

Charlie's Book Club 2017
Bernalillo Library

Meet at 3:30 on the 2nd Tuesday at the

January

Say You're One of Them by Uwem Akpan Marcella

Each story in this jubilantly acclaimed collection pays testament to the wisdom and resilience of children, even in the face of the most agonizing circumstances.

A family living in a makeshift shanty in urban Kenya scurries to find gifts of any kind for the impending Christmas holiday. A Rwandan girl relates her family's struggles to maintain a facade of normalcy amid unspeakable acts. A young brother and sister cope with their uncle's attempt to sell them into slavery. Aboard a bus filled with refugees—a microcosm of today's Africa—a Muslim boy summons his faith to bear a treacherous ride across Nigeria. Through the eyes of childhood friends the emotional toll of religious conflict in Ethiopia becomes viscerally clear.

Uwem Akpan's debut signals the arrival of a breathtakingly talented writer who gives a matter-of-fact reality to the most extreme circumstances in stories that are nothing short of transcendent.

February

**The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society by Mary Ann Shaffer
George**

"I wonder how the book got to Guernsey? Perhaps there is some sort of secret homing instinct in books that brings them to their perfect readers." January 1946: London is emerging from the shadow of the Second World War, and writer Juliet Ashton is looking for her next book subject. Who could imagine that she would find it in a letter from a man she's never met, a native of the island of Guernsey, who has come across her name written inside a book by Charles Lamb....

As Juliet and her new correspondent exchange letters, Juliet is drawn into the world of this man and his friends—and what a wonderfully eccentric world it is. The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society—born as a spur-of-the-moment alibi when its members were discovered breaking curfew by the Germans occupying their island—boasts a charming, funny, deeply human cast of characters, from pig farmers to phrenologists, literature lovers all.

Juliet begins a remarkable correspondence with the society's members, learning about their island, their taste in books, and the impact the recent German occupation has had on their lives. Captivated by their stories, she sets sail for Guernsey, and what she finds will change her forever.

Written with warmth and humor as a series of letters, this novel is a celebration of the written word in all its guises, and of finding connection in the most surprising ways.

March

The Storied Life of A. J. Fikery by Gabrielle Zevin

Shirley

"Funny, tender, and moving, *The Storied Life of A. J. Fikry* reminds us all exactly why we read and why we love."

A. J. Fikry's life is not at all what he expected it to be. He lives alone, his bookstore is experiencing the worst sales in its history, and now his prized possession, a rare collection of Poe poems, has been stolen. But when a mysterious package appears at the bookstore, its unexpected arrival gives Fikry the chance to make his life over--and see everything anew.

April

The Bees by Laline Paull

Linda

The Handmaid's Tale meets *The Hunger Games* in this brilliantly imagined debut set in an ancient culture where only the queen may breed and deformity means death.

Flora 717 is a sanitation worker, a member of the lowest caste in her orchard hive where work and sacrifice are the highest virtues and worship of the beloved Queen the only religion. But Flora is not like other bees. With circumstances threatening the hive's survival, her curiosity is regarded as a dangerous flaw but her courage and strength are an asset. She is allowed to feed the newborns in the royal nursery and then to become a forager, flying alone and free to collect pollen. She also finds her way into the Queen's inner sanctum, where she discovers mysteries about the hive that are both profound and ominous.

But when Flora breaks the most sacred law of all—daring to challenge the Queen's fertility—enemies abound, from the fearsome fertility police who enforce the strict social hierarchy to the high priestesses jealously wedded to power. Her deepest instincts to serve and sacrifice are now overshadowed by an even deeper desire, a fierce maternal love that will bring her into conflict with her conscience, her heart, her society—and lead her to unthinkable deeds.

Thrilling, suspenseful and spectacularly imaginative, *The Bees* gives us a dazzling young heroine and will change forever the way you look at the world outside your window.

May

Our Souls at Night by Kent Haruf

Ann K.

In the familiar setting of Holt, Colorado, home to all of Kent Haruf's inimitable fiction, Addie Moore pays an unexpected visit to a neighbor, Louis Waters. Her husband died years ago, as did his wife, and in such a small town they naturally have known of each other for decades; in fact, Addie was quite fond of Louis's wife. His daughter lives hours away, her son even farther, and Addie and Louis have long been living alone in empty houses, the nights so terribly lonely, especially with no one to talk with. But maybe that could change? As Addie and Louis come to know each other better--their pleasures and their difficulties--a beautiful story of second chances unfolds, making *Our Souls at Night* the perfect final installment to this beloved writer's enduring contribution to American literature.

June

Empire of the Summer Moon by S. C. Gwynne

Nancy

In the tradition of *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, a stunningly vivid historical account of the forty-year battle between Comanche Indians and white settlers for control of the American West, centering on Quanah, the greatest Comanche chief of them all.

S. C. Gwynne's *Empire of the Summer Moon* spans two astonishing stories. The first traces the rise and fall of the Comanches, the most powerful Indian tribe in American history. The second entails one of the most remarkable narratives ever to come out of the Old West: the epic saga of the pioneer woman Cynthia Ann Parker and her mixed-blood son Quanah, who became the last and greatest chief of the Comanches.

Although readers may be more familiar with the tribal names Apache and Sioux, it was in fact the legendary fighting ability of the Comanches that determined just how and when the American West opened up. Comanche boys became adept bareback riders by age six; full Comanche braves were considered the best horsemen who ever rode. They were so masterful at war and so skillful with their arrows and lances that they stopped the northern drive of colonial Spain from Mexico and halted the French expansion westward from Louisiana. White settlers arriving in Texas from the eastern United States were surprised to find the frontier being rolled *backward* by Comanches incensed by the invasion of their tribal lands. So effective were the Comanches that they forced the creation of the Texas Rangers and account for the advent of the new weapon specifically designed to fight them: the six-gun.

The war with the Comanches lasted four decades, in effect holding up the development of the new American nation. Gwynne's exhilarating account delivers a sweeping narrative that encompasses Spanish colonialism, the Civil War, the destruction of the buffalo herds, and the arrival of the railroads—a historical feast for anyone interested in how the United States came into being.

Against this backdrop Gwynne presents the compelling drama of Cynthia Ann Parker, a lovely nine-year-old girl with cornflower-blue eyes who was kidnapped by Comanches from the far Texas frontier in 1836. She grew to love her captors and became infamous as the "White Squaw" who refused to return until her tragic capture by Texas Rangers in 1860. More famous still was her son Quanah, a warrior who was never defeated and whose guerrilla wars in the Texas Panhandle made him a legend.

S. C. Gwynne's account of these events is meticulously researched, intellectually provocative, and, above all, thrillingly told. *Empire of the Summer Moon* announces him as a major new writer of American history.

July

Brave New World by Aldous Huxley

Classic

Aldous Huxley is rightly considered a prophetic genius and one of the most important literary and philosophical voices of the 20th Century, and *Brave New World* is his masterpiece. From the author of *The Doors of Perception*, *Island*, and countless other works of fiction, non-fiction, philosophy, and poetry, comes this powerful work of speculative fiction that has enthralled and

terrified readers for generations. *Brave New World* remains absolutely relevant to this day as both a cautionary dystopian tale in the vein of the George Orwell classic *1984*, and as thought-provoking, thoroughly satisfying entertainment.

August

Fates and Furies by Lauren Groff

Lara

Fates and Furies is a literary masterpiece that defies expectation. A dazzling examination of a marriage, it is also a portrait of creative partnership written by one of the best writers of her generation.

Every story has two sides. Every relationship has two perspectives. And sometimes, it turns out, the key to a great marriage is not its truths but its secrets. At the core of this rich, expansive, layered novel, Lauren Groff presents the story of one such marriage over the course of twenty-four years.

At age twenty-two, Lotto and Mathilde are tall, glamorous, madly in love, and destined for greatness. A decade later, their marriage is still the envy of their friends, but with an electric thrill we understand that things are even more complicated and remarkable than they have seemed. With stunning revelations and multiple threads, and in prose that is vibrantly alive and original, Groff delivers a deeply satisfying novel about love, art, creativity, and power that is unlike anything that has come before it. Profound, surprising, propulsive, and emotionally riveting, it stirs both the mind and the heart.

September

Hillbilly Elegy by J. D. Vance

Nancy & George

From a former marine and Yale Law School graduate, a powerful account of growing up in a poor Rust Belt town that offers a broader, probing look at the struggles of America's white working class

Hillbilly Elegy is a passionate and personal analysis of a culture in crisis—that of white working-class Americans. The decline of this group, a demographic of our country that has been slowly disintegrating over forty years, has been reported on with growing frequency and alarm, but has never before been written about as searingly from the inside. J. D. Vance tells the true story of what a social, regional, and class decline feels like when you were born with it hung around your neck.

The Vance family story begins hopefully in postwar America. J. D.'s grandparents were "dirt poor and in love," and moved north from Kentucky's Appalachia region to Ohio in the hopes of escaping the dreadful poverty around them. They raised a middle-class family, and eventually their grandchild (the author) would graduate from Yale Law School, a conventional marker of their success in achieving generational upward mobility.

But as the family saga of *Hillbilly Elegy* plays out, we learn that this is only the short, superficial version. Vance's grandparents, aunt, uncle, sister, and, most of all, his mother, struggled profoundly with the demands of their new middle-class life, and were never able to fully escape the legacy of abuse, alcoholism, poverty, and trauma so characteristic of their part of America.

Vance piercingly shows how he himself still carries around the demons of their chaotic family history.

A deeply moving memoir with its share of humor and vividly colorful figures, *Hillbilly Elegy* is the story of how upward mobility really feels. And it is an urgent and troubling meditation on the loss of the American dream for a large segment of this country.

October

The Devils of Cardona by Matthew Carr

Peggy

In this gripping historical thriller set in sixteenth-century Spain, a Catholic priest is murdered by a mysterious Muslim avenger as the Inquisition continues to force Moriscos to live and worship as Christians.

In March 1584, the priest of Belamar de la Sierra, a small town in Aragon near the French border, is murdered in his own church. Most of the town's inhabitants are Moriscos, former Muslims who converted to Catholicism. Anxious to avert a violent backlash on the eve of a royal visit, an adviser to King Philip II appoints local magistrate Bernardo de Mendoza to investigate. A soldier and humanist, Mendoza doesn't always live up to the moral standards expected of court officials, but he has a reputation for incorruptibility.

From the beginning, Mendoza finds almost universal hatred for the priest. And it isn't long before he's drawn into a complex and dangerous world in which greed, fanaticism, and state policy overlap. And as the killings continue, Mendoza's investigation is overshadowed by the real prospect of an ethnic and religious civil war.

By turns an involving historical thriller and a novel with parallels to our own time, *The Devils of Cardona* is an unexpected and compelling read.

November

The Underground Railroad by Colson Whitehead

Geri

Cora is a slave on a cotton plantation in Georgia. Life is hell for all the slaves, but especially bad for Cora; an outcast even among her fellow Africans, she is coming into womanhood—where even greater pain awaits. When Caesar, a recent arrival from Virginia, tells her about the Underground Railroad, they decide to take a terrifying risk and escape. Matters do not go as planned—Cora kills a young white boy who tries to capture her. Though they manage to find a station and head north, they are being hunted.

In Whitehead's ingenious conception, the Underground Railroad is no mere metaphor—engineers and conductors operate a secret network of tracks and tunnels beneath the Southern soil. Cora and Caesar's first stop is South Carolina, in a city that initially seems like a haven. But the city's placid surface masks an insidious scheme designed for its black denizens. And even worse: Ridgeway, the relentless slave catcher, is close on their heels. Forced to flee again, Cora embarks on a harrowing flight, state by state, seeking true freedom.

Like the protagonist of *Gulliver's Travels*, Cora encounters different worlds at each stage of her journey—hers is an odyssey through time as well as space. As Whitehead brilliantly re-creates the unique terrors for black people in the pre-Civil War era, his narrative seamlessly

weaves the saga of America from the brutal importation of Africans to the unfulfilled promises of the present day. *The Underground Railroad* is at once a kinetic adventure tale of one woman's ferocious will to escape the horrors of bondage and a shattering, powerful meditation on the history we all share.

December

The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry by Rachel Joyce

Sharon

Meet Harold Fry, recently retired. He lives in a small English village with his wife, Maureen, who seems irritated by almost everything he does. Little differentiates one day from the next. Then one morning a letter arrives, addressed to Harold in a shaky scrawl, from a woman he hasn't heard from in twenty years. Queenie Hennessy is in hospice and is writing to say goodbye. But before Harold mails off a quick reply, a chance encounter convinces him that he absolutely must deliver his message to Queenie in person. In his yachting shoes and light coat, Harold Fry embarks on an urgent quest. Determined to walk six hundred miles to the hospice, Harold believes that as long as he walks, Queenie will live. A novel of charm, humor, and profound insight into the thoughts and feelings we all bury deep within our hearts, *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* introduces Rachel Joyce as a wise—and utterly irresistible—storyteller.