - A fictional memoir of a 5th century nun of St Brigid's convent who had been a practicing druid for many years during Ireland's Dark Ages.

[*The Crying of Lot 49*](#) by Thomas Pynchon - When Oedipa Maas is named as the executor of her late lover's will, she discovers that his estate is mysteriously connected with an underground organization.

[*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*](#) by Mark Haddon - Despite his overwhelming fear of interacting with people, a mathematically-gifted, autistic teenager investigates the murder of a neighbor's dog, meanwhile uncovering family secrets.

[*The Daughter of Time*](#) by Josephine Tey - A 20th-century policeman sees a picture of Richard III and reinvestigates Richard's role in the murder of the princes in the Tower using all available information about Richard's time. Voted the number one mystery novel of all time by the Crime Writers Association.

[*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.

[*Elizabeth and her German Garden*](#) by Elizabeth Von Arnim – Originally published in 1898, this is a year's diary of a noblewoman. It includes commentary on the beauty of nature and on society, but is primarily humorous due to Elizabeth's frequent mistakes and her idiosyncratic outlook on life.

[*Ella Minnow Pea*](#) by Mark Dunn - Ella finds herself acting to save her friends, family, and fellow citizens from the encroaching totalitarianism of the Nollop Island's Council, which has banned the use of certain letters of the alphabet as they fall from a memorial statue of Nevin Nollop.

[*Ellen Foster*](#) by Kaye Gibbons - A story of the life of a young foster child and the victory of hope over victimization in her young life.

[*Ender's Game*](#) by Orson Scott Card - In order to develop a secure defense against a hostile alien race's next attack, government agencies breed child geniuses and train them as soldiers. Winner of the Hugo and Nebula Awards.

[*Fahrenheit 451*](#) by Ray Bradbury - Fireman Guy Montag loves to rush to a fire and watch books burn up. Then he meets a seventeen-year old girl who tells him of a past when people were not afraid, and a professor who tells him of a future where people could think.

[*The Five People You Meet in Heaven*](#) by Mitch Albom - Killed in a tragic accident, an elderly man who believes that he had an uninspired life awakens in the afterlife, where he discovers that heaven consists of having five people explain the meaning of one's life.

[*Flatland*](#) by Edwin Abbott - Flatland, a place of two dimensions peopled by a hierarchy of geometrical forms, is the home of narrator A. Square, who takes readers along on a tour of his bizarre homeland that provides a hilarious satire on Victorian society.

[*Franny and Zooey*](#) by J. D. Salinger - Two interrelated stories, originally published in *The New Yorker* magazine, concern Franny and Zooey Glass, two members of the family that was the subject of most of Salinger's short fiction.

[*Gift from the Sea*](#) by Anne Morrow Lindbergh - The author reveals her compelling meditations on youth and age, love and marriage

[*The Giver*](#) by Lois Lowry - A Newbery Award winner depicting a future society and the young boy who realizes the truth about his world and struggles with its duplicity.

[*Glaciers*](#) by Alexis M. Smith – A day in the life of Isabel, a twentysomething thrift-store shopper. Isabel's childhood snows from her youth in Alaska are juxtaposed against her adult trip to a vintage thrift store; her hopes for an evening party push against the echoes of war that haunt a young soldier whom she loves.

[*God Help the Child*](#) by Toni Morrison – The story of a woman who calls herself Bride, whose stunning blue-black skin is only one element of her beauty, her boldness and confidence, her success in life; but which caused her light-skinned mother to deny her even the simplest forms of love.

[*The Great Gatsby*](#) by F. Scott Fitzgerald - The story of the fabulously wealthy Jay Gatsby and his love for the beautiful Daisy Buchanan has been acclaimed by generations of readers.

[*Herland*](#) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman - Utopian novel about a fictitious society of women who reproduce by asexual means resulting in an ideal society that is free of conflict and war.

[*The House on Mango Street*](#) by Sandra Cisneros - For Esperanza, a young girl growing up in the Hispanic quarter of Chicago, life is an endless landscape of concrete and run-down tenements, and she tries to rise above the hopelessness..

[*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 Heard the Owl Call My Name*](#) by Margaret Craven - A young vicar is sent to a village in the Pacific Northwest, learning tolerance and love as he faces his own poignant destiny.

[*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.

[*A Judgement in Stone*](#) by Ruth Rendell – When a housekeeper carries out a modern "Valentine's Day Massacre" on the family that employs her, the investigation uncovers evidence of a personal tragedy that precipitated the crime. Often deemed the greatest work of one of the world's great crime novelists.

[*Kentucky Straight*](#) by Chris Offutt - Stories, sometimes poignant, about life in Kentucky Appalachia, told with no patina of nostalgia, but with a strong sense of place.

[*The Kitchen Boy: a Novel of the Last Tsar*](#) by Robert Alexander - A novel based on the 1918 Bolshevik revolutionary murder of Czar Nicholas II and the rest of the Russian royal family as told from the perspective of the event's only surviving witness, a young kitchen boy.

[*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.

[*The Little Prince*](#) by Antoine de Saint-Exupery - (available in English, French and Spanish) - An aviator whose plane is forced down in the Sahara Desert encounters a little prince from a small planet who relates his adventures in seeking the secret of what is important in life.

[*The Lover*](#) by Marguerite Duras - An adolescent French girl living with her family in pre-World War II Indochina in the waning days of France's colonial empire has a scandalous and tumultuous affair with the son of a wealthy Chinese businessman.

[*The Memory of Old Jack*](#) by Wendell Berry - Kentucky author Wendell Berry proves his mastery as a storyteller by sharing the life story of a 92-year-old small town Kentucky farmer, "Old Jack" Beechum.

[*The Meursault Investigation*](#) by Kamel Daoud - This work revisits Albert Camus's *The Stranger* from the Arab perspective. The narrator, Harun, recalls the murder of his older brother, Musa, who is all but anonymous in Camus's work, and the heavy consequences of this act.

[*Miss Fuller*](#) by April Bernard - When feminist, journalist, and orator Margaret Fuller's family is drowned off the coast of New York upon their return from Europe, Henry David Thoreau visits the site of their shipwreck and discovers a revealing personal document of hers.

[*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.

[*Ms. Hempel Chronicles*](#) by Sarah Shun-lien Bynum - Ms. Beatrice Hempel, new to teaching, new to the school, newly engaged, and newly bereft of her idiosyncratic father, struggles to figure out what is expected of her in life and at work.

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

[O Pioneers!](#) by Willa Cather - The story of a 19th century Nebraska family coming to grips with farm life and personal relationships.

[Old School](#) by Tobias Wolff - The school literary contest at an elite prep school, whose winner will be awarded an audience with the most legendary writer of the time, is the means of fraying alliances, deceptions, betrayals and growth.

[Our Souls at Night](#) by Kent Haruf - In Holt, Colorado, widower Louis Waters is initially thrown when the widowed Addie Moore suggests that they spend time together, in bed, to stave off loneliness, but soon they are exchanging the confidences and memories.

[The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie](#) by Muriel Spark - Miss Jean Brodie teaches school and influences the lives of young girls in Edinburgh during the 1930s, until one of them betrays her.

[Push](#) by Sapphire - Told from the point of view of an illiterate, brutalized Harlem teenager, this intense, explicit novel charts the psychic damage of the most ghettoized of inner-city inhabitants.

[The Red Pony](#) by John Steinbeck - The classic story of a boy's journey to manhood under the joys and hardships of ranch life, focused around the life and death of his red pony.

[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.

[The Sense of an Ending](#) by Julian Barnes – Tony Webster, a middle-aged man, contends with a past he never thought much about—until his closest childhood friends return with a vengeance: one of them from the grave, another maddeningly present.

[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.

[The Sorrows of Young Werther](#) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe - Chronicles a young man's unrequited love and fatal passion for a married woman.

[The Stranger](#) by Albert Camus - Through the story of an ordinary man unwittingly drawn into a senseless murder on an Algerian beach, Camus explores what he termed "the nakedness of man faced with the absurd."

[Sula](#) by Toni Morrison - The story of a young African-American girl who leaves her oppressive neighborhood to expand her dreams but finds many of her previous relationships tested when she returns ten years later.

[Summer](#) by Edith Wharton - A New Englander of humble origins, Charity Royall is swept into a torrid love affair with an artistically inclined young man, but her dreams of a future with him are thwarted. Summer was an immediate sensation when first published in 1917 and still stands as one of Wharton's greatest achievements.

[Tinkers](#) by Paul Harding - The history and final thoughts of a dying grandfather surrounded by his family. George Washington Crosby repairs clocks for a living and on his deathbed revisits his turbulent childhood as the oldest son of an epileptic smalltime traveling salesman.

[The Testament of Mary](#) by Colm Toibin - Years after her son's crucifixion, Mary lives alone and in fear, badgered by her son's friends and hunted by his enemies, trying to piece together the events that led to her son's brutal death.

[*Tortilla Flat*](#) by John Steinbeck - Danny is a paisano descended from the original Spanish settlers of Monterey, California. He and his cohorts value friendship above money and possessions. Their love of freedom and scorn for material things draw them into daring and often hilarious adventures.

[*Train Dreams*](#) by Denis Johnson - The story of early twentieth-century day laborer Robert Grainer, who endures the harrowing loss of his family while struggling for survival in the American West against a backdrop of radical historical changes.

[*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.

[*When the Emperor Was Divine*](#) by Julie Otsuka – (Regular and Large Print) A story told from five different points of view chronicles the experiences of Japanese Americans caught up in the nightmare of the World War II internment camps.

[*Wide Sargasso Sea*](#) by Jean Rhys - In a prequel to Jane Eyre, Creole heiress Antoinette Cosway lives in Dominica and Jamaica in the 1830s before she travels to England, becomes Mrs. Rochester, and goes mad.

[*Winesburg, Ohio*](#) by Sherwood Anderson - A timeless book of connected short stories about the brave, cowardly, and altogether realistic inhabitants of an imaginary American town.

[*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.