

**WOC BOOK DISCUSSION FINAL SELECTIONS 2024-2025**  
**7:00 PM on 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays except as noted (December & May)**  
**Warm months = in person at locations TBD**  
**Winter months via Zoom**

**September 23 7PM in person at home of Patty Thomas**

**The Personal Librarian by Marie Benedict** 368 pages, library, Kindle, ebook, Amazon, etc.  
**PATTY THOMAS, discussion facilitator**

A remarkable novel about J. P. Morgan's personal librarian, Belle da Costa Greene, the Black American woman who was forced to hide her true identity and pass as white in order to leave a lasting legacy that enriched our nation, from New York Times bestselling authors Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray.

In her twenties, Belle da Costa Greene is hired by J. P. Morgan to curate a collection of rare manuscripts, books, and artwork for his newly built Pierpont Morgan Library. Belle becomes a fixture in New York City society and one of the most powerful people in the art and book world, known for her impeccable taste and shrewd negotiating for critical works as she helps create a world-class collection.

But Belle has a secret, one she must protect at all costs. She was born not Belle da Costa Greene but Belle Marion Greener. She is the daughter of Richard Greener, the first Black graduate of Harvard and a well-known advocate for equality. Belle's complexion isn't dark because of her alleged Portuguese heritage that lets her pass as white—her complexion is dark because she is African American.

The Personal Librarian tells the story of an extraordinary woman, famous for her intellect, style, and wit, and shares the lengths she must go to—for the protection of her family and her legacy—to preserve her carefully crafted white identity in the racist world in which she lives.

**October 28, 2024 7PM in person location TBD**

**Ordinary Grace by William Kent Krueger** 336 pages library, Kindle, ebook, Amazon, etc.  
**JANICE CLEMENTS, discussion facilitator**

"That was it. That was all of it. A grace so ordinary there was no reason at all to remember it. Yet I have never across the forty years since it was spoken forgotten a single word."

New Bremen, Minnesota, 1961. The Twins were playing their debut season, ice-cold root beers were selling out at the soda counter of Halderson's Drugstore, and Hot Stuff comic books were a mainstay on every barbershop magazine rack. It was a time of innocence and hope for a country with a new, young president. But for thirteen-year-old Frank Drum it was a grim summer in which death visited frequently and assumed many forms. Accident. Nature. Suicide. Murder.

Frank begins the season preoccupied with the concerns of any teenage boy, but when tragedy unexpectedly strikes his family—which includes his Methodist minister father; his passionate, artistic mother; Juilliard-bound older sister; and wise-beyond-his-years kid brother—he finds himself thrust into an adult world full of secrets, lies, adultery, and betrayal, suddenly called upon to demonstrate a maturity and gumption beyond his years.

Told from Frank's perspective forty years after that fateful summer, Ordinary Grace is a brilliantly moving account of a boy standing at the door of his young manhood, trying to understand a world that seems to be falling apart around him. It is an unforgettable novel about discovering the terrible price of wisdom and the enduring grace of God.

**November 25, 2024 7PM via Zoom**

**North Woods** by Daniel Mason 384 pages library, Kindle, ebook, Amazon, etc.

**DIANNE GRIFFITHS, discussion facilitator**

When two young lovers abscond from a Puritan colony, little do they know that their humble cabin in the woods will become the home of an extraordinary succession of human and nonhuman characters alike. An English soldier, destined for glory, abandons the battlefields of the New World to devote himself to growing apples. A pair of spinster twins navigate war and famine, envy and desire. A crime reporter unearths an ancient mass grave—only to discover that the earth refuse to give up their secrets. A lovelorn painter, a sinister con man, a stalking panther, a lusty beetle: As the inhabitants confront the wonder and mystery around them, they begin to realize that the dark, raucous, beautiful past is very much alive.

This magisterial and highly inventive novel from Pulitzer Prize finalist Daniel Mason brims with love and madness, humor and hope. Following the cycles of history, nature, and even language, *North Woods* shows the myriad, magical ways in which we're connected to our environment, to history, and to one another. It is not just an unforgettable novel about secrets and destinies, but a way of looking at the world that asks the timeless question: How do we live on, even after we're gone?

**December 16 7PM In person location TBD**

**Annual Holiday Poetry and Short Story Reading; cookie swap**

**January 27 7PM via Zoom**

**The Frozen River** by Ariel Lawhon 448 pages library, Kindle, ebook, Amazon, etc.

**BOBBI HOLZEL discussion facilitator**

Maine, 1789: When the Kennebec River freezes, entombing a man in the ice, Martha Ballard is summoned to examine the body and determine cause of death. As a midwife and healer, she is privy to much of what goes on behind closed doors in Hallowell. Her diary is a record of every birth and death, crime and debacle that unfolds in the close-knit community. Months earlier, Martha documented the details of an alleged rape committed by two of the town's most respected gentlemen—one of whom has now been found dead in the ice. But when a local physician undermines her conclusion, declaring the death to be an accident, Martha is forced to investigate the shocking murder on her own.

Over the course of one winter, as the trial nears, and whispers and prejudices mount, Martha doggedly pursues the truth. Her diary soon lands at the center of the scandal, implicating those she loves, and compelling Martha to decide where her own loyalties lie.

Clever, layered, and subversive, Ariel Lawhon's newest offering introduces an unsung heroine who refused to accept anything less than justice at a time when women were considered best seen and not heard. *The Frozen River* is a thrilling, tense, and tender story about a remarkable woman who left an unparalleled legacy yet remains nearly forgotten to this day.

**February 24, 2025 via Zoom Black History Month**

**The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store** by James McBride 512 pages library, Kindle, ebook, Amazon, etc.

**JANICE CLEMENTS, discussion facilitator**

In 1972, when workers in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, were digging the foundations for a new development, the last thing they expected to find was a skeleton at the bottom of a well. Who the skeleton was and how it got there were two of the long-held secrets kept by the residents of Chicken Hill, the dilapidated neighborhood where immigrant Jews and African Americans lived side by side and shared ambitions and sorrows. Chicken Hill was where Moshe and Chona Ludlow lived when Moshe integrated his theater and where Chona ran the Heaven & Earth Grocery Store. When the state came looking for a deaf boy to institutionalize him, it was Chona and Nate Timblin, the Black janitor at Moshe's theater and the unofficial leader of the Black community on Chicken Hill, who

worked together to keep the boy safe.

As these characters' stories overlap and deepen, it becomes clear how much the people who live on the margins of white, Christian America struggle and what they must do to survive. When the truth is finally revealed about what happened on Chicken Hill and the part the town's white establishment played in it, McBride shows us that even in dark times, it is love and community—heaven and earth—that sustain us.

Bringing his masterly storytelling skills and his deep faith in humanity to *The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store*, James McBride has written a novel as compassionate as *Deacon King Kong* and as inventive as *The Good Lord Bird*.

**March 24, 2025 7PM via Zoom Women's History Month**

**The Road from Coorain** by Jill Ker Conway 238 pages library, Kindle, ebook, Amazon, etc.

**NANCY MCCLELLAN, discussion facilitator**

In a memoir that pierces and delights us, Jill Ker Conway tells the story of her astonishing journey into adulthood—a journey that would ultimately span immense distances and encompass worlds, ideas, and ways of life that seem a century apart.

She was seven before she ever saw another girl child. At eight, still too small to mount her horse unaided, she was galloping miles, alone, across Coorain, her parents' thirty thousand windswept, drought-haunted acres in the Australian outback, doing a "man's job" of helping herd the sheep because World War II had taken away the able-bodied men. She loved (and makes us see and feel) the vast unpeopled landscape, beautiful and hostile, whose uncertain weathers tormented the sheep ranchers with conflicting promises of riches and inescapable disaster. She adored (and makes us know) her large-visioned father and her strong, radiant mother, who had gone willingly with him into a pioneering life of loneliness and bone-breaking toil, who seemed miraculously to succeed in creating a warmly sheltering home in the harsh outback, and who, upon her husband's sudden death when Jill was ten, began to slide—bereft of the partnership of work and love that had so utterly fulfilled her—into depression and dependency.

We see Jill, staggered by the loss of her father, catapulted to what seemed another planet—the suburban Sydney of the 1950s and its crowded, noisy, cliquish school life. Then the heady excitement of the University, but with it a yet more demanding course of lessons—Jill embracing new ideas, new possibilities, while at the same time trying to be mother to her mother and resenting it, escaping into drink, pulling herself back, striking a balance. We see her slowly gaining strength, coming into her own emotionally and intellectually and beginning the joyous love affair that gave wings to her newfound self.

Worlds away from Coorain, in America, Jill Conway became a historian and the first woman president of Smith College. Her story of Coorain and the road from Coorain startles by its passion and evocative power, by its understanding of the ways in which a total, deep-rooted commitment to place—or to a dream—can at once liberate and imprison. It is a story of childhood as both Eden and anguish, and of growing up as a journey toward the difficult life of the free.

**April 28 7PM in person location TBD**

**Remarkably Bright Creatures** by Shelby Van Pelt 368 Pages. library, Kindle, ebook, Amazon, etc.

**JOAN GOODELL discussion facilitator**

After Tova Sullivan's husband died, she began working the night shift at the Sowell Bay Aquarium, mopping floors and tidying up. Keeping busy has always helped her cope, which she's been doing

since her eighteen-year-old son, Erik, mysteriously vanished on a boat in Puget Sound over thirty years ago.

Tova becomes acquainted with curmudgeonly Marcellus, a giant Pacific octopus living at the aquarium. Marcellus knows more than anyone can imagine but wouldn't dream of lifting one of his eight arms for his human captors—until he forms a remarkable friendship with Tova.

Ever the detective, Marcellus deduces what happened the night Tova's son disappeared. And now Marcellus must use every trick his old invertebrate body can muster to unearth the truth for her before it's too late.

Shelby Van Pelt's debut novel is a gentle reminder that sometimes taking a hard look at the past can help uncover a future that once felt impossible.

**May 26 7PM in person location TBD**

**James by Percival Everett 320 pages** library, Kindle, ebook, Amazon, etc.

**DONNA LEE discussion facilitator**

When the enslaved Jim overhears that he is about to be sold to a man in New Orleans, separated from his wife and daughter forever, he decides to hide on nearby Jackson Island until he can formulate a plan. Meanwhile, Huck Finn has faked his own death to escape his violent father, recently returned to town. As all readers of American literature know, thus begins the dangerous and transcendent journey by raft down the Mississippi River toward the elusive and too-often-unreliable promise of the Free States and beyond.

While many narrative set pieces of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* remain in place (floods and storms, stumbling across both unexpected death and unexpected treasure in the myriad stopping points along the river's banks, encountering the scam artists posing as the Duke and Dauphin...), Jim's agency, intelligence and compassion are shown in a radically new light.

Brimming with the electrifying humor and lacerating observations that have made Everett a "literary icon" (*Oprah Daily*), and one of the most decorated writers of our lifetime, James is destined to be a major publishing event and a cornerstone of twenty-first century American literature.

**June 23 5:30 PM In person Location TBD: Annual Pot Luck and Book Pitch Gathering**