

Staff Picks

General Fiction

- ***Boo* by Neil Smith (Recommender by Dawn)**
 - From Neil Smith, author of the award-winning, internationally acclaimed story collection *Bang Crunch*, comes a dark but whimsical debut novel about starting over in the afterlife in the vein of Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*.
- ***Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes (Recommended by Kim)**
 - The beloved, classic story of a mentally disabled man whose experimental quest for intelligence mirrors that of Algernon, an extraordinary lab mouse. In poignant diary entries, Charlie tells how a brain operation increases his IQ and changes his life. As the experimental procedure takes effect, Charlie's intelligence expands until it surpasses that of the doctors who engineered his metamorphosis. The experiment seems to be a scientific breakthrough of paramount importance--until Algernon begins his sudden, unexpected deterioration. Will the same happen to Charlie?
- ***The Funeral Dress* by Susan Gregg Gilmore (Recommended by Patty)**
 - In a moving tale exploring Southern spirit and camaraderie among working women, a young mother will compel a town to become a community.
- ***The Help* by Kathryn Stockett (Recommended by Nancy)**
 - In pitch-perfect voices, Kathryn Stockett creates three extraordinary women whose determination to start a movement of their own forever changes a town, and the way women--mothers, daughters, caregivers, friends--view one another. A deeply moving novel filled with poignancy, humor, and hope, *The Help* is a timeless and universal story about the lines we abide by, and the ones we don't.
- ***The Mermaid Chair* by Sue Monk Kidd (Recommended by Marianne)**
 - Telling the story of Jessie Sullivan -- a love story between a woman and a monk, a woman and her husband, and ultimately a woman and her own soul -- Kidd charts a journey of awakening and self-discovery illuminated with brilliance that only a writer of her ability could conjure.

- ***The Orphan Master's Son* by Adam Johnson (Recommended by Emily)**
 - Pak Jun Do is the haunted son of a lost mother—a singer “stolen” to Pyongyang—and an influential father who runs a work camp for orphans. Superiors in the state soon recognize the boy’s loyalty and keen instincts. Considering himself “a humble citizen of the greatest nation in the world,” Jun Do rises in the ranks. He becomes a professional kidnapper who must navigate the shifting rules, arbitrary violence, and baffling demands of his Korean overlords in order to stay alive. Driven to the absolute limit of what any human being could endure, he boldly takes on the treacherous role of rival to Kim Jong Il in an attempt to save the woman he loves, Sun Moon, a legendary actress “so pure, she didn’t know what starving people looked like.”

- ***Roots* by Alex Haley (Recommended by Nancy)**
 - Haley, as the first black American writer to trace his origins back to their roots, has told the story of 25,000,000 Americans of African descent. He has rediscovered for an entire people a rich cultural heritage that slavery took away from them, along with their names and their identities. But *Roots* speaks, finally, not just to blacks, or to whites, but to all people and all races everywhere, for the story it tells is one of the most eloquent testimonials ever written to the indomitability of the human spirit.

Fantasy

- ***A Discovery of Witches* by Deborah Harkness (Recommended by Callan)**
 - Witch and Yale historian Diana Bishop discovers an enchanted manuscript, attracting the attention of 1,500-year-old vampire Matthew Clairmont. The orphaned daughter of two powerful witches, Bishop prefers intellect, but relies on magic when her discovery of a palimpsest documenting the origin of supernatural species releases an assortment of undead who threaten, stalk, and harass her.

- ***The Banished of Muirwood* by Jeff Wheeler (Recommended by Callan)**
 - In a world full of magic and mystery, eighteen-year-old Maia is the exiled princess of Comoros and rightful heir to the throne. Forced to live as a servant in her enemy's home, Maia flees her captors and begins a perilous quest to save her people. To survive, she must use magic she has learned in secret--despite the fact that women are forbidden to control it. Hunted by enemies at every turn, Maia realizes that danger lurks within her, too. Her powers threaten to steal not only her consciousness but also her sense of right and wrong. Can she set herself free and save the realm she loves--even if her people have forgotten her?

Historical Fiction

- ***Honolulu* by Alan Brennert (Recommended by Dawn)**
 - With its passionate knowledge of people and places in Hawai'i far off the tourist track, *Honolulu* is most of all the spellbinding tale of four women in a new world, united by dreams, disappointment, sacrifices, and friendship.
- ***The Last Kingdom* by Bernard Cornwell (Recommended by Callan)**
 - In the middle years of the ninth century, the fierce Danes stormed onto British soil, hungry for spoils and conquest. Kingdom after kingdom fell to the ruthless invaders until only one realm remained. Suddenly the fate of all England--and the course of history--depended upon one man, one king.
- ***The Invention of Wings* by Sue Monk Kidd (Recommended by Kim)**
 - Hetty "Handful" Grimke, an urban slave in early nineteenth century Charleston, yearns for life beyond the suffocating walls that enclose her within the wealthy Grimke household. The Grimke's daughter, Sarah, has known from an early age she is meant to do something large in the world, but she is hemmed in by the limits imposed on women. Inspired by the historical figure of Sarah Grimke, Kidd goes beyond the record to flesh out the rich interior lives of all of her characters, both real and invented, including Handful's cunning mother, Charlotte, who courts danger in her search for something better.
- ***The Other Boleyn Girl* by Philippa Gregory (Recommended by Kim)**
 - A rich and compelling novel of love, sex, ambition, and intrigue, *The Other Boleyn Girl* introduces a woman of extraordinary determination and desire who lived at the heart of the most exciting and glamorous court in Europe and survived by following her heart.
- ***Outlander* by Diana Gabaldon (Recommended by Callan)**
 - Hurlled back through time more than two hundred years to 1743 Scotland, Claire Randall finds herself caught in the midst of an unfamiliar world torn apart by violence, pestilence, and revolution and haunted by her growing feelings for a young soldier, James Fraser.

- ***People of the Book* by Geraldine Brooks (Recommended by Emily)**
 - In 1996, Hanna Heath, an Australian rare-book expert, is offered the job of a lifetime: analysis and conservation of the famed Sarajevo Haggadah, which has been rescued from Serb shelling during the Bosnian war. Priceless and beautiful, the book is one of the earliest Jewish volumes ever to be illuminated with images. When Hanna, a caustic loner with a passion for her work, discovers a series of tiny artifacts in its ancient binding—an insect wing fragment, wine stains, salt crystals, a white hair—she begins to unlock the book’s mysteries. The reader is ushered into an exquisitely detailed and atmospheric past, tracing the book’s journey from its salvation back to its creation.

- ***The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd (Recommended by Marianne)**
 - Set in South Carolina in 1964, *The Secret Life of Bees* tells the story of Lily Owens, whose life has been shaped around the blurred memory of the afternoon her mother was killed. When Lily's fierce-hearted black "stand-in mother," Rosaleen, insults three of the deepest racists in town, Lily decides to spring them both free. They escape to Tiburon, South Carolina--a town that holds the secret to her mother's past. Taken in by an eccentric trio of black beekeeping sisters, Lily is introduced to their mesmerizing world of bees and honey, and the Black Madonna.

- ***The Traitor's Wife* by Allison Pataki (Recommended by Kim)**
 - Everyone knows Benedict Arnold--the Revolutionary War general who betrayed America and fled to the British--as history's most notorious turncoat. Many know Arnold's co-conspirator, Major John Andre, who was apprehended with Arnold's documents in his boots and hanged at the orders of General George Washington. But few know of the integral third character in the plot: a charming young woman who not only contributed to the betrayal but orchestrated it.

- ***Whistling Past the Graveyard* by Susan Crandall (Recommender by Dawn)**
 - When Starla is grounded on the Fourth of July, she sneaks out to see the parade. After getting caught, Starla’s fear that Mamie will make good on her threats and send her to reform school cause her to panic and run away from home. Once out in the country, Starla is offered a ride by a black woman, Eula, who is traveling with a white baby. As the two unlikely companions make their long and sometimes dangerous journey, Starla’s eyes are opened to the harsh realities of 1963 southern segregation.

- ***Water for Elephants* by Sara Gruen (Recommended by Nancy)**
 - Orphaned, penniless, Jacob Jankowski jumps a freight train in the dark, and in that instant, transforms his future. By morning, he's landed a job with the Flying Squadron of the Benzini Brothers Most Spectacular Show on Earth. By nightfall, he's in love. In an America made colourless by prohibition and the Depression, the circus is a refuge of sequins and sensuality. But behind the glamour lies a darker world, where both animals and men are dispensable. Where falling in love is the most dangerous act of all...

Horror

- ***House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski (Recommended by Scott)**
 - A young family move into a small home where they discover something is terribly wrong: their house is bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. Of course, neither Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist Will Navidson nor his companion Karen Green were prepared to face the consequences of that impossibility, until the day their two little children wandered off and their voices eerily began to return another story -- of creature darkness, of an ever-growing abyss behind a closet door, and of that unholy growl which soon enough would tear through their walls and consume all their dreams.
- ***I am Legend* by Richard Matheson (Recommended by Scott)**
 - Robert Neville is the last living man on Earth... but he is not alone. Every other man, woman and child on the planet has become a vampire, and they are hungry for Neville's blood. By day he is the hunter, stalking the undead through the ruins of civilisation. By night, he barricades himself in his home and prays for the dawn. How long can one man survive like this?
- ***World War Z* by Max Brooks (Recommended by Nancy) – Try it as an audiobook!**
 - Ranging from the now infamous village of New Dachang in the United Federation of China, where the epidemiological trail began with the twelve-year-old Patient Zero, to the unnamed northern forests where untold numbers sought a terrible and temporary refuge in the cold, to the United States of Southern Africa, where the Redeker Plan provided hope for humanity at an unspeakable price, to the west-of-the-Rockies redoubt where the North American tide finally started to turn, this invaluable chronicle reflects the full scope and duration of the Zombie War.

Mystery

- ***The Magician's Lie* by Greer Macallister (Recommended by Dawn)**
 - *Water for Elephants* meets *The Night Circus* in *The Magician's Lie*, a debut novel in which the country's most notorious female illusionist stands accused of her husband's murder --and she has only one night to convince a small-town policeman of her innocence.

Romance

- ***After I Do* by Taylor Jenkins Reid (Recommender by Dawn)**
 - From the author of *Forever, Interrupted*—hailed by Sarah Jio as "moving, gorgeous, and at times heart-wrenching"—comes a breathtaking new novel about modern marriage, the depth of family ties, and the year that one remarkable heroine spends exploring both.
- ***Eleanor & Park* by Rainbow Rowell (Recommended by Nancy)**
 - Set over the course of one school year, this is the story of two star-crossed sixteen-year-olds—smart enough to know that first love almost never lasts, but brave and desperate enough to try.

Science Fiction

- ***C.S. Lewis's Space Trilogy* (*Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*) by C.S. Lewis (Recommended by Valarie)**
 - *Out of the Silent Planet* begins the Space Trilogy with the adventures of the remarkable Dr. Ransom, who is abducted by aliens and taken by spaceship to another planet. In the second book, *Perelandra*, Dr. Ransom must battle evil on a new world when it is invaded by the Devil's agent. The final book, *That Hideous Strength*, concludes the adventures with Dr. Ransom in a world of superior alien beings and scientific experiments run amok, as he struggles with questions of ethics and morality in his quest for truth.
- ***Dune* by Frank Herbert (Recommended by Scott)**
 - Set in the far future amidst a sprawling feudal interstellar empire where planetary dynasties are controlled by noble houses that owe an allegiance to the imperial House Corrino, *Dune* tells the story of young Paul Atreides as he and his family accept control of the desert planet Arrakis, the only source of the 'spice' melange, the most important and valuable substance in the cosmos. The story explores the complex, multi-layered interactions of politics, religion, ecology, technology, and human emotion as the forces of the empire confront each other for control of Arrakis.

- ***The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin (Recommended by Scott)**
 - *The Left Hand of Darkness* tells the story of a lone human emissary to Winter, an alien world whose inhabitants can choose -and change - their gender. His goal is to facilitate Winter's inclusion in a growing intergalactic civilization. But to do so he must bridge the gulf between his own views and those of the completely dissimilar culture that he encounters

Thriller

- ***Angels and Demons* by Dan Brown (Recommended by Marianne)**
 - When world-renowned Harvard symbologist Robert Langdon is summoned to a Swiss research facility to analyze a mysterious symbol—seared into the chest of a murdered physicist—he discovers evidence of the unimaginable: the resurgence of an ancient secret brotherhood known as the Illuminati, the most powerful underground organization ever to walk the earth. The Illuminati has now surfaced to carry out the final phase of its legendary vendetta against its most hated enemy—the Catholic Church.
- ***The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown (Recommended by Marianne)**
 - An ingenious code hidden in the works of Leonardo da Vinci. A desperate race through the cathedrals and castles of Europe. An astonishing truth concealed for centuries . . . unveiled at last.
- ***Still Missing* by Chevy Stevens (Recommender by Dawn)**
 - On the day she was abducted, Annie O'Sullivan, a 32-year-old realtor, had three goals—sell a house, forget about a recent argument with her mother, and be on time for dinner with her ever-patient boyfriend. The open house is slow, but when her last visitor pulls up in a van as she's about to leave, Annie thinks it just might be her lucky day after all.
- ***The Third Secret* by Steve Berry (Recommended by Marianne)**
 - Explosive in both its pace and its revelations, *The Third Secret* is a remarkable international thriller. Bestselling author Steve Berry tackles some of the most controversial ideas of our time in a breakneck journey through the history of the Church and the future of religion.

- ***Those Girls* by Chevy Stevens (Recommender by Dawn)**
 - Life has never been easy for the three Campbell sisters. Jess, Courtney, and Dani live on a remote ranch in Western Canada where they work hard and try to stay out of the way of their father's fists. One night, a fight gets out of hand and the sisters are forced to go on the run, only to get caught in an even worse nightmare when their truck breaks down in a small town. Events spiral out of control and a chance encounter with the wrong people leaves them in a horrific and desperate situation. They are left with no choice but to change their names and create new lives.

- ***In a Dark, Dark Wood* by Ruth Ware (Recommender by Dawn)**
 - Nora hasn't seen Clare for ten years. Not since Nora walked out of school one day and never went back. In a dark, dark wood there was a dark, dark house. Until, out of the blue, an invitation to Clare's hen do arrives. Is this a chance for Nora to finally put her past behind her? And in the dark, dark house there was a dark, dark room But something goes wrong. Very wrong. And in the dark, dark room...some things can't stay secret forever.

Nonfiction

- ***Bad Mother: A Chronicle of Maternal Crimes, Minor Calamities, and Occasional Moments of Grace* by Ayelete Waldman (Recommended by Emily)**
 - Covering topics as diverse as the hysteria of competitive parenting (Whose toddler can recite the planets in order from the sun?), the relentless pursuits of the Bad Mother police, balancing the work-family dynamic, and the bane of every mother's existence (homework, that is), *Bad Mother* illuminates the anxieties that riddle motherhood today, while providing women with the encouragement they need to give themselves a break.

- ***Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* by Roz Chast (Recommended by Nancy)**
 - In her first memoir, Roz Chast brings her signature wit to the topic of aging parents. Spanning the last several years of their lives and told through four-color cartoons, family photos, and documents, and a narrative as rife with laughs as it is with tears, Chast's memoir is both comfort and comic relief for anyone experiencing the life-altering loss of elderly parents.

- *The Doodle Revolution: Unlock the Power to Think Differently* **by Sunni Brown**
(Recommended by Valarie)
 - A fearless guide to awakening your mind using simple visual language. What do Einstein, Edison, Richard Feynman, Henry Ford, and JFK have in common? Like virtually all heavy-hitting thinkers, they looked beyond just words and numbers to get intellectual and creative insights. They actively applied a deceptively simple tool to think both smarter and faster: the doodle. And so can the rest of us--zero artistic talent required. Visual thinking expert Sunni Brown has created *The Doodle Revolution* as a kick-starter guide for igniting and applying simple visual language to any challenge. The instinctive and universal act of doodling need only be unleashed in order to innovate, solve problems, and elevate cognitive performance instantly.

- *Garlic and Sapphires: The Secret Life of a Critic in Disguise* **by Ruth Reichl**
(Recommended by Emily)
 - Ruth Reichl, world-renowned food critic and editor in chief of *Gourmet* magazine, knows a thing or two about food. She also knows that as the most important food critic in the country, you need to be anonymous when reviewing some of the most high-profile establishments in the biggest restaurant town in the world--a charge she took very seriously, taking on the guise of a series of eccentric personalities. In *Garlic and Sapphires*, Reichl reveals the comic absurdity, artifice, and excellence to be found in the sumptuously appointed stages of the epicurean world and gives us--along with some of her favorite recipes and reviews--her remarkable reflections on how one's outer appearance can influence one's inner character, expectations, and appetites, not to mention the quality of service one receives.

- *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* **by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn** **(Recommended by Emily)**
 - From two of our most fiercely moral voices, a passionate call to arms against our era's most pervasive human rights violation: the oppression of women and girls in the developing world. Through these stories, Kristof and WuDunn help us see that the key to economic progress lies in unleashing women's potential. They make clear how so many people have helped to do just that, and how we can each do our part. Throughout much of the world, the greatest unexploited economic resource is the female half of the population. Deeply felt, pragmatic, and inspirational, *Half the Sky* is essential reading for every global citizen.

- ***In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote (Recommended by Kim)**
 - On November 15, 1959, in the small town of Holcomb, Kansas, four members of the Clutter family were savagely murdered by blasts from a shotgun held a few inches from their faces. There was no apparent motive for the crime, and there were almost no clues. As Truman Capote reconstructs the murder and the investigation that led to the capture, trial, and execution of the killers, he generates both mesmerizing suspense and astonishing empathy. *In Cold Blood* is a work that transcends its moment, yielding poignant insights into the nature of American violence.

- ***The Way of the Knife: The CIA, A Secret Army, and a War at the Ends of the Earth* by Mark Mazzetti (Recommended by Scott)**
 - A Pulitzer Prize–winning reporter’s riveting account of the transformation of the CIA and America’s special operations forces into man-hunting and killing machines in the world’s dark spaces: the new American way of war.

- ***The Underground Girls of Kabul: In Search of a Hidden Resistance in Afghanistan* by Jenny Nodberg (Recommended by Emily)**
 - In Afghanistan, a culture ruled almost entirely by men, the birth of a son is cause for celebration and the arrival of a daughter is often mourned as misfortune. A *bacha posh* (literally translated from Dari as “dressed up like a boy”) is a third kind of child – a girl temporarily raised as a boy and presented as such to the outside world. Divided into four parts, the book follows those born as the unwanted sex in Afghanistan, but who live as the socially favored gender through childhood and puberty, only to later be forced into marriage and childbirth. *The Underground Girls of Kabul* charts their dramatic life cycles, while examining our own history and the parallels to subversive actions of people who live under oppression everywhere.

- ***Vietnam: The Real War* by the Associated Press (Recommended by Scott)**
 - To cover the Vietnam War, the Associated Press gathered an extraordinary group of superb photojournalists in its Saigon bureau, creating one of the great photographic legacies of the 20th century. Collected here are images that tell the story of the war that left a deep and lasting impression on American life. These are pictures that both recorded and made history, taken by unbelievably courageous photojournalists.

- *What If?: Serious Scientific Answers to Absurd Hypothetical Questions* by **Randall Munroe (Recommended by Kim)**

- Randall Munroe left NASA in 2005 to start up his hugely popular site XKCD 'a web comic of romance, sarcasm, math and language' which offers a witty take on the world of science and geeks. It's had over a billion page hits to date. A year ago Munroe set up a new section - What If - where he tackles a series of impossible questions. Far more than a book for geeks, WHAT IF explains the laws of science in operation in a way that every intelligent reader will enjoy and feel the smarter for having read.