



# BOOK CLUB BOOKS

*Below are this summer's Book Club selections. Chosen to represent a range of interests, it is hoped these books will stimulate thought and discussion among our diverse group of readers. As always, your comments and suggestions are welcome.*

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## SUMMER 2009

### **Apples and Oranges** by Marie Brenner

In this moving memoir, the author deftly traces the fascinating relationship she developed with her dying brother. Carl had left his career as a trial lawyer to become an apple farmer. Marie was a world-class journalist, a New York sophisticate, a symbol of all that her brother loathed. Even in childhood they had a contentious relationship. Yet, she abandons her life to try to help her brother when he is diagnosed with cancer. How they learn to love each other, while tracking down alternative treatments for Carl and investigating their complex family history, becomes an inspiring and liberating story.

### **The Art of Racing in the Rain** by Garth Stein

Enzo, a very philosophical and perceptive dog, narrates the tragic events in his owner's life. Denny is a race-car driver who has been in a three-year custody battle over his daughter. With an amazing ability to "see" the world through the eyes of a dog, the author has fashioned a truly inspiring story about the power of relationships, and the acquiring of hope and redemption in the face of despair.

### **Beautiful Boy** by David Sheff

While a brilliant and heartbreaking portrayal of addiction, this is most importantly a story of parental love and its redemptive power. Nic Sheff had been a charming, funny, popular kid before he became addicted to crystal meth. His family tried everything they could to help him, but the worry and stress took a tremendous toll. Nevertheless, David refused to give up on his son. This book grew out of an article in the *New York Times Magazine* that was hailed as a revelation and "while painfully candid...equally optimistic and powerful."

### **Driftless** by David Rhodes

Welcome to Words, Wisconsin where July has finally found peace after two decades of drifting. A respected member of the town, he is the center of this suspenseful sequel to "Rock Island Line". Through July we meet many intriguing characters like Gail, a musician who has a strange reaction to an offer to have one of her songs recorded by her idol, and Cora, a farmer's wife who is intent on exposing agribusiness corruption. In vivid scenes involving gambling, family intrigue, miraculous cures, wisdom gained through hard work, and the great power of kindness, Rhodes has written a beautiful novel of an enthralling community.

### **The Elegance of the Hedgehog** by Muriel Barbery

Through the inner lives of a widow who serves as caretaker of a Parisian apartment building and a troubled young girl living there, the author engagingly comments on art, philosophy, Japanese culture, and social prejudices. A critical success in France, the story is by turns very funny and heartbreaking. The two main characters may hide their true talents from a world that they feel cannot appreciate them, but the reader surely will be won over by them.

### **The Geography of Bliss** by Eric Weiner

Having worked for NPR as a foreign correspondent, the author had been in many places reporting on tragic events. So he decided to go on a yearlong quest to find the world's best unknown happy places. The result is a travelogue from the Persian Gulf to the Arctic Circle, finding happiness where we least expect it. Weiner does more than just report. He becomes a participant, whether meditating in Bangalore or meeting people in cafes and bus stops. His humor and intelligence shine through, making him a delightful road companion.

### **The Girl from Foreign** by Sadia Shepard

In this vivid memoir, a young Muslim-Christian searches for ancient family secrets, leading her to an amazing discovery. Her grandmother was a descendant of the Bene Israel, a small Jewish community in India. The author writes about her journey to India to unlock the mysteries of her heritage, her religious and cultural revelations, and what it means to be on a search for self-discovery.

### **The Middle Place** by Kelly Corrigan

The author was happily married and the mother of two great kids, with a satisfying career as a newspaper columnist, when she found a lump in her breast. When her father, too, learns he has late-stage cancer, it's time for Kelly to stop living in what she calls the Middle Place, "that sliver of time when parenthood and childhood overlap", and to really grow up. What could have been a depressing

chronicle of illness is instead a rich, funny, honest memoir about finding strength through home and family and celebrating being alive.

**Netherland** by Joseph O'Neill

Hans is the Dutch-born narrator of this observant, perceptive novel about two great loves: the city of New York and the game of cricket. Feeling lost and adrift after 9/11, his wife and daughter having gone back to London, Hans seeks solace by striking up a friendship with another immigrant, a charming gangster from Trinidad named Chuck. Teeming with life and psychologically poignant, this book won the Pen/Faulkner Award.

**Olive Kitteridge** by Elizabeth Strout

In these thirteen linked stories, Strout creates a touching portrait of ordinary coastal Mainers. Olive, a retired math teacher and deplorer of what has happened to the world, interacts with family and friends in tales of rich emotional intensity. Although the townspeople's lives are often focused on their fears and insecurities, they also include moments of humor and hope. People are sustained by the comfort of ordinary life and the sudden beauty of the natural landscape. These are powerful stories that will long be remembered.

**Sarah's Key** by Tatiana de Rosnay

This fictionalized account of the 1942 Paris roundups and deportations of thousands of Jewish families is told through the eyes of Julia, a contemporary American writer. When Julia and her husband move to France, she vows to find out what happened to the former occupants of their apartment. The author captures the insane world of the Holocaust and the efforts of a few brave people who stood against it. This haunting story, shocking and profoundly moving, will grab your heart.

**Sonata for Miriam** by Linda Olsson

The novel opens in New Zealand where Adam Anker, a middle-aged musician and professor, views a Holocaust exhibit in Auckland. He is startled to see a photograph of a young violinist from pre-war Poland with his birth name. Thus begins a journey into his past, which takes the story to Sweden and Poland. Adam's daughter, Miriam, who he raised alone, has died leaving him with no future. Now it's time to find out what his emotionally distant mother refused to talk about and who he is. The descriptions of New Zealand and Krakow take the reader there and the emotional lives of the characters are beautifully evoked.

**The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher** by Kate Summerscale

This true crime story takes place in mid-Victorian London. One of England's first great detectives, Jack Whicher from Scotland Yard, tirelessly pursues every lead in the case of the murder of three-year-old Saville Kent. In crime annals, it ranks alongside the Lindbergh trial or the JonBenet Ramsey mystery. The author's suspenseful narrative and detailed construction of the intellectual puzzle of finding the killer makes for a fascinating, chilling read.



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