



Crossroads Conversations

The *Crossroads Conversations* catalog is a curated list of presentations, discussions, and workshops designed to spark conversations in the Sunflower State.

Visit humanitieskansas.org.





This catalog is part of the *Crossroads: Change in Rural America* initiative anchored by the Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibition of the same name. *Crossroads* will promote fresh thinking about the history and culture of Kansas and spark new conversations about our state's future.

The presentations in this edition are available through August 31, 2021, or as funding allows.

Kansas nonprofit organizations are invited to apply for the *Crossroads Conversations* programs. These programs are primarily for out-of-school, adult audiences.

Booking a Speakers Bureau Program

How to bring a Humanities Kansas program to your community:

- Review the catalog and select a speaker and topic.
- Contact the speaker and confirm time, date, and location.
- Apply at humanitieskansas.org for HK program funds to bring the speaker to your community.
- Publicize your event. Create a social media event or post. Download a press release, speaker bio, photo, and HK logo poster.
- Tell us how it went. After the event, download and fill out an evaluation and cost-share form and email them to abigail@humanitieskansas.org.
- Presentations can be conducted in person or online.

Questions? Contact Abigail Kaup
785/357-0359 or abigail@humanitieskansas.org

The opinions expressed by the speakers do not necessarily reflect those of Humanities Kansas.

Continue the Conversation

Check out additional stories of rural life and changes in Kansas found in our **Movement of Ideas Speakers Bureau Catalog**.



Children of the Promised Land



Nicodemus, a small, unincorporated town in Graham County, is the only remaining western town established by African Americans during the Reconstruction Period following the Civil War. Today the town is a National Historic Site. This pictorial history explores the unique experience of mothers and their children in Nicodemus, some of whom were the first members of their families born free. This discussion will explore the dynamics of child-rearing during and after slavery, stories of children conceived in slavery but born free, and the contrast of life and decisions based on the simple concept of 'choice,' which freedom afforded. *Presented by Angela Bates.*

Angela is the executive director and past president of the Nicodemus Historical Society.

Angela Bates
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Strangers in Town—Film Discussion*

Strangers in Town tells the story of how global migration transformed and enriched Garden City, Kansas. Amidst the increased demands for housing, social services, education, and infrastructure, current students at Garden City High School are flourishing. This film explores their stories, gives meaning to the city's motto "The World Grows Here," and provides an inspiring view of human possibility in the face of change that resonates in all communities. After the screening of the 30-minute film, take part in a timely discussion that promotes understanding and uncovers our shared humanity. *Presented by Debra Bolton or Amy Longa.*

**Projector and internet access are needed for this program.*

Amy Longa
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Wichita
Amy Longa is the Program and Resource Development Manager at International Rescue Committee in Wichita.

Debra Bolton
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Debra Bolton is Director of Intercultural Learning and Academic Success and faculty member in the Department of Geography and Geospatial Sciences at Kansas State University.



Amy Longa



Debra Bolton

Water, Energy, and Rural Kansas: How They're Connected, What the Future May Hold

For decades, many rural counties in Kansas have experienced population decline. This is due in part to more efficient agricultural and industrial practices. This presentation explores the complex relationship between natural resources, renewable energy sources, public land access, and population trends in both rural and urban areas. Economic impact and viability are important considerations when planning for the long-term future of Kansas, but this presentation encourages us to consider the value of our natural surroundings in securing the best future for generations to come.

Presented by Rex Buchanan.

Rex Buchanan is Director Emeritus of the Kansas Geological Survey.

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Lawrence



"I would like to express my views . . .": Kansans Write to Congress, 1960-1968



What concerns were on the minds of the people of Kansas at the midpoint of the 20th century? What challenges and opportunities did rural Kansans face and how did they see their future? Drawing from historical documents from the archive of Kansas Senator Robert Dole, this presentation explores the concerns and views of everyday people in Kansas during the influential decade of the 1960s, a period of change for many Kansas communities. Like many of us do with members of Congress today, Kansans 50 years ago reached out to Senator Dole to share their opinions, and their stories may sound familiar. Find out what was on their minds as we use letters, oral histories, and photographs to learn more about the past's view of the present. *Presented by Audrey Coleman.*

Audrey is the Associate Director of the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics and Director of Museum and Archives.

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Sunflower Music

Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow famously described music as being “the universal language of mankind.” Music transcends race, gender, class, and geography and throughout history humans have used music to communicate stories, express emotions, and connect us to one another and moments in time and place. Music provides a lifeline when we’re at a crossroads, reminds us of days gone by, and can provide welcomed motivation when it’s time to make a change. What is it like to be a musician from Kansas and what does their music tell us? From

Martina McBride and Melissa Etheridge to Charlie Parker and Janelle Monáe, this presentation highlights numerous artists and musicians from the Sunflower State and takes a deeper look into how the power of place informs and inspires us musically. *Presented by Cash Hollistah.*



Cash Hollistah is a Rapper, Arts Educator, and Mentor at The City Teen Center in Salina

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Games I Play with My Father: Building Connections Through Board Games



Playing board games is entertaining, but the benefits of playing games extend beyond the realm of entertainment. Board games have the power to bring people together, foster cooperative and competitive play, increase brain function, and connect us with our past. This presentation focuses on how designer board games can connect players to history and how play brings communities together across varying backgrounds and generations. Attendees will learn about games that focus on rural life, promote critical thinking and communication, and build community. *Presented by Daniel Ireton.*

Daniel Ireton is an Associate Professor and Academic Services Librarian at Kansas State University.

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Manhattan

Kansas' Local Architecture: History, Place, and Identity



When the Ness City Bank was built in 1890, it was called the Skyscraper of the Plains because it was the tallest building between Topeka and Denver. Still a remarkable structure today, it reflects the optimism of the time when citizens looked forward to a bright future and a growing city. Corner banks as well as opera houses, gas stations, courthouses, and other forms of public and commercial architecture are found in rural towns across Kansas. While some structures have changed, many remain vital. Collectively these buildings contribute to past and present identity. Individually, they reflect continuity, resilience, and place. In this presentation, discover stories of Kansas' everyday built

environment and consider what happens to these structures over time. *Presented by Liz Kowalchuk.*

Liz Kowalchuk is an Associate Professor of Museum Studies Program and the Visual Art Department at the University of Kansas.

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Lawrence

Spectacular Failures: Changing the Way You Think About Failure Can Breathe New Life into Creative Endeavors

We often hear about the road to success, but what about the paths that veer into the void — the epic failures? This facilitated discussion examines true stories of failure and adversity and discusses the unexpected lessons learned. Members are encouraged to share their own stories of “Spectacular Failures.” Through this shared exploration of the embarrassing, each participant will see that success isn’t a guarantee, but a journey with twists, false starts, and the permission to start over with a clean slate. From Buckminster Fuller’s original experiments with dome architecture (failed!) to the story of an eccentric visionary artist’s dream to build and fly a giant hot air balloon (failed!), this discussion provides skill-building and training to help individuals thrive in rural communities and inspires action for growing support for rural arts and culture. *Presented by Erika Nelson.*



Erika Nelson is an independent artist and educator exploring contemporary art forms in the public realm.

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Lucas

Holes on the Range: The History of Kansas Golf



While the origins of the game are centuries old, the first golf courses popped up on the prairies just over a century ago. Since that time, the game has taken root in the Sunflower State. In an era when lifelong sports in rural areas are falling by the wayside, golf has survived. A player rarely needs to travel farther than thirty miles to find a golf course. This topic explores all aspects of golf in Kansas: from our humble beginnings with holes made of tomato soup cans, to our world-class courses and players, to the architects of golden age design who molded the prairies, to spotlighting some of the local places we play. Discover how golf, like other sports, can help create a thriving community. *Presented by Jordan Poland.**

**The talk ends with a short golf "lesson." And, Jordan has golf clubs if anyone is interested in a match before or after the presentation.*

Jordan Poland is the President/CEO of the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame.

Jordan Poland
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Wichita

The Rural Grocery Store: Innovative Community Builder



Independently owned grocery stores are vital to the health of our rural communities. These small businesses contribute to local economies, provide the largest quantity and greatest variety of food options, and act as social gathering places. Yet, keeping a store open is a challenge. Since 2008, 105 rural stores have closed in Kansas. Still, many remain open and are building on local history and culture to remain vibrant. This presentation discusses the challenges of the grocery store business, explores success stories, and considers how rural grocery stores build and strengthen community. *Presented by David Procter.*

David Procter is a Professor of Communication Studies at Kansas State University.

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Manhattan

A Boomerang's Approach to Reimagining Rural Tourism

After ten years away from Dickinson County, Julie Roller Weeks returned with a renewed enthusiasm for making Abilene better. In this presentation, hear firsthand how rural communities can share their stories by using earned media, social media influencers, and travel bloggers. By creating partnerships with others to help tell their stories, rural communities can attract new visitors and help residents see their hometown with a fresh perspective. This out-of-the-box, *work harder*, not *spend larger* approach maximizes budgets and yields big results. Every town, regardless of its size and location, has something to offer. In this talk, Julie discusses how embracing tourism can help sustain our rural communities for future generations. *Presented by Julie Roller Weeks.*



Julie Roller Weeks is the Director of the Abilene Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Julie Roller Weeks
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Dirt, Grit, and Jell-O Salad — How We Survived the Great Depression



Generations after the Great Depression, Kansans still define themselves and rural communities largely in the same terms their grandparents and great-grandparents once used — “hard-working, close-knit, loyal and faithful.” But the dynamics have changed. Fewer Kansans are growing up on farms. More than 70 percent of people in Kansas now identify themselves as living in urban communities. Today, rural Kansans face new challenges—aging communities and fewer services. This presentation examines historical

aspects of Kansas during the 1930s to better understand our rural communities today. Discover what communities did to survive and thrive in times of hardships, what it means to be rural, and how that's changed over time. Are we still full of the dirt, grit, and Jell-O salad that defined our ancestors? *Presented by Beccy Tanner.*

Literature Across Kansas

This presentation examines some of the writers who have shaped how we feel about Kansas and how others see us. From Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* and L. Frank Baum's *Wizard of Oz* to Langston Hughes poetry and Truman Capote's portrayal of Kansas in his book *In Cold Blood*, we'll look at the descriptions of Kansas — its culture and its residents —and see if, as people of Kansas, we agree with how we have been portrayed throughout the literary world. *Presented by Beccy Tanner.*

Beccy Tanner currently teaches Kansas history classes at Wichita State University and works as a freelance writer.

Beccy Tanner
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St. John

Farm Stress: You Are Not Alone

“The trouble is, as farmers, we’re supposed to be these tough guys who run from daylight to dusk, nonstop, and we can put up with anything. But man, these last couple of years, it’s been a struggle.” Those are the words of a young Kansas farmer about the struggles of being a farmer. Farming is stressful even in a good year, but in a bad year (or two or three) stress can turn to sickness, both physical and mental. Erratic weather patterns, low commodity prices, high input and labor costs, heavy regulations, changing trade policies, and generational and cultural shifts in rural life can lead to anxiety, isolation, irritability, relationship struggles, depression, addiction, and even suicide. According to the American Farm Bureau, 82% of farmers say mental health is important, but few are comfortable talking about it. This presentation hopes to break the silence, get past the stigma, and talk about mental health and farming. *Presented by Nancy Thellman**



**This presentation has the potential to be a panel discussion. Contact Nancy for more information.*

Nancy Thellman is a lifelong Kansan, a former registered nurse, an ordained Presbyterian Pastor, and a former Douglas County Commissioner.

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Lawrence

“Wide-Open America?”: Kansas’ Legacies of Conquest

In the mid-20th century, *Life* magazine published an article that ran with the title “Kansas—Bill White’s State is Wide-Open America.” This idea of Kansas as a rural oasis of freedom has often hidden the history of invasion of Indigenous lands. Examining the history of land grants given to veterans and others, as well as popular political rhetoric around the turn of the 20th century, this presentation explores the continuing impact of conquest on Kansas politics and society. *Presented by Kerry Wynn.*



Kerry Wynn is an Associate Professor of History at Washburn University, and the Director of the Washburn University Honors Program.

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Topeka



Pick a Song and Sing Along! Soundtrack of Rural America

Help us curate our *Crossroads: Change in Rural America* playlist! So much of American music focuses on the themes included in the *Crossroads* project – change, challenge, sense-of-place, identity, rural life. Songs like Sam Cooke’s “A Change is Gonna Come,” John Denver’s “Take Me Home Country Road,” or Robert Johnson’s “Cross Road Blues” can connect us to specific and memorable moments in our lives, moments both big and small. HK wants to know: What’s YOUR favorite song that best captures the spirit of life at the crossroads?

Send your song selection, tell us why you picked the song, and we’ll put it on our *Crossroads* playlist! Send suggestions to Abigail Kaup, Program Officer: abigail@humanitieskansas.org or tweet it to @humanitiesks to be included on our Spotify *Crossroads: Change in Rural America* playlist.

Then, host an event and talk about what’s on (and off) the playlist! Use our discussion guide to spark a conversation.

Discussion Guide:

1. What is this song about?
2. Consider the context. What has changed since this song was first recorded? What has remained the same?
3. What kind of sense of place or images do these songs evoke?
4. Does your impression of the song change if you’re originally not from a rural area?
5. What American ideals do these songs represent?



Follow Humanities Kansas on Spotify!





Love at the Crossroads

Readers Theater

Celebrate the holidays all year round with *Love at the Crossroads*. If you're a fan of holiday original movies, you may have noticed that the genre follows a formula: the lead characters meet under awkward circumstances, fall in love, and find the true meaning of Christmas.

Taking holiday original movies as inspiration, *Love at the Crossroads* readers theater provides an opportunity to host your own dramatic performance while poking fun at the movie genre. In this one-act holiday spoof play, Holly, a young professional from the big city returns to her hometown, where she discovers a problem that only she can solve—with the help of her quirky but loyal community. She meets old and new friends, unearths long-buried secrets, and reunites with an old flame who's hiding a mysterious past. Along the way, Holly finds herself at a crossroads, forced to make decisions that will impact her future. Grab a hot chocolate and your friends and family to act out this wildly entertaining parody of holiday rom-coms. No props or costumes required! No memorization required either!

How to host a Readers Theater in your community:

1. Fill out the [online form](#) to reserve your scripts.
2. Publicize your event. Download [promotional materials](#) and create a social media event or post about the event and tag Humanities Kansas:
 - **Facebook:** [@humanitieskansas](#)
 - **Instagram:** [@humanitieskansas](#)
 - **Twitter:** [@humanitiesks](#)
3. Tell us how it went. After the event, download and fill out an [evaluation](#) and email it to abigail@humanitieskansas.org.
4. Readers Theater can be conducted in person or online.

[Click here to reserve your script](#)

Questions? Contact Abigail Kaup
785/357-0359 or abigail@humanitieskansas.org

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At the Crossroads: Stories of Rural America

Rural life and experiences are often conveyed to audiences in romanticized, parodied, or over-simplified terms. But the American rural experience is more complex than what is often represented. Technological advancements and changing social landscapes impact conceptions of what it means to be and live rural. The books in this series deliver gripping stories that explore contemporary and historical issues, offering us an intimate portrait of rural life. The protagonists, both real and imagined, persist in the face of challenges and inspire us to do the same. Each book asks us to consider what choices we would make at the crossroads.

BOOKING A TALK PROGRAM

- Select your books and discussion leader(s).
- 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. Create a social media event or post. Download a press release, discussion leader bios, and HK 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.
- Discussions can be conducted in person or online.

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

Series Discussion Leaders indicate scholars who will lead discussions for any book within a series.

Please note that Humanities Kansas does not have copies of these books available for lending.

Bluebird, Bluebird by Attica Locke (2017)

When it comes to law and order, East Texas plays by its own rules—a fact that Darren Mathews, a Black Texas Ranger, knows all too well. Deeply ambivalent about growing up black in the Lone Star State, he was the first in his family to get as far away from Texas as he could. Until duty called him home. But when his allegiance to his roots puts his job in jeopardy, he travels up Highway 59 to the small town of Lark, where two murders—a Black lawyer from Chicago and a local white woman—have stirred up a hornet’s nest of resentment. Darren must solve the crimes and save himself in the process before Lark’s long-simmering racial fault lines erupt. An exhilarating rural noir about the collision of race and justice in America.

Book Discussion Leaders: Trish Reeves, Randee Baty, and Kim Stanley

Our Boys: A Perfect Season on the Plains with the Smith Center Redmen by Joe Drape (2009)

Meet the local football team of Smith Center, Kansas, holders of the nation’s longest high school winning streak. As the team embarked on a quest for a fifth consecutive state title, they faced a potentially destabilizing transition: the greatest senior class in school history had graduated, and Coach Barta was contemplating retirement. In Smith Center—population 1,931—this changing of the guard was seismic. Discover what makes the team and the town an inspiration for miles around and along the way, meet the community trying to overcome even greater challenges.



Plainsong by Kent Haruf (1999)

In Holt, Colorado, a high school teacher is raising his two boys alone. A pregnant teenage girl kicked out by her mother is alone with nowhere to go. And out in the country, two elderly bachelors work the family homestead, the only world they've ever known. From these separate stories emerges a vision of life and of the community and landscape that bind them together—their fates somehow overcoming the powerful circumstances of place and station. *Plainsong* is a story of the abandonment, grief, and stoicism that bring these people together, and it is a story of the kindness, hope, and dignity that redeem their lives.

Book Discussion Leaders: Trish Reeves and Tom Prasch

Winters Bone by Daniel Woodrell (2006)

The sheriff's deputy at the front door brings hard news to Ree Dolly, who has grown up in the harsh poverty of the Ozarks. Her father has disappeared and skipped bail on charges that he ran a meth lab. If Ree doesn't find him by the next court date, the Dollys will lose their home. In search of her father, Ree discovers depths of herself she didn't know she had and family that will protect its own at any cost.

Book Discussion Leaders: Trish Reeves, Tom Prasch, Kevin Rabas, Randee Baty, and Kim Stanley

Series Discussion Leaders: Sara Jane Richter, Anne Hawkins, Marilyn Klaus, Dennis Etzel, Nicolas Shump, Gene Chávez, Erin Pouppirt, Rachel Goossen, Rosemary Kolich, Dan Eells, Deborah Peterson, and Miranda Ericsson

