

Book Group
AAUW - Southern New Hampshire Branch
Book Blurbs 2022-2023

September 6, 2022 [TUESDAY]

The Night Watchman by Louise Erdrich

Pulitzer Prize winner 2021. Based on the life of Louise's grandfather who worked as a night watchman and carried the fight against Native dispossession from rural North Dakota all the way to Washington, D.C., this powerful novel explores themes of love and death with lightness and gravity and unfolds with the elegant prose, sly humor, and depth of feeling of a master craftsman. She creates a fictional world populated with memorable characters who are forced to grapple with the worst and best impulses of human nature.

October 3, 2022

Taste: My Life Through Food by Stanley Tucci

A casual but captivating memoir by this most interesting man. His life, his opinions and his recipes are nicely interwoven. Having heard many interviews with Stanley Tucci and watched his TV show on Italy, it is very much in his authentic voice. Just wish they'd included an index to the recipes which are buried throughout the book. Incredible account of his first wife's battle with cancer and his own recent one. What an ordeal - and how food has helped him through everything life has thrown at him.

November 7, 2022

The Maid by Nita Prose

A "Clue"-like, locked room mystery and a heartwarming journey of the spirit, *The Maid* explores what it means to be the same as everyone else and yet entirely different - and reveals that all mysteries can be solved through connection to the human heart. Has the depth of good literature, but with a strong thriller/mystery plot and insight into people who often go unnoticed in society.

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December 5, 2022

A Well Behaved Woman: a novel of the Vanderbilts by Therese Anne Fowler

This novel follows the remarkable life of Alva Smith Vanderbilt, wife of William Vanderbilt in the era after the Civil War and beyond, into the turn of the Twentieth Century. This is a story of power held by men, and how women coped as second-class citizens despite their wealth. Alva married in order to save her destitute, but well pedigreed family, and elevate the nouveau rich Vanderbilts in New York society. Outspoken, brave, and fiercely independent, Alva defied convention in many ways, including supporting women's suffrage.

January, 2023 [Date TBD]

The Blue Tattoo: The Life of Olive Oatman by Margot Mifflin

Olive Oatman was a 14-year-old member of a Mormon splinter group. Her family was killed by Yavapai enroute between Tucson and Yuma in 1851, and she and her younger sister were first enslaved by the Yavapai, then sold to the Mohave. The Mohave raised them as members of the tribe; her sister died, but Olive was returned to white society after five years with the two Indian tribes.

The author has practiced source criticism on the various accounts of Oatman's life, discounting distortions introduced to serve various political and social biases. The resulting narrative is a fascinatingly ambiguous story. Was Olive better off as an Indian or white woman? It's hard to tell, but clearly she had warm feelings for her former "captors" when she met one of them in later life. The sexual, social, and racial norms of the time are called into question by the story of her life.

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February 6, 2023

The Invention of Miracles: Language, Power, and Alexander Graham Bell's Quest to End Deafness by Katie Booth

We think of Alexander Graham Bell as the inventor of the telephone, but that's not how he saw his own career. As the son of a deaf woman and, who later became husband to another, his goal in life from adolescence was to teach deaf students to speak. Even his tinkering sprang from his teaching work; the telephone had its origins as a speech reading machine. Katie Booth has been researching this story for more than fifteen years, poring over Bell's papers, Library of Congress archives, and the records of deaf schools around America. But she's also lived with this story for her entire life. Witnessing the damaging impact of Bell's legacy on her family would set her on a path that overturned everything she thought she knew about language, power, deafness, and the telephone.

March 6, 2023

The Soul of an Octopus: a surprising exploration into the wonder of consciousness by Sy Montgomery

A National Book Award Finalist - Sy Montgomery lives in Hancock NH and is a naturalist who has written many well researched nonfiction books.

April 3, 2023

Once There Were Wolves by Charlotte McConaghy

Inti Flynn arrives in Scotland with her twin sister, Aggie, to lead a team of biologists tasked with reintroducing fourteen gray wolves into the remote Highlands. She hopes to heal not only the dying landscape, but Aggie, too, unmade by the terrible secrets that drove the sisters out of Alaska. This is a story of a woman desperate to save the creatures she loves – if she isn't consumed by a wild that was once her refuge.

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May 1, 2023

Cloud Cuckoo Land by Anthony Doerr

Anthony Doerr is a consummate storyteller. In this novel he tells three stories in different time periods that are united by an ancient manuscript. Each story, told in alternating chapters is thoroughly engaging and is a testament to the power of books, libraries, and librarians. It has been called a hauntingly beautiful and redemptive novel about stewardship of the book, the earth, and the human heart.

June 5, 2023

Harlem Shuffle by Colson Whitehead

Colson Whitehead is an accomplished writer with two Pulitzers and a National Book Award as proof of his writing chops. *Harlem Shuffle* is his latest and funniest book to date. Ray Carney has two halves. On the one hand he is a college graduate building a successful furniture business and trying to provide for his wife and children in Harlem in the 1960's. On the other hand, he has not been able to escape the legacy of his family of hoods and crooks. Whitehead has given us a character to care about and a thoroughly enjoyable read.