

**Book Group**  
**AAUW - Southern New Hampshire Branch**  
**Book Blurbs 2023-2024**

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September 5, 2023 [TUESDAY]

***People of the Book*** by Geraldine Brooks

Inspired by a true story. Australian rare book expert Hanna Heath to conserve the Haggadah a priceless work, the tiny artifacts she discovers in its ancient binding—a butterfly wing fragment, wine stains, salt crystals, a white hair—only begin to unlock the book’s deep mysteries and unexpectedly plunges Hanna into the intrigues of fine art forgers and ultra-nationalist fanatics.

October 2, 2023

***Dinners with Ruth: A Memoir on the Power of Friendships*** by Nina Totenberg

A genial, likable tone. Totenberg’s stories are lively but never go on too long; she appears to reflexively turn the reader’s attention to the generosity or small kindnesses of others. She writes, without pretension or self-congratulation, about moments of journalistic triumph of which she has every right to be proud...Her final display of friendship in this book entails laying bare just how frail Ginsburg truly was — and how extraordinary she was to persevere and inspire for as long as she did.

November 6, 2023

***The Mitford Affair*** by Marie Benedict

Probing the torrid political climate in the lead-up to World War II and the ways that seemingly sensible people can be sucked into radical action, *The Mitford Affair* follows Nancy's valiant efforts to stop the Nazis from taking over Great Britain, and the complicated choices she must make between the personal and the political. Between the World Wars, the six Mitford sisters—each more beautiful, brilliant, and eccentric than the next—dominate the English political, literary, and social scenes. Though they've weathered scandals before, the family falls into disarray when Diana divorces her wealthy husband to marry a fascist leader and Unity follows her sister's lead all the way to Munich, inciting rumors that she's become Hitler's mistress.

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December 4, 2023

***Hester*** by Laurie Lico Albanese

A vivid reimagining of the woman who inspired Hester Prynne, the tragic heroine of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Isobel Gamble, a young Scottish seamstress, is afflicted with Synesthesia, wherein she sees colors when she hears sounds, particularly people's voices. Her late mother warned her to hide her talents to avoid being labeled a witch. With her debt-ridden and opium addicted husband Edward, she arrives in Salem in 1829. Only days after they've arrived, Edward joins a departing ship as a medic--leaving Isobel penniless and alone in a strange country, forced to make her way by any means possible. When she meets young Nathaniel Hawthorne, the two are instantly drawn to each other. He is a man haunted by his ancestors, who sent innocent women to the gallows--while she is an unusually gifted needleworker, troubled by her own strange talents. Interwoven with Isobel and Nathaniel's story is a depiction of the early days of the Underground Railroad in New England.

January 8, 2024 [2<sup>nd</sup> Monday]

***The Jane Austen Society*** by Natalie Jenner

Set in the tiny village of Chawton, during and after World War II, it's a story about eight people from very different backgrounds—from a farm laborer to a movie starlet—who, in saving the house Jane Austen last lived in from developers, unexpectedly save themselves from loneliness, grief, and loss. Author Natalie Jenner does a marvelous job of showing how a disparate group of villagers could go from enduring their disappointments in quiet solitude, to being united, both by their love of Jane Austen and their determination to preserve her home.

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February 5, 2024

***Master Slave Husband Wife*** by Ilyon Woo

For the enslaved couple, Wm and Ellen Craft, in 1848 when they were concerned about being separated; they use a daring masquerade, with exposure to constant risk, to make their way north and then to England - eventually doing speaking tours - it explores the brutality of slavery.

March 4, 2024

***The Sweetness of Water*** by Nathan Harris

This is Nathan Harris's debut novel, published by a major publisher while he was still in his 20's. It received many awards including being an Oprah Book Club selection and being long listed for the Booker Prize. In the period immediately after the Civil War, George Walker, a wealthy non-slave holding landowner transplanted from the North, discovers two brothers, former slaves of his neighbor, camping on his land. They have no money and nowhere to go with their new-found freedom. George hires them at a fair wage and allows them to sleep in his barn, helping him to start a peanut farm. In some ways, the brothers help fill the hole in George and his wife's hearts, a hole from the loss of their only child in the war. Their fair treatment of these brothers has repercussion in their community that will change lives forever.

April 1, 2024

***The Forever Witness*** by Edward Humes

This book is how DNA and Genealogy solved a cold case double murder. A young couple was murdered on what was supposed to be an overnight trip to Seattle in 1987. It's the story of a relentless detective and amateur genealogist and the line between justice and privacy.

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May 6, 2024

***Demon Copperhead*** by Barbara Kingsolver

Set in the mountains of southern Appalachia, a boy born to a teenaged single mother in a single-wide trailer, with no assets. Story is told through the young boy's character; he braves the modern perils of foster care, child labor, derelict schools, athletic success, addiction, disastrous loves, and crushing losses. Through all of it, he reckons with his own invisibility in a popular culture where even the superheroes have abandoned rural people in favor of cities. Pulitzer Prize for 2023

June 3, 2024

***The Lonely Hearts Book Club*** by Lucy Gilmore

A running theme in this novel is the power of books and reading in bringing people close together. The narrative is shared from multiple perspectives of the several characters, all lonely for various reasons and all searching for solace in life. They form the Lonely Hearts Book Club after a conflict/crisis changes the daily ritual of insults between librarian Sloane and curmudgeonly library patron Arthur McLachlan. The book club is a safe space for these lonely strangers to be themselves, and share their stories and, in doing so, become friends who enable one another to reevaluate their lives and exact positive change.