



**HUMANITIES
KANSAS**

A Movement of Ideas

MOVEMENT OF IDEAS

TALK CATALOG



October 2018

Welcome to Talk About Literature in Kansas (TALK), a program for every Kansan who loves to read and discuss good books.

TALK is a HK program that explores topics important to Kansans through literature. The humanities help us understand what it means to be human – to seek connections with people and place. Talk About Literature in Kansas book discussions draw on our diverse literatures to help us see more clearly who we are as people and define ideas that will shape a future worthy of generations to come.

HOW TALK WORKS:

Each TALK series is built around an entertaining topic of interest to adult readers. The books in each series are selected for reader appeal, literary quality, and relevance to the series theme. The local sponsor – a library, senior center, historical society, community center, or other nonprofit group – selects the series to present to the community. Humanities Kansas provides financial assistance that includes multiple sets of books, discussion leaders, and special publicity materials to the sponsoring group.

THE TALK MODEL:

There are many different ways to plan TALK Book discussions in your community! Coordinators are encouraged to experiment and develop a TALK model that works with their community. Not sure how to begin? Let this example of a popular TALK model inspire you to create your own. A TALK reading discussion group meets at regular intervals – usually once per month. A series includes up to three scholar-facilitated discussions, depending on the local sponsor's preference.

Before each meeting, the discussion group participants check out and read the book to be discussed. Each meeting may begin with informal comments by a HK discussion leader, who may provide background information about the author and the book, and raise thought-provoking questions for discussion. The questions provide a point of departure for open discussion among the participants. Program time is 60 to 90 minutes – or longer when the discussion is particularly lively!

Please note: TALK programs are intended for adult, out-of-school audiences.

BOOKING A PROGRAM:

How to create a TALK book discussion in your community

- Review the catalog and select a TALK series and discussion leader.
- Reserve the TALK series from the Northwest Kansas Library System: contact ill@nwkls.org or call 785-877-5148.
- Contact discussion leader(s) and confirm time, date, and location.
- Apply online at humanitieskansas.org for HK program funds to bring the discussion leader(s) to your community.
- Publicize your event. Download a press release, discussion leader bios, and Humanities Kansas' logo poster
- Tell us how it went. After the event, download and fill out a TALK evaluation and cost-share form and email them to abigail@humanitieskansas.org.

A list of series and books is available in the TALK catalog. Some books are labeled **LP** (Large Print), **DB** (Digital Talking Book), and **BR** (Digital Braille). These titles are available to qualifying individuals via the State Library of Kansas, Talking Books Service in Digital Talking Book (DB) and/or Digital Braille (BR) format. Kansans with a visual or physical impairment that keeps them from reading traditional print materials should contact Kansas Talking Books at 1-800-362-0699 or KTB@ks.gov to learn more.

Book Discussion Leaders indicates scholars who will lead discussions for a particular book.

Series Discussion Leaders indicates scholars who will lead discussions for any book within that series.

* indicates scholars who are willing to lead book discussions online. See the TALK Scholar Directory for details.

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Ad Astra: Working Hard in the Heartland

“Ad Astra: Working Hard in the Heartland” seeks to elevate the stories of working Kansans. We aim to spark conversations on what it means to be working class in 21st century Kansas and to highlight the resilience of the often overlooked and over-worked members of our communities.

Heartland: a Memoir of Working Hard and being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth by Sarah Smarsh

Kansan Sarah Smarsh writes about growing up in rural Kansas during the 1980s and 1990s. She moves beyond a Kansas love story, however, and openly discusses taboo topics such as money (or lack thereof), teen pregnancy, divorce, and depression. Chronicling her family’s hard-scrabble life and struggles to make ends meet, Smarsh speaks about the toll of working on the working class.

This program is sponsored by the Sunflower Foundation

Series Discussion Leaders: Dan Eells, Martha Sanchez, Tom Prasch, Deborah Peterson, Annette Billings, Edgar Tidwell, Rosemary Kolich, Trish Reeves, Sara Tucker, Sandra Wiechert, Nicolas Shump, Dennis Etzel, Erin Pouppirt, Miranda Ericsson, Anne Hawkins, Sara Richter, Gene Chávez, Kim Stanley, Marilyn Klaus, Rachel Goossen, Valerie Brown-Kuchera



African Experiences of Migration

Immigrants from Africa have settled into Kansas's communities over the past several decades, seeking escape from social conflict, pursuing educational opportunities, or simply hoping for a better quality of life. Like immigrants who came before them, they suffer in their struggles to adjust to differences in language, culture, and some of the stereotypes they hold of Americans, as well as the stereotypes through which they are perceived. The books in this series provide intimate portraits of African immigrants' efforts to understand what it takes to fit into American culture, and how to preserve their own cultural values in the process. Perhaps most insightful, however, is the extent to which these stories illuminate what it means to be American in a place where nearly all of us have come from somewhere else.

Open City: A Novel by Teju Cole (2011) **DB, BR**

In the streets of Manhattan, a young Nigerian doctor named Julius wanders, reflecting on his relationships, his recent breakup with his girlfriend, his present, his past, meeting people from different cultures during his journey from Brussels, and back to the Nigeria of his youth.

Brooklyn Heights by Miral al-Tahawy (2010)

The story of Hind and her eight-year-old son, who have arrived in New York to start a new life, finds the two of them drawing parallels between their new urban community and memories of the Bedouin village where Hind was raised. Set in New York's Brooklyn Heights, this novel unfolds the relationship between mother and son struggling in a new culture.

The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears by Dinaw Mengestu (2007) **DB, BR**

In 1990 Sepha Stephanos fled the Ethiopian revolution. Now he finds himself running a grocery store in a poor African-American neighborhood in Washington, DC. Told in a haunting and powerful first-person narrative that casts the streets of DC and Addis Ababa through Sepha's eyes, this novel illuminates what it means to lose a family and country—and what it takes to create a new home.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Sara Tucker

A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier by Ishmael Beah (2007) **DB, BR**

Ishmael Beah's life in war-torn Sierra Leone did not prepare him for his move to the United States in 1998, where he finished his last two years of high school at the United Nations International School in New York. He went on to earn a degree in Political Science from Oberlin College and become a member of the Human Rights Watch Children's Division Advisory Committee. His personal experiences now inform his work in addressing children's conditions in countries ravaged by war throughout the world.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez

What Is the What by Dave Eggers (2006) **DB**

This moving novel traces the story of Valentino Achak Deng, one of thousands of Lost Boys of Sudan, who fled on foot to escape the death squads of militias overtaking their villages. They walked hundreds of miles, evading government bombers, wild animals, and environmental dangers to reach freedom. Many of these boys, like Valentino, were settled in the United States, where new challenges tried their resilience.

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Carmaletta Williams, Tom Prasch, Rosemary Kolich, Shawn Alexander, Kevin Rabas

After the Fact (NEW in 2018)

Some events in our lives are so pivotal that once they occur everything changes. The Great Depression, World War II, and 9/11 represent large-scale cultural events while marriage, job loss, and major illness serve as more intimate examples. This series is about the changes that happen during and after major traumas. The books in this series take on the topics of war, illness, and murder. Each author depicts the transformations shaped by the main characters due to a variety of stressors. How does each character handle change?

The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien (1990) **DB, BR, LP**

Written nearly 30 years ago about his experiences in the Vietnam War, O'Brien's book still resonates with readers young and old. In fact, some critics refer to this prize-winning work that defies genres as the best book ever written about war. As O'Brien has stated, "stories are for joining the past and the present," and that is exactly what this book does. The work served as a catharsis for the author and his memories of Vietnam. He begins the work with the literal weight of the objects in the soldiers' packs—steel helmets five pounds, letters four ounces, .45 caliber pistol 2.9 pounds, etc. Interviewed for the book's 20th anniversary in 2010, O'Brien remembered, "I carry the memories of the ghosts of a place called Vietnam, the people of Vietnam, my fellow soldiers. . . I carry the weight of responsibility and a sense of abiding guilt." Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Rosemary Kolich

Station Eleven by Emily St. John Mandel (2014) **DB, BR, LP**

This fascinating work depicts the lives of characters after a flu pandemic that decimates 99% of the world's population. Set 20 years after the fact where small groups of people live in abandoned gas stations (the fossil fuel economy no longer exists) and abandoned fast food restaurants such as Wendy's. Readers meet Kirsten, an actress with the traveling symphony that tours the upper peninsula of Michigan performing Shakespeare (because audiences prefer it to more modern plays). The novel examines a post-apocalyptic world consisting of "ferals," starvation, and loneliness through themes of nostalgia, memory, and art. Mandel weaves together this cast of characters with an air of mystery and suspense that propels the reader forward wanting to learn more.

The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas (2017) **DB, BR, LP**

This young adult novel revolves around the aftermath of the murder of a young Black teenager by a police officer during a traffic stop. The story is told through the eyes of Starr, the sole witness to the murder. Prior to the shooting Starr lived in two worlds kept strictly separate—one of her majority white private school and the second of her majority Black neighborhood. The book explores how unstable the boundary between these two worlds is. As the *Los Angeles Review of Books* notes, this is a "powerful novel that strikes to the heart of contemporary race relations in the United States." Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Susan Anne Carlson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Dennis Etzel, Anne Hawkins, Nicolas Shump, Randee Baty, Miranda Ericsson, Kim Stanley, Lori Brack, Al Ortolani, Annette Billings, Kevin Rabas, Dan Eells

Between Fences

“Good fences make good neighbors,” Robert Frost famously declared in his poem “Mending Wall,” but not all fences do. In the same poem, Frost notes nature’s own resistance to man-made boundaries: “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.” Fences mark our territory, define our boundaries, limit our movement, and convey our sense of property. We define ourselves and our space with fence. Metaphorically, fences can mark different states of being – ins and outs, the included and excluded, the sacred and taboo, and even life and death. There must be some kind of enclosure for there to be a need for “pearly gates.”

Farewell to Manzanar by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston (1973) **DB, BR**

In this memoir, Houston recalls life in the camp from a child’s point of view, from dining to schooling to cultivating the land, in addition to recounting her re-entry into American life and her return to Manzanar in 1972.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, William Clyde Brown, Sara Tucker

Fences by August Wilson (1985) **DB**

For Troy, an old baseball player, fences mark the boundary for a home run, yet also mark the racial restrictions that kept Troy from the big leagues and demarcate Troy’s struggle with his own mortality.

Book Discussion Leaders: John Edgar Tidwell, Gene Chávez, William Clyde Brown

The Tortilla Curtain by T. C. Boyle (1995)

Boyle juxtaposes two Los Angeles couple’s lives: one of privilege; the other of illegal immigration. Boyle’s plot brings the two families into tragic collision, exposing issues of class divides, problems of illegal Mexican immigration, and environmental degradation. As the United States builds hundreds of miles of fence along the Mexican border, his novel has never been timelier.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Gene Chávez

The Wire-Cutters by Mollie E. Moore Davis (1899)

Set during the 1880s Texas Wire-Cutting War, when fencing off the open plains set smallholders against the rich large-tract owners, this novel has all the trappings of a classic Western: cowboys, duels and outlaws framed against the canvas of the struggle to survive on the frontier.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Dan Eells, Sabdra Wiechert

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Erin Poupirt, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Kim Stanley, Michaeline Chance-Reay, Shawn Alexander, Martha Sanchez, Kevin Rabas

BEYOND THE BORDER: LATINO IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCES



Latino immigration narratives are essential to the entire multicultural landscape of American literature. Although no single text tells the whole story of immigration, the books in this series center around key themes: the ways immigrants see themselves, their journeys, and their communities left behind; generational conflicts between parents and their teens in Latino families; and the power to (re)define their fluid identities amidst border politics and global economy.

Antonio's Gun and Delfino's Dream: True Tales of Mexican Migration by Sam Quinones

Quinones delivers nine astounding pieces of narrative journalism that situate individual migrant experiences within a broader social, political, cultural and economic context. One of the most powerful stories follows a soccer season in Garden City, Kansas. The development of soccer is “a metaphor for Mexican immigrants’ standing in town.” It illustrates both the challenges high school immigrant students face in their communities and also the ways in which the meat-packing industry job prevents social mobility for second generations of Mexican youth.

The House of Broken Angels by Luis Alberto Urrea

In a novel overflowing with joy, sorrow, and humor, Urrea skillfully weaves the voices of four generations of a Mexican-American family caught in border politics. An exuberant cast of characters, Urrea unveils their stories from their move to southern California after the Mexican Revolution in 1910, the great wave of deportation of 1932 that took them back to Mexico, and their current lives in San Diego and Seattle.

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter by Erika L. Sánchez

Julia is an irreverent young daughter of Mexican immigrants who aspires to become a writer. She refuses to have a quinceañera and to stay at home after completing high school. As she struggles to break free of her parents’ expectations, she also tries to understand her parents’ migration experience: their journey and border crossing, their sacrifices, and their status as undocumented immigrants. In this New York Times bestseller and National Book Awards finalist, Sanchez also questions the stigma associated with mental health conditions, raises awareness about depression, and addresses the issue of suicide among young Latinas.

The program is administered by the Federation of State Humanities Council and supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in partnership with the Pulitzer Prizes.

Series Discussion Leaders: Martha Sanchez, Tom Prasch, Deborah Peterson, Dennis Etzel, Erin Poupirt, Gene Chávez, Sara Richter, Marilyn Klaus, Miranda Ericsson, Annette Billings, Rosemary Kolich, Trish Reeves, Sarah Tucker, Nicolas Shump, Kim Stanley, Ann Hawkins, Sofía Paredes



LATINO STORIES OF KANSAS
HISTORIAS LATINAS DE KANSAS

Civil Rights Revisited (NEW in 2018)

When poet Langston Hughes attended middle school in Lawrence, Kansas, in the 1910s his teacher placed all the Black students in a single row of desks in the classroom, effectively segregating the African-American students from their white classmates. Hughes, who grew up in a progressive household, protested this treatment by placing signs on the desks of his fellow African-American classmates that read “Jim Crow row.” When his teacher grew angry and removed the signs, Hughes ran through the halls of the school and into the courtyard shouting, “Jim Crow row! Jim Crow row!” The literal and figurative disruption he caused led to a meeting between African-American parents, community leaders, and school officials, which ended the segregation of students in the classroom.

The story of Hughes’s act of resistance towards racism and injustice highlights two points. First, the actions of one person can make a difference. Hughes’s act of disruption affected change. Second, the story represents one episode in the fight for equality and dignity for African-Americans in Kansas.

The books in this series offer a look at Civil Rights from the launch pad of the 21st century. John Lewis’s graphic novel memoir reveals the power of pictures and words in his intimate retelling of pivotal events of the Civil Rights Movement and how these actions can be directly linked to the election of this country’s first African-American president. Coates, Rankine, and Alexander forefront the injustices that still exist through systemic racism, microaggressions, or outright hostility. Themes of the body, citizenship, and dreams—and dreams deferred, to invoke Hughes—thread all of these volumes together.

March by John Lewis (2013) **DB, LP**

Civil Rights icon and United States Congressman John Lewis wrote this series of three graphic novels based on his experiences in the Civil Rights Movement during the early 1960s. A 1958 comic about Martin Luther King, Jr. inspired him as a young man growing up in rural Alabama, and he sought to instill that same sense of pride in a new generation of youth. The illustrations and first-hand account bring this period to life.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Sara Tucker, Marilyn Klaus

Book 1

This volume begins the day of the inauguration of Barack Obama and through a series of flashbacks, Lewis recalls the impact of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the philosophy of nonviolence that characterized the Civil Rights Movement. Lewis explains how he and other young activists became frustrated with the conservatism of the folks in the Civil Rights Movement from an earlier generation and that this led to the formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). SNCC’s policy, while still following the philosophy of nonviolence, leaned towards direct confrontation.

Book 2

Book 2 follows Lewis’s rise within SNCC and the growing influence of the organization on the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. We witness the struggles of the 1961 Freedom Riders, the voter registration campaign in Mississippi, and the 1963 March on Washington. As Lewis states, “Human dignity is the most important thing in my life.”

Book 3

The final volume in the trilogy focuses on the Selma to Montgomery march, which led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The longest of the three volumes, it covers the death of the three girls in the Birmingham church bombing and Freedom Summer in Mississippi.

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Civil Rights Revisited (NEW in 2018)

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Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) **DB, BR, LP**

Author Ta-Nehisi Coates won the National Book Award for this searingly honest reflection on contemporary race relations in the United States. Written as a letter to his teenage son, this slim volume provokes a myriad of emotions. Part autobiography, part history lesson, Coates forces the reader to grapple with the meaning of being American.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, John Edgar Tidwell

Citizen: An American Lyric by Claudia Rankine (2014) **DB, BR, LP**

This poetic work crosses boundaries in its sojourn into American race relations in the twenty-first century. Rankine turns a critical eye to everything from tennis superstar Serena Williams to everyday microaggressions on the subway. As one of the blurbs on the back of her book reads, “[Citizen] lovingly embraces and articulates the trauma and contradictions of what happens when one person is spat upon and another person spits.”

Book Discussion Leaders: John Edgar Tidwell

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness by Michelle Alexander (2010) **DB, LP**

Author Michelle Alexander meticulously examines the role of race in the American judicial system. In a powerful tour de force, she steps back, looks at the big picture, and concludes that the prison industrial complex picks up where slavery and Jim Crow segregation left off. She demonstrates how today’s conditions perpetuate a system that discriminates against people of color through the War on Drugs. “No other country in the world imprisons so many of its racial or ethnic minorities,” Alexander writes. In fact, “the United States imprisons a larger percentage of its black population than South Africa did at the height of apartheid.” Beyond this lurks the fact that once a person is branded a felon, it is legal to discriminate against him or her in employment, housing, and education. He or she is excluded from voting, jury service, and often denied public benefits. All of this adds up to effectively creating a caste system as a result of mass incarceration.

Book Discussion Leaders: John Edgar Tidwell, William Clyde Brown, Marilyn Klaus

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Carmaletta Williams, Dennis Etzel, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Miranda Ericsson, Gene Chávez, Shawn Alexander, Annette Billings, Margy Stewart, Kevin Rabas

The Civil War

After commemorating the Civil War’s sesquicentennial from 2011-2015, the reasons to continue exploring its impact are clear: because no political dispute came closer to destroying the United States, and defining issues of race and inclusion began to be settled then, but the work is not over. The war left deep scars, and its legacy remains unresolved. Contemporary disputes—over the display of Confederate flags and monuments, over Southern politicians returning to the discourse of “state’s rights” that had informed secession, over the continued struggle of African-Americans to claim a full share of political rights and economic power in America, even over what to call this war that divided America—all reflect the continuing legacy of the Civil War on the contemporary American scene.

A Diary from Dixie by Mary Boykin Chesnut (1905/2006)

Mary Chesnut (1823-1886) was a woman of the Southern plantation elite, well connected, and passionately committed to the Confederacy’s losing cause. Through the course of the war, she worked in hospitals and witnessed the social costs of the Civil War, the slow destruction of her way of life.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Sandra Wiechert, Sara Tucker, Marilyn Klaus

March by Geraldine Brooks (2005) **DB**

The March of Brooks’s title is not Sherman’s, but Alcott’s. In Louisa May Alcott’s classic *Little Women*, the father of the girls of the March family is absent for much of the novel, serving as a chaplain for Union forces during the Civil War. Brooks’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel re-imagines the absent March as an abolitionist with utopian inclinations, testing his ideological commitments in the theatre of war.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Marilyn Klaus

The March by E.L. Doctorow (2005) **DB**

General William Tecumseh Sherman’s famous March, the rapacious scorched-earth tromping of Union forces across Georgia and the Carolinas, seemed designed to prove his slogan that “war is hell.” Doctorow in this novel brings to bear a perspective that blends panoramic overview with local experience, freely mixing fictional creations with historical figures.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Sara Tucker

The Red Badge of Courage by Stephen Crane (1895/2004) **DB, BR**

For Henry Fleming, the protagonist of Crane’s classic Civil War novel, the fundamental contrast between his anticipation of war and his experience of battle frames the hero’s growing consciousness of the realities of war. That new consciousness brings into question the hero’s initial idealized quest for a “red badge of courage,” the wound that proves his manhood.

Book Discussion Leaders: John Edgar Tidwell, Gene Chávez, William Clyde Brown

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Erin Poupirt, Tom Prasch, Michaeline Chance-Reay, Sara Jane Richter, Al Ortolani, Margy Stewart, Kevin Rabas

Community: The Way We Live

The quest for community has taken many forms in the history of the United States, the quintessential nation of the individual. Today we worry about the erosion of community as growing incivility, ethnic diversity, and fear of crime seem to weaken the ties that bind our towns and neighborhoods. This series explores some of the many ways we live together, from rural New Mexico and Alabama to our aging cities. Neighbors who've known each other all their lives and lonely folks slipping through the cracks of society all have something to teach us about how to depend on one another – about our need for support, for tolerance, for forgiveness.

Bailey's Cafe by Gloria Naylor (1992) **DB**

No one comes to Bailey's Cafe for the food – they're drawn by the grace and magic that attracts souls like alcoholic Sadie; sweet Esther, who accepts only roses for her "services;" and Mariam, the Ethiopian child who may be the bearer of a miracle.

Book Discussion Leaders: Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Rosemary Kolich

Mama Day by Gloria Naylor (1988) **DB**

On the Georgia sea island of Willow Springs, people still use only herbal medicine and honor ancestors who came over as slaves. Matriarch Mama Day, who can call up lightning storms and see secrets in her dreams, tests her powers when her great-niece, a stubbornly emancipated woman, finds her life and soul in danger from the island's darker forces.

Book Discussion Leaders: Caryn Mirriam-Goldbert, Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich, Marilyn Klaus

Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe by Fannie Flagg (1987) **DB**

This endearing novel travels from the 1980s back to the 1930s, when Idgie and Ruth's Alabama cafe offered good barbecue, love, laughter, and even an occasional murder.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Caryn Mirriam-Goldbert, Rosemary Kolich, Sara Tucker

The Milagro Beanfield War by John Nichols (1974) **DB**

When feisty Joe Mondragon decides to irrigate his bean crop with "stolen" water, he drags the neighbors in his New Mexico village into a hilarious battle to save their community.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Marilyn Klaus

Snow Falling on Cedars by David Guterson (1994) **DB, BR**

A fisherman drowns and a Japanese-American is charged with his murder, forcing the island residents of San Piedro to come to terms with their past, including the exile of local Japanese families during World War II.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Marilyn Klaus

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Carmaletta Williams, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Erin Poupirt, Nicolas Shump, Dan Eells, Rachel Goossen, Shawn Alexander, Kevin Rabas

Dearly Beloved (NEW in 2018)

Society admonishes us to live now, be in the moment, don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today. This conveniently allows us not to think about our own end. Death and dying are uncomfortable topics. The three volumes in this series take on this taboo subject from a variety of perspectives. In *Being Mortal* Dr. Atul Gawande looks at aging from a medical point of view and explores how the profession has dealt with death incorrectly. Roz Chast adds whimsy and humor in her illustrated memoir based on her experiences dealing with the decline of her parents. Finally, author Richard Wagamese offers a fictional story of a father trying to make amends before he dies.

Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End by Atul Gawande (2014)

DB, LP

Our culture idealizes youth. People are so busy trying to look, act, or feel younger that we ignore the fact of our aging. *Being Mortal* offers a brutally honest truth: we will all someday die. Dr. Gawande writes compassionately and engagingly about the sensitive topic of death and dying. He argues that our medicalization of aging and dying merely prolongs life without regard to whether or not it is enjoyable.

Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant? by Roz Chast (2014) **DB, LP**

Chast's memoir discusses the emotional struggles of caring for aging parents without shying away from the gritty reality. How and when to help? How much, how often? When to downsize, what to do with all the stuff? How will the extended care be paid for? She takes on this tough topic in a lighthearted manner and in an unconventional way—through drawing. Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker

Medicine Walk by Richard Wagamese (2014) **LP**

"So far it's all been stories," remarks Franklin Starlight. "It's all we are in the end, our stories," replies his companion. Wagamese, widely considered one of Canada's best novelists, writes about redemption, reconciliation, and the healing process in this rich novel filled with lush landscape. Sixteen-year-old Franklin agrees to take his estranged father to the back country of British Columbia to die the "warrior way" and along the way receives the stories his father must tell.

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Dennis Etzel, Rosemary Kolich, Erin Pouppirt, Nicolas Shump, Miranda Ericsson, Dan Eells, Rachel Goossen, Margy Stewart, Kevin Rabas

Entangled World

Globalization, typically considered in economic terms, has sparked cultural collisions and ignited new multicultural identities. Although these cultural exchanges are as old as human history, patterns of globalization have accelerated dramatically over the past century. Whereas new forms of trade and exchange of ideas have elevated living standards, wars and ethnic clashes have dislocated peoples and remapped the world. To all this, literature has responded, producing a range of works that investigate the complex interactions of people and cultures in our increasingly entangled world.

Bel Canto by Anne Patchett (2001) **DB, BR**

An American opera singer, a Japanese industrialist, a French diplomat with skills in the kitchen, and a translator who falls in love with a Latin American terrorist are taken hostage by revolutionary terrorists in an unnamed Latin American embassy. Low comedy and high suspense, romance and tragedy blend in Patchett's Orange Prize-winning novel, inspired by the actual seizure of the Japanese ambassador's residence in Peru by Tupac Amaru guerillas in 1996.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Rosemary Kolich, Caryn Mirriam-Goldbert, Gene Chávez, Marilyn Klaus

People of the Book by Geraldine Brooks (2007) **DB, BR**

Book restorer Hannah Heath's project, the 500-year-old illuminated Sarajevo Haggadah manuscript, is a repository of tragic episodes throughout human history: as a friend tells her, "this book has survived the same disaster over and over again," referring to "this fear, this hate, this need to demonize 'the other.'" As Heath unpacks the clues in the book that illuminate its history—an insect wing, a wine stain, a missing silver clasp—her life in Sarajevo at the end of the fratricidal Bosnian war enriches her own perspectives on humankind's potential for violence and redemption.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Gene Chávez, Marilyn Klaus

Anil's Ghost by Michael Ondaatje (2000) **DB**

Canadian novelist Michael Ondaatje explores his own Sri Lankan roots in his fourth novel, limning the violence of the conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan state. Anil has fled her increasingly violent homeland to train in America as a forensic archaeologist. She comes to Sri Lanka on a UN mission after work in the killing fields of Guatemala's "dirty war." She is teamed with local archaeologist Sarath, whose Buddhist perspective and murky political connections balance her Western perspective on events.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prash, Nicolas Shump, Miranda Ericsson, Rachel Goossen, Shawn Alexander, Kevin Rabas

The Exile's Place

The exile's place is a site of construction: old ideas, foodways, religious beliefs, language, and habits are used to build a new life in a place newly settled. This place is always also a site of contest, of struggles with residents already there who might reject the newcomer's religion or skin color or anything else that differs from the new land's norm. What drives the exile to this new place colors both the memories of the land left behind and the perspectives on the new homeland. The exile straddles frontiers; finding a balance is always a question, always a negotiation.

The Lazarus Project by Aleksandar Hemon (2008) **DB**

Bosnian Vladimir Brik is caught in exile in Chicago by the wars that broke up Yugoslavia. Obsessed with Lazarus Averbach, an immigrant who had fled Moldavian pogroms in the early 1900s only to be gunned down by Chicago police as a presumed anarchist, Brik returns to Eastern Europe to explore the roots of the earlier tragedy. The parallels illuminate the recurrent motifs of exile and the sufferings of Central Europeans through the bloody history of the twentieth century.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Rosemary Kolich

The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri (2003) **DB, BR**

This story of the Ganguli family centers on Gogol, the eldest son, and highlights the different ways in which his parents, first-generation immigrants, and Gogol's generation, American-born children of immigrants, interact with India as a place, a culture, and an ethnic identity, and how they work to shape these identities within the New World.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Sara Tucker

Things I've Been Silent About by Azar Nafisi (2008) **DB**

Iranian exile Azar Nafisi recognizes that “the ease with which all that you call home, all that gives you an identity, a sense of self and belonging, can be taken away from you.” Her memoir covers both her increasing alienation from the theocratic state in Iran and her complex relationships with her mother, whose “coffee hours” with other women offered a refuge from an increasingly controlled public sphere, and her father, who kept his own secret diary.

Book Discussion Leader: Marilyn Klaus

Brick Lane by Monica Ali (2003) **DB**

Nazneen is an 18-year-old Bangladeshi brought to Britain in an arranged marriage with almost no preparation—the only words she knows in English are “sorry” and “thank you.” She must make a life with her much older, comically incompetent husband and survive her impoverished and violent surroundings in the Brick Lane territory of East London that has been the refuge for waves of immigrants from the eighteenth century onward.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Marilyn Klaus

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Anne Hawkins, Erin Poupirt, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Michaeline Chance-Reay, Kevin Rabas

Faiths in Fiction: World Faiths

Do our lives unfold at random, or do the things that happen to us have a larger purpose? Do love and compassion matter in a world that often lacks both? Questions such as these have led people in every society, throughout history, to seek answers in the spiritual realm. In this series, readers will encounter characters whose lives are shaped by faith – both in the formal sense of an inherited religious tradition, and in their personal struggles with questions of doubt and belief, fate and free will, forgiveness and redemption.

Distant View of a Minaret and Other Stories by Alifa Rifaat (Islam) (1983)

The private, hidden world of women in Egypt unfolds in 15 tales – a disloyal husband, a pregnant daughter, a naive wife, an aging spinster – all permeated by the call of the mosque and the daily rituals of prayer.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Sandra Wiechert, Marilyn Klaus

Go Tell It on the Mountain by James Baldwin (Christianity)(1953) **DB, BR**

John is supposed to become a preacher like his father, Gabriel, but at 14 he is tempted to reject the strict faith of a family whose buried secrets and struggles gradually unfold.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, William Clyde Brown, Rosemary Kolich, John Edgar Tidwell

Harp of Burma by Michio Takeyama (Buddhism)(1967)

When a carefree, harp-playing Japanese soldier is wounded in Burma at the close of World War II, he is saved by a Buddhist priest and undergoes a conversion that takes him and his country on the road to peace. (Upon request, The Burmese Harp. Video)

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Sandra Wiechert, William Clyde Brown, Rosemary Kolich

Nectar in a Sieve by Kamala Markandaya (Hinduism)(1954) **DB**

A simple peasant woman in India never loses her faith in life or her love for her family, even as she endures the uncertainties of farming, poverty, and changing times.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Sandra Wiechert, William Clyde Brown, Rosemary Kolich

The Romance Reader by Pearl Abraham (Judaism)(1995) **DB**

The daughter of a Hasidic rabbi, Rachel is expected to care for her siblings, dress modestly, and submit to an arranged marriage. But there's a more enticing world in the pages of her forbidden paperback books.

Book Discussion Leaders: Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Susan Anne Carlson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Dan Eells, Al Ortolani, Kevin Rabas

Food for Thought

Food is more than sustenance. Cooking and serving food has always been important emotionally. Old and new generations learn family recipes and share family traditions. Communities come together at events and eating places to get to know one another and to build common identities. At the same time, conflict can appear wherever people raise, cook, or eat food. The books in this series were shaped by both the power and the conflicts surrounding the way we eat.

Empire Falls by Richard Russo (2001) **DB**

Richard Russo offers a different relationship between food and human interaction. Miles Roby, runs the local diner, the Empire Grill. “His daily parade of customers provides him with ample evidence of both the restrictions and forced intimacy of small-town life.”

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Marilyn Klaus

Epitaph for a Peach by David Mas Masumoto (1995) **BR**

Masumoto details his struggle to survive the rigors of modern-day grocery cold storage and distribution timetables, while addressing the importance of family and learning to work with, rather than against, nature.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich

Miriam's Kitchen by Elizabeth Ehrlich (1997) **DB**

Ehrlich tells how and why, as the child of mostly secular Jewish parents, she came to reclaim the kosher cooking ways of her Holocaust-survivor mother-in-law, Miriam. Ehrlich writes gently and with humor, taking time to talk about the small details of how things are done to “keep kosher.”

Book Discussion Leaders: Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Sara Tucker, Marilyn Klaus

Secrets of the Tsil Café by Thomas Fox Averill (2001)

Wes Hingler’s parents had one marriage, but two kitchens – his father’s Native American Tsil Café, and his mother’s European-heritage catering business. Wes’s search for his cooking style, and thus his own adult identity, comes interwoven with a number of memorable characters, family crises and secrets, and whole-world recipes.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Tom Prasch, Miranda Ericsson, Dan Eells, Gene Chávez, Kevin Rabas

Friends and Neighbors (NEW in 2018)

“Of all possessions a friend is the most precious,” stated Greek historian, Herodotus. From Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn to Jo and Laurie, literature is filled with stories of friendships. This series is about forging friendships in unexpected places and the changes these relationships bring to our lives.

A Man Called Ove by Fredrik Backman (2012) **DB, BR, LP**

In *Ove*, author Fredrik Backman creates a loveable curmudgeon. Ove, a recent widower and forced retiree, likes things to be orderly and fair. He spends his days as self-appointed neighborhood watch overlord in his Swedish housing complex making sure bicycles remain in designated areas and sheds are securely locked. He’s the type of guy who goes out of his way to ensure that a tailgating Mercedes misses out on a prime parking space near the mall by physically blocking the space with his Saab—the only brand of car that people should drive. New neighbors disrupt his world, beginning with knocking over his mailbox, driving over his flowerbed, and bringing him dinner as an apology.

Book Discussion Leaders: William Clyde Brown, Sara Tucker, Dan Eells, Marilyn Klaus

Five Skies by Ron Carlson (2007) **DB, BR, LP**

“And so their days ended with this regard for their tools and the days began, as they squinted over coffee, in the exhilarating open air knowing where the shovel was, the chain, the awl,” author Ron Carlson poignantly writes, about his male protagonists. This book is about

three strangers, each with a scarred past, who come together for a summer to construct a motorcycle ramp over a canyon gorge in the Idaho Rockies. The foreman looks for a way around his grief after the sudden death of his wife and the project engineer seeks to overcome his guilt over the death of his brother. They are joined by a runaway teen with a history of petty crime. Carlson chronicles how the trio immerses themselves in the work in search of salvation and become friends along the way.

Book Discussion Leaders: Dan Eells

The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears by Dinaw Mengestu (2007) **DB, BR, LP**

Ethiopian shopkeeper Sepha Stephanos states, “I was hit with the sudden terrible and frightening realization that everything I cared for and loved was either lost or living on without me seven thousand miles away, and that what I had here was not a life, but a poorly constructed substitution made up of one uncle, two friends, a grim store, and a cheap apartment.” This novel follows Stephanos as he chronicles his life in the rapidly gentrifying Washington D.C. neighborhood of Logan Circle and his path there from war torn Ethiopia as a young man in the 1970s. The story is about the pain of exile, a changing neighborhood, and friendships forged and lost. Though his friendship with two other African immigrants help ease his transition, it is the companionship of Judith and her biracial 11-year-old daughter Naomi that transform his world into something hopeful.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Sara Tucker

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Dennis Etzel, Anne Hawkins, Rosemary Kolich, Nicolas Shump, Miranda Ericsson, Rachel Goossen, Annette Billings, Kevin Rabas

Ghost Stories (NEW in 2018)

Literature, like folklore, is filled with the spirits of the dead: King Saul asks the Witch of Endor to call up Samuel's ghost; Odysseus tries to embrace his mother's wraith in Hades; and Hamlet asks whether his father's image is ghost or demon. People tell stories to try to explain what death is, where loved ones go, and why the good suffer. The books in this series represent some classic explanations.

The Haunting of Hill House by Shirley Jackson (1959) **DB, LP**

A lonely woman is strangely drawn to a house that others find hateful. We gradually discover what it is in her past and in the house's past that draws them together. This story provides some truly scary moments.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert

The Woman in Black by Susan Hill (1983) **LP**

In this modern ghost story all the classic elements are brought together: the isolated mansion, the dark past, described in riffs from yellowed letters, the young innocent charged with telling a dead woman's story, and the devastating final turn.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert

The Graveyard Book by Neil Gaiman (2008) **DB, BR, LP**

"There was a hand in the darkness, and it held a knife," so begins Neil Gaiman's Newberry Medal winning work of fiction. A small child wanders off into a graveyard pursued by a mysterious man named Jack who murdered the child's family. The boy is dubbed "Nobody Owens" by his adoptive ghostly parents who nickname him Bod. Bod's companions include an undead guardian named Silas and a graveyard full of ghosts who grant Bod the "freedom of the graveyard." As Bod grows, he learns to read from gravestones, is someone's imaginary friend, develops a crush on a witch, and experiences more adventures.

Series Discussion Leader: Sara Jane Richter, Trish Reeves, Lori Brack, Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Dennis Etzel, Rosemary Kolich, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Randee Baty, Miranda Ericsson, Kim Stanley, Dan Eells, Kevin Rabas

The Great Plains Spirit

Stretching from Texas north to the Dakotas, the vast Great Plains region has generated its share of myths and stereotypes, from the hardy pioneer farmer and the vanishing Indian to the Dust Bowl refugee. It has also produced some of our best American writers and inspired a rich and varied literary tradition.

The Bones of Plenty by Lois Hudson (1962)

Proud, independent Dakota wheat farmer George Armstrong Custer and his hard-working wife Rachel must battle both the land and their landlord during the depression years of 1933-34.

Great Plains by Ian Frazier (1989) **DB**

Taking us on a journey of 25,000 miles up, down, and across the myth-inspiring Great Plains, Frazier's adventures range from the site of Sitting Bull's cabin to Homecoming in Nicodemus, Kansas.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich

Little House on the Prairie by Laura Ingalls Wilder (1932-1943/1971) **DB, BR**

The Ingalls family leaves the Big Woods of Wisconsin and settles in the Indian territory of Kansas, a land of prairie fires, wolves, adventure, and startling beauty.

Book Discussion Leaders: William Clyde Brown, Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich, Sandra Wiechert

O Pioneers! by Willa Cather (1913) **DB**

Alexandra Bergson's dying father leaves their struggling Nebraska homestead to her, not her brothers. With her iron will and intelligence, she overcomes family tragedy and tames wild land that she loves.

Book Discussion Leaders: William Clyde Brown, Rosemary Kolich, Sandra Wiechert, Marilyn Klaus

Touching the Fire: Buffalo Dancers, the Sky Bundle, and Other Tales by Roger Welsch (1992)

The fictional Nehawka Indians wage a battle for the return of their sacred Sky Bundle, a medicine pouch whose stories take us back in time to the first Nehawka village on the Plains.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Sara Tucker, Sandra Wiechert

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Erin Poupirt, Linda Lewis, Randee Baty, Steven Foulke, Rachel Goossen, Sara Jane Richter, Margy Stewart, Kevin Rabas

Growing Up

“Rites of passage” is the term for rituals used by different cultures to mark the entrance of an individual into adulthood and full membership of the community. Western societies have not routinely marked the passage to adulthood with such dramatic and ritualized events as those chronicled by anthropologists like Margaret Mead and Victor Turner, but our own culture’s ceremonial markers – driver’s licenses, draft cards, restrictions on drinking age, voting rights – have their own unique mix of drama and ritual. The transition to adulthood is a deeply fraught passage, involving coming to terms with sexuality, choosing a career path, and generally making one’s way in an adult world. However, if coming of age is broadly universal, it is also deeply particular and personal.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon (2003) **DB, BR**

Finding a dead dog, any child might begin an investigation to find the murderer. However, Christopher Boone, a boy with autism, must not only carry out an investigation, but he must find a way to operate in the often-terrifying world, thereby bringing us into the world of the high-functioning autistic child.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini (2003) **DB, BR**

Amir recalls his childhood in Afghanistan, prior to the Soviet invasion and the rise of the Taliban. His memories focus on his relation with Hassan, his loyal servant and best friend, whom Amir betrayed. Returning to Afghanistan to rescue Hassan’s son from the clutches of the Taliban, Amir comes to terms with his past.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Marilyn Klaus

My Last Days as Roy Rogers by Pat Cunningham Devoto (1999) **DB**

Devoto’s novel recalls life in small-town, 1950s Alabama where Tabitha’s favorite cowboy is Roy Rogers and her best friend Maudie May’s is Gene Autry. As their friendship develops and challenges social conventions, Tabitha understands the racial and class dynamics of her hometown, and the limits of her own possibilities as the white-hatted hero who can come to the rescue.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Sara Tucker, Marilyn Klaus

The Secret Life of Bees by Sue Monk Kidd (2002) **DB, BR**

Fleeing from the law, 14-year-old Lily and her black nanny, Rosaleen, head to South Carolina, where they find refuge in a pink house of African-American sisters who cultivate bees and a cult of the Black Madonna. Lily comes to terms with her own past and struggles toward autonomy.

Book Discussion Leaders: Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Marilyn Klaus

Series Discussion Leaders: Sara Jane Richter, Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Michaeline Chance-Reay, Rachel Goossen, Rosemary Kolich, Kevin Rabas

Growing Up American

Coming-of-age literature captures the liminal state of adolescence while also serving as a tool for broader social critique, providing a cultural examination through the eyes of someone still a bit outside of the adult world's norms and values. It comprehends both the terrain of the personal and the historically specific territory of a work's moment of creation. In this sense, that fancy German term, *Bildungsroman*, provides some illumination: the notion that a person is an act of construction, and all of the experiences of a person's life are building blocks that create that final product, the self-conscious adult. In the American context, the very complexity of the American mosaic makes the coming-of-age genre such rich territory.

Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger (1951) **DB, BR**

"I keep picturing all these kids playing some game in this big field of rye.... What I have to do," Holden explains, "I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff." Can J. D. Salinger's classic still tell us anything about what it means to be American? Let's start this series by revisiting that too-wise-for-his-age, smart aleck Holden Caulfield and his quest for the un-phony.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Dan Eells

Tender at the Bone: Growing Up at the Table by Ruth Reichl (1998) **DB**

"I was slowly discovering that if you watched people as they ate, you could find out who they were." Through food, Ruth Reichl also comes to learn who she is. By turns moving and hilarious, nostalgic and hopeful, she recalls the long road from her upbringing (with parents indifferent to the appeals of the palate) to her chosen profession of restaurant reviewer, with foreign travel and dumpster diving along the way, and a recipe to punctuate each chapter.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Dan Eells, Marilyn Klaus

Sag Harbor by Colson Whitehead (2009) **DB, BR**

Benji explains the central terms of his summers away: "First you had to settle the question of out." The "out" is out from school, out for vacation, and out to Sag Harbor, but for the African-American elites who made the resort their vacation home, the ins and outs of it were more complex. Fifteen-year-old Benji must try to come to terms with growing up, with African-Americanness, and with American popular culture.

Book Discussion Leaders: John Edgar Tidwell, Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich, Marilyn Klaus

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Miranda Ericsson, Gene Chávez, Lori Brack, Shawn Alexander, Kevin Rabas

Hispanic Heritage: Mothers, Sisters, and Daughters

In this series, readers will discover authors who are helping to create a new and vibrant Latino literature in the United States. Their novels center around family ties, particularly the universal bonds between mother and daughter, grandmother and granddaughter, and among sisters.

Brand New Memory by Elias Miguel Muñoz (1998)

Cuban American teenager Gina Domingo's life revolves around Southern California pop culture and her wealthy parents – until her grandmother arrives from Cuba for an unexpected visit.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chavez, Rosemary Kolich

Esperanza's Box of Saints by María Amparo Escandón (1999)

Guided by her favorite saint, the beautiful young widow Esperanza sets off on a humorous journey from Mexico to Los Angeles in search of her missing daughter.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Rosemary Kolich, Marilyn Klaus

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros (1984) **DB**

This classic story of a young Mexican-American girl growing up in the Latino section of Chicago is sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes deeply joyous.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez, Marilyn Klaus

In the Time of the Butterflies by Julia Alvarez (1994) **DB**

The four Mirabal sisters sacrificed safe and comfortable lives to become symbols of hope – the butterflies – who dared to oppose the Dominican Republic's cruel 30-year dictatorship.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Rosemary Kolich, Marilyn Klaus

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Anne Hawkins, Nicolas Shump, Kim Stanley, Trish Reeves, Martha Sanchez, Kevin Rabas

It's a Hard Knock Life (NEW in 2018)

Orphans have populated literature for centuries, from *Little Goody Two-Shoes* to *Oliver Twist* to *Jane Eyre* to *Harry Potter*. Many roamed the streets, some lived in orphanages, while others were placed with cruel and heartless relatives—but all longed for someone to love and shelter them. Though often found out of place and out of home in real life, orphans have held a special place and function in literature, especially in 19th century novels. These parentless children revealed a bleak social history as they negotiated the streets and world.

Orphan Trains that operated in America from 1854 to 1929 somewhat altered the definition of orphans, as they transported parentless or abandoned children across the country from the cities of the East Coast to the farming communities of the Midwest. Though many Orphan Train riders never talked about their early lives, others, longing for self-identity, found themselves journeying home - sometimes only to discover that they were already there.

Orphan Train by Christina Baker Kline (2013) **DB, BR, LP**

When foster-teen Molly Ayer steals a copy of *Jane Eyre* from the library, she is assigned community service with the elderly Vivian Daly. As the troubled foster-care juvenile helps 91-year-old Vivian clean out the tucked-away trunks in her attic, Molly learns that Vivian is an Orphan Train survivor. An unexpected relationship develops between the two and together, they find answers about their separate pasts.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Marilyn Klaus

The Chaperone by Laura Moriarty (2012) **DB, LP**

Thirty-six-year-old Mrs. Cora Carlisle chaperones teen Louise Brooks to New York City from Wichita, Kansas, when the budding silent-film star secures an opportunity to study at the prestigious Denishawn school of dance. While Louise attends dance lessons, Cora secretly embarks on her own personal quest, finding herself knocking at the door of the New York Home for Friendless Girls.

The Light Between Oceans by M.L. Stedman (2012) **DB, LP**

A boat with a dead man and a living infant wash ashore an isolated island off the coast of mainland Australia where a lighthouse keeper and his young wife reside. Isabel, who has suffered two miscarriages and a stillbirth, pleads and convinces her husband Tom that they must keep and raise this child as their own. An impossible dilemma ensues when, after a visit to the mainland, the true identity of the child is discovered.

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Dennis Etzel, Anne Hawkins, Rosemary Kolich, Erin Pouppirt, Miranda Ericsson, Kevin Rabas

Literature with Kansas Connections

Even if it isn't always completely accurate, almost everyone has a picture of 19th century Kansas – Free State Bleeding Kansas, Sod House Early Settler Kansas, Populist Farmer Kansas, and other conceptions of the state we call home. There's less agreement about what it means to live in Kansas today. Urbanization, rural decline, and social changes in the roles of women and the races have fundamentally altered what it means to be a Kansan. The desire to cling to tradition is set at odds with the changing technological and social landscape.

The Center of Everything by Laura Moriarty (2003) **DB**

Evelyn Bucknow, a ten-year-old growing up in fictional Kerrville, Kansas, seeks the certainty provided by a very conservative church, where she is assured that she is at the “center of everything.” Difficulties and humor appear when her own interest in evolutionary science conflicts with church teachings.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Marilyn Klaus

Not Without Laughter by Langston Hughes (1930)

Set in the fictional Kansas town of Stanton – purportedly based on Hughes's Lawrence boyhood experiences, the novel follows Sandy as he negotiates a world of prejudice and segregation, struggling to be the best that he can be despite the realities of racial inequality and poverty.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, John Edgar Tidwell

One Soldier's Story by Bob Dole (2005) **DB, BR**

Long before he was a United States senator, Bob Dole was first a boy growing up in Russell, Kansas. Although *Soldier's Story* focuses on his wartime years with a gripping account of the years he spent recovering from his wounds, themes of family and community are a vital part of the story.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Sandra Wiechert

The Slow Air of Ewan MacPherson by Thomas Fox Averill (2003)

Ewan MacPherson was brought as an infant from Scotland to the neo-Scottish town of Glasgow, Kansas. Times are hard, young love is harder, and everybody makes mistakes . . . but eventually, with perseverance, some good things do happen.

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Carmaletta Williams, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Randee Baty, Miranda Ericsson, Shawn Alexander, Kevin Rabas

Middle Eastern Culture and Society

The Middle East can seem so far from daily life in Kansas. The information we receive is often through images in the media that become stereotypes generalized to all people of the region – terrorists, fundamentalists, women who suffer gender inequality. Just as we in Kansas are frequently called upon to defend our state’s diversity and rich culture, so too the Middle East is a diverse region with multiple histories, cultures, and peoples of varied backgrounds. This series moves beyond stereotypes to delve into the complexities of the region’s people and cultures.

The Israelis: Ordinary People in an Extraordinary Land by Donna Rosenthal (2003)

Living in a state frequently at war within its territories and with its neighbors, Israelis have had to adjust to a climate of fear. Young people, who face compulsory military service, lead lives that are necessarily entwined with religion and politics. A nation of immigrants, Israel is much more religiously and ethnically diverse than many would guess.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Rosemary Kolich

My Prison, My Home: One Woman’s Story of Captivity in Iran by Haleh Esfandiari (2009)

This autobiography provides a window into modern-day Iran and Iranian-American relations. Ms. Esfandiari is an American citizen and native of Iran who travels from the United States to visit her mother in Tehran, where she is arrested and incarcerated.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Gene Chávez, Rosemary Kolich

Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood by Marjane Satrapi (2000) **BR**

This 2004 graphic novel, also made into a film, offers a quick read. Political changes following the 1979 revolution affect a young girl’s daily life and the lives of those around her in ways that are difficult for her to understand. It is a New York Times Notable Book, Time Magazine “Best Comix of the Year,” and San Francisco Chronicle and Los Angeles Times bestseller.

Book Discussion Leaders: Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Sara Tucker, Rosemary Kolich, Marilyn Klaus

The Yacoubian Building by Alaa Al Aswany (2002) **DB**

A bestseller in the Arab world, this novel was also made into a film in 2006. It follows the lives of a group of people who live in one apartment building in Cairo during the first Gulf War. The diversity of the inhabitants reveals a cross-section of gritty lives in a big city.

Book Discussion Leaders: William Clyde Brown

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Kevin Rabas

The Modern Family (NEW in 2018)

Beginning in the mid-20th century, the stereotypical American family has been comprised of mother, father and 2.5 children—the so-called nuclear family. Yet, in reality, very few families meet this standard. Adoptive, step, blended, multi-generational--families realistically come in all shapes and sizes. Relationships between family members are also complex and run the gamut from loving and nurturing to traumatic. The books in this series challenge and complicate our notion of what it means to be a family.

The Burgess Boys by Elizabeth Strout (2013) **DB, LP**

Author Elizabeth Strout crafts an engaging story about three siblings from Maine—Jim, a successful New York attorney and twins Bob, a less-successful New York attorney, and Susan, who stayed behind in Maine. A family crisis involving Susan's teenage son brings Jim and Bob back to their hometown as adults where they have to deal with the current crisis and the aftermath of the childhood tragedy that shaped their entire adult lives and family relationships.

Family Man by Elinor Lipman (2009) **LP**

The reviewers agree this light-hearted book by Elinor Lipman is funny, clever, and whimsical. The plot begins when Henry, a Manhattan lawyer, receives a call from his ex-wife who is about to be kicked out of her posh apartment by her two stepsons after the death of her third husband. The call brings Denise—his ex-wife—and her daughter, Thalia, back into the lonely bachelor's life. The ensuing plot twists and dialogue are worthy of Jane Austen according to both the *Washington Post* and the *Chicago Tribune*.
Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker

LaRose by Louise Erdrich (2016) **DB, LP**

This beautifully written novel by Erdrich draws you in from page one and makes you want to read the book in one sitting. She skillfully weaves together the traumas of the present with those from the past in a narrative that glides from one era to the other. The novel opens when Landreaux Iron accidentally shoots his neighbor's son while hunting. Overcome with guilt and grief, Landreaux turns to his Native American ancestors for guidance. Hoping for redemption and forgiveness, he and his wife give their own son, LaRose, to the grieving family. The narrative chronicles the effect of the adoption on both families and their small North Dakota community while looking back at the life of the first LaRose beginning in 1839. With this story, Erdrich shows us a fluid notion of family in some Native American communities.

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Dennis Etzel, Rosemary Kolich, Erin Poupirt, Nicolas Shump, Kevin Rabas

On the Lighter Side

Life can be sad, stressful, and depressing. Fortunately, humor writers come to our rescue, bringing us both immediate laughs and healing new perspectives on the ordinary afflictions of daily living. On the Lighter Side authors do this by giving us worlds populated with off-kilter, eccentric characters thinking and doing unusual things. They make their characters funny and even lovable. Seen through the lens of warm, appreciative humor, maddening things become funny and bearable. The strange becomes the charming; local quirkiness becomes universal humanity.

How Elizabeth Barrett Browning Saved My Life by Mameve Medwed (2006) **BR**

Harvard-dropout, Abby Randolph, sells “eclectic” antiques. Dumped by her lover and losing her mother in an earthquake, things begin to look up when Abby makes an appearance on the program Antiques Roadshow with what turns out to be Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s chamber pot.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez

Quite a Year for Plums by Bailey White (1998) **DB**

People want to help Roger, a divorced plant pathologist and peanut virologist, find true love and happiness again. One possibility is Della, a visiting artist who communicates through notes she leaves on discarded dumpster objects. Meanwhile, Roger’s ex-mother-in-law is trying to make contact with aliens.

Standing in the Rainbow by Fannie Flagg (2002) **DB**

Flagg takes us to Elmwood Springs, Missouri, where we meet Bobby Smith, a ten-year-old living an idyllic postwar boyhood; his mother, Neighbor Dorothy, broadcasts her Midwest housewife’s radio show; and later on, Tot Whooten, a very incompetent hairdresser; mortician Cecil Figgs; Hamm Sparks, the tractor salesman turned politician and many, many others.

Book Discussion Leaders: Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

Walking Across Egypt by Clyde Edgerton (1988) **DB**

Mattie Riggsbee tells everyone she is slowing down and can’t be responsible for the stray dog or the orphan that show up in her life. She’s busy with her church, planning her funeral, and wishing her two children would marry and give her grandchildren. The disapproval of family and neighbors provides tension, but also laughter.

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Erin Poupirt, Nicolas Shump, Sara Tucker, Michaeline Chance-Reay, Rosemary Kolich, Kevin Rabas

That's Funny: Books that Make Us Laugh

We are often told that “laughter is the best medicine.” Laughter has also made for some of the best reading since the time of the ancient Greeks. Books that make us laugh are often just plain fun to read, as can be seen by their regular presence on bestseller lists. At the same time, the very best funny books are also much more. In the hands of master writers, humor helps us look (warts and all) at what it is to be human and what makes society tick – two topics at the heart of the humanities.

The Egg and I by Betty MacDonald (1945) **DB**

Betty MacDonald writes about her years as a young bride in the late 1920s, which she spent with her less-than-realistic new husband on a very primitive chicken farm in rural Washington state.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

I'm a Stranger Here Myself by Bill Bryson (1999) **DB, BR**

In this collection of essays written for a London magazine, Bryson wonders what modern America looks like to an American newly returned after twenty years in England. Though often bemused by surface absurdities (such as dental floss hotlines), Bryson is fundamentally both loving and appreciative of the core of American life.

Book Discussion Leader: Marilyn Klaus

In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash by Jean Shepherd (1966) **DB**

Shepherd's wildly witty reunion with his Indiana hometown recalls the days when happiness was a Red Ryder BB gun and station wagons roamed the earth.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Michaeline Chance-Reay

Mama Makes Up Her Mind and Other Dangers of Southern Living by Bailey White (1993) **DB**

National Public Radio commentator White's eccentric family includes Aunt Belle, whose alligator bellows on command, Uncle Jimbuddy, and the elderly, endearing Mama, who turns road kill into gourmet meals.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

The Mammy by Brendan O'Carroll (1994) **DB**

This funny, tender, and moving portrait of working-class Dublin life in the sixties centers on Agnes Browne, widowed mother of seven and indomitable neighborhood character.

Book Discussion Leader: Marilyn Klaus

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Erin Poupirt, Nicolas Shump, Sara Tucker, Randee Baty, Kim Stanley, Kevin Rabas

Westering

The westward movement of settlers and the existence of a frontier of settlement in the last century played an important role in shaping our country's character. The Old West retains its hold on our imagination as a theme in literature, film, and history, while the contemporary West still exerts a strong influence on the national culture. Popular ideas of the West still play a role in how the rest of the world perceives the United States, and in how we perceive ourselves. This series examines, through fact and fiction, the settling of the American West and its enduring influence on our patterns of thought.

The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck (1939) **DB, BR**

Forced from their Oklahoma farm by the Dust Bowl, the Joad family sets out for the promised land of California. As they travel across the country, joined by other migrants, they confront an America deeply divided between rich and poor.

Book Discussion Leaders: William Clyde Brown, Rosemary Kolich, Marilyn Klaus

A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains by Isabella L. Bird (1879) **DB**

In 1873, Isabella Bird made an unlikely journey alone on horseback through the Rockies of Colorado, climbing Longs Peak, staying in mountain cabins, and observing the tumultuous world of the mining camps.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Gene Chávez, Rosemary Kolich, Marilyn Klaus, Michaeline Chance-Reay

The Last Cattle Drive by Robert Day (1977) **DB, BR**

Spangler Star Tuke, a cantankerous rancher, and his no-nonsense wife Opal defy the truckers and drive their cattle to market the old-fashioned way, in a hilarious journey from Hays to the eastern stockyards.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Gene Chávez, Rosemary Kolich

Letters of a Woman Homesteader by Elinore Pruitt Stewart (1914) **DB**

Stewart took up homesteading in 1909 to prove that a woman could ranch. Her captivating letters reveal the isolation, the beauty, and the joy of working the prairie.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, William Clyde Brown, Marilyn Klaus

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, William Clyde Brown, Erin Poupirt, Nicolas Shump, Sara Tucker, Randee Baty, Steven Foulke, Sara Jane Richter, Kevin Rabas

Wit and Grit: Women Characters in Contemporary Fiction (NEW in 2018)

Throughout literary history, the depiction of women has varied from writer to writer. Although exceptions exist, today's female characters appear more prominently and cast from reality rather than dream.

In this series, women of contemporary literature face situations and decisions that would challenge a shipload of whalers. These women display the wit to think their way through obstacles, sometimes with humor and always with the grit to persist. Whether Cora deciding on a dangerous path to seek freedom from slavery, Amabelle facing losses and brutal killings, or Christina shouldering the load of a household and insights into her own shortcomings. In this series we meet women who think, act, and engage life on their own terms in search of their freedom, and their dreams.

A Piece of the World by Christina Baker Kline (2017) **DB, BR, LP**

The protagonist of this historical novel, Christina Olson, is none other than the mysterious young woman of Andrew Wyeth's painting "Christina's World." Christina reveals great strength and independence no matter the deprivation, hardship, and thwarted dreams of her life as a principal support of her family, even though her lifelong neuromuscular disease, always debilitating, progresses to the point that she has to crawl to pick blueberries or climb the stairs. The novel, written as Christina's memoir, reveals her frailties, her strengths, her flaws, and the importance of her friendship with Andrew Wyeth, who saw her as kindred spirit, model, and muse.

The Farming of Bones by Edwidge Danticat (1998) **DB, LP**

The same day eight-year-old Amabelle Désir watches her parents drown in the swollen Massacre River that separates Haiti from the Dominican Republic, she is taken into the home of a prominent Dominican couple to become their servant and playmate for their daughter. The greater part of the novel follows Amabelle as she deals with the dreams and nightmares that result from her early trauma, her love for Sebastian, another Haitian immigrant, and the terror of the 1937 slaughter of Haitian immigrants when Dominicans turn on these laborers. How Amabelle survives her losses, her servitude, and the senseless terror brought down upon her and her fellow immigrants is a lesson in courage.

The Underground Railroad by Colson Whitehead (2016) **DB, BR, LP**

It's hard to imagine a more daunting struggle for life and sanity than what young Cora faces as the novel's protagonist as a third-generation slave on a Georgia plantation. Nevertheless, Cora possesses the intelligence and tenacity of her grandmother and mother and flees the unrelenting brutality and cruelty of the plantation to thread her way through swamp, sickness, and harrowing journey on the underground railroad in search of freedom. This novel is long researched and deeply felt by a writer whose ancestors were enslaved, shows the human race at its worst and at its best, and portrays women of true wit and grit.

Book Discussion Leaders: John Edgar Tidwell, Marilyn Klaus

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Dennis Etzel, Anne Hawkins, Rosemary Kolich, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Miranda Ericsson, Lori Brack, Shawn Alexander, Annette Billings, Kevin Rabas

Women Around the World

This series introduces readers to the voices of women novelists from Latin America, Africa, and Ireland, a European nation with a colonial past. The worlds these writers evoke are remarkably diverse, from the gritty South Africa of Nadine Gordimer to the magical terrain of Laura Esquivel's Mexico. They put us on intimate terms with some realities unfamiliar to Americans: revolution, polygamy, the crimes of dictatorship. At the same time, readers will identify with universal themes that shape the lives of women everywhere: love, growing up, the joys and disappointments of marriage, and the struggle for respect and identity.

The Country Girls Trilogy by Edna O'Brien (Ireland)(1986) **DB**

Kate and Baba are ambitious Irish country girls in search of life: romantic Kate seeks love while pragmatic Baba will take whatever she can get. Together they set out to conquer Dublin and the world.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

The House of the Spirits by Isabel Allende (Chile)(1982) **DB**

This is the epic tale of the proud Trueba family: stubborn patriarch Esteban, sweet but rebellious daughter Blanca, and Alba, the granddaughter who is part of both the old aristocratic order and the turbulent new Chile.

Book Discussion Leader: Marilyn Klaus

Like Water for Chocolate by Laura Esquivel (Mexico)(1989) **DB, BR**

Obedient daughter Tita rebels when tradition and a tyrannical mother conspire to keep her from true love in this enchanting story of romance, recipes, and magic.

Book Discussion Leaders: Gene Chávez

Book Discussion Leader: Marilyn Klaus

None to Accompany Me by Nadine Gordimer (South Africa)(1984) **DB**

The evolving relationships of two couples, one black, one white, illustrate the hazards and hopes of life in post-apartheid South Africa, especially for Vera Stark, a mature, self-possessed woman on the brink of change.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sara Tucker, Marilyn Klaus

So Long a Letter by Mariama Bâ (Senegal)(1979)

In a lively letter to a childhood friend, the recently widowed Ramatoulaye reminisces about her husband's devastating decision to take a second wife and about how she rebuilt her life and her emotional serenity.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Wiechert, Rosemary Kolich, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Sara Tucker

Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Tom Prasch, Nicolas Shump, Linda Lewis, Miranda Ericsson, Martha Sanchez, Kevin Rabas

World War II Generation

World War II profoundly reshaped the world, in part because it was so total a war, engaging civilian populations so fully and covering so much of the globe. As a result, it has proven to be an irresistible subject for literature and film. A generation of authors, including American novelists Norman Mailer, James Michener, and Kurt Vonnegut, began their writing careers by processing their experiences of World War II. Ever since, writers have continued to be drawn by the wide range of subject matter the war offers. This World War II reading series bypasses the more familiar territories of the war – the European theater of operations, the Holocaust, and the use of atomic weaponry on Japan – by selecting later books that address less-familiar aspects of this world-wide conflict. In accounts of the war in the Philippines, secret American military activity in Alaska and the Aleutians, and aspects of the home front, the books in this series serve to illuminate the full range of horror and hope that sprung from World War II.

The Cloud Atlas by Liam Callanan (2004) **DB**

A priest, at the deathbed of an Alaskan shaman, recalls the events that brought them together, including stories of love, magic, spirituality, and the secret history of Japanese balloon warfare. A cloud atlas, the shaman says, “would not be a map of where things are now,” but “where they will be.” Callanan’s novel is a “cloud atlas” in reverse: telling us where we are by looking at where we have been.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich

The Gardens of Kyoto by Kate Walbert (2001) **BR**

Ellen inherits a book, *The Gardens of Kyoto*, when her cousin is killed. Vignettes describing the famed zen gardens and a professor’s struggle to keep Kyoto off the list of American atomic bomb targets, intersected by Ellen’s elusive unfolding of her family’s secrets.

Book Discussion Leader: Marilyn Klaus

Once Upon a Town by Bob Greene (2002) **DB, BR**

This journalistic account of North Platt, Nebraska’s citizenry who found a unique way to express their patriotism: by giving the troops a final home-cooked meal before they headed off to war. The meals led to much more – lasting friendships, love, and a solidarity among the citizens of the city.

Book Discussion Leaders: Sandra Tucker, Marilyn Klaus

When the Elephants Dance by Tess Uriza Holthe (2002) **BR**

Taking its title from a traditional adage: “When the elephants dance, the chickens must be careful,” this novel focuses on the Filipino people, caught in the Japanese and American crossfire, in the war’s waning days. A hiding family spends its time telling tales of magic, ghosts, and legends, affirming their Filipino identity. Outside, we see the war through the eyes of a teenage boy, his older sister, and a partisan fleeing the Japanese.

Book Discussion Leaders: Rosemary Kolich, Gene Chávez

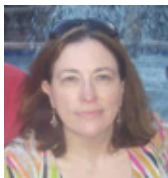
Series Discussion Leaders: Deborah Peterson, Valerie Brown-Kuchera, Anne Hawkins, Erin Poupirt, Nicolas Shump, Steven Foulke, Kevin Rabas

TALK SCHOLARS DIRECTORY

Use this directory to contact discussion leaders for your TALK programs. *Travel* indicates how many hours discussion leaders are willing to travel from their hometown. If you're not sure about travel, contact the person and give her/him an opportunity to say "yes." You may schedule up to three scholars per book series. * indicates discussion leaders who are willing to lead discussions in-person and online.



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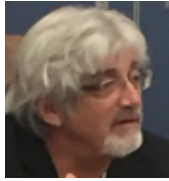


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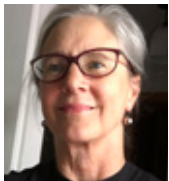
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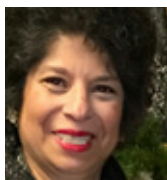
TALK SCHOLARS DIRECTORY (CONTINUED)



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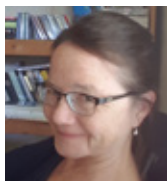
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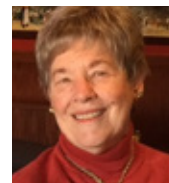


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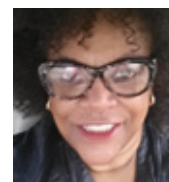
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**HUMANITIES
KANSAS**

A Movement of Ideas