



Evening Book Group - River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Informal discussion of recent fiction, non-fiction, and an occasional older classic. Meets September through June on the second Monday from 7:30 to 9:00pm. If Veteran's Day or Columbus Day fall on a meeting date, the meeting will be held on the second Tuesday.

Dec 11, 2017 [THE SELLOUT](#). By *Paul Beatty*. Amazon readers 4 stars Major prizes. 304 p. Many copies in mcpl
Beatty's satire breaks open the private jokes and secrets of blackness in a way that feels powerful and profane but not escapist.

"The first 100 pages of [Paul Beatty's] new novel, *The Sellout*, are the most caustic and the most badass first 100 pages of an American novel I've read in at least a decade. I gave up underlining the killer bits because my arm began to hurt . . . [They] read like the most concussive monologues and interviews of Chris Rock, Richard Pryor and Dave Chappelle wrapped in a satirical yet surprisingly delicate literary and historical sensibility . . . The jokes come up through your spleen . . . The riffs don't stop coming in this landmark and deeply aware comic novel . . . [It] puts you down in a place that's miles from where it picked you up." —Dwight Garner, *The New York Times*

"[*The Sellout*] is among the most important and difficult American novels written in the 21st century . . . It is a bruising novel that readers will likely never forget." —Kiese Laymon, *Los Angeles Times*

"Swiftian satire of the highest order . . . Giddy, scathing and dazzling." —Sam Sacks, *The Wall Street Journal*

"*The Sellout* isn't just one of the most hilarious American novels in years, it also might be the first truly great satirical novel of the century . . . [It] is a comic masterpiece, but it's much more than just that—it's one of the smartest and most honest reflections on race and identity in America in a very long time." —Michael Schaub, *NPR*.

Jan 8, 2018 [Ordinary Grace](#) by [William Kent Krueger](#) Pulitzer prize winner 336 p 14 copies in mcpl, but popular. Amazon readers 4.5 stars

"A pitch-perfect, wonderfully evocative examination of violent loss. In Frank Drum's journey away from the shores of childhood—a journey from which he can never return—we recognize the heartbreaking price of adulthood and its 'wisdoms.' I loved this book." (Dennis Lehane, New York Times bestselling author of *Live by Night* and *The Given Day*)

"Krueger's elegy for innocence is a deeply memorable tale." (*Washington Post*)

"...elegiac, evocative.... a resonant tale of fury, guilt, and redemption." (*Publishers Weekly*)

"Once in a blue moon a book drops down on your desk that demands to be read. You pick it up and read the first page, and then the second, and you are hooked. Such a book is *Ordinary Grace*...This is a book that makes the reader feel better just by having been exposed to the delights of the story. It will stay with you for quite some time and you will always remember it with a smile." (*Huffington Post*)

"One cannot read *Ordinary Grace* without feeling as if it is destined to be hailed as a classic work of literature. *Ordinary Grace* is one of those very rare books in which one regrets reaching its end, knowing that the experience of having read it for the first time will never be repeated. Krueger, who is incapable of writing badly, arguably has given us his masterpiece." (*BookReporter.com*)

"A superb literary novel." (*New York Journal of Books*)

"...the tone is much like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, with its combination of dread and nostalgia." (*Detroit News*)

"Everything about this book, from language to ideas to Aeschylus's epigram is beautiful and you'll think about it long after you're finished reading." (*The Globe and Mail (Toronto)*)

"Besides being a terrific story that examines a powerful range of human experiences and emotions, it was the authentic voice of the teenage narrator, Frank Drum, that kept me reading late into the night. Though the tone is quiet, Krueger

artfully layered the story with suspenseful examinations of family life, death, fury, spiritual fiber and redemption.” (Beth Hoffman, New York Times bestselling author of *Saving CeeCee Honeycutt*)

“Sometimes a work of fiction just comes to you, sits in your soul, touches your life experiences and then is hard to remember as fiction. *Ordinary Grace* by William Kent Kruger is such a novel.” (*Capital Journal*)

Feb 12 *The Billion Dollar Spy* by David Hoffman. 432 p. Amazon readers 4.5 stars. MCPL 31 copies, 25 avail. It is non-fiction, based on real people during the cold war.

“This riveting book gives fascinating insight into how spies and their handlers operate and traitors give them away. “

“*The Billion Dollar Spy* is one of the best spy stories to come out of the Cold War and all the more riveting . . . for being true. It hits the sweet spot between page-turning thriller and solidly researched history (even the footnotes are informative) and then becomes something more, a shrewd character study of spies and the spies who run them, the mixed motives, the risks. . . . This is a terrific book.” —*Washington Post*

“A true-life tale so gripping at times it reads like spy fiction.” —*Los Angeles Times*

“Engrossing. . . . Mr. Hoffman’s book particularly shines in cinematic accounts of . . . anxious encounters.” —*The New York Times*

Mar 13 - Tues I thought we should dive deeper into espionage with this well-reviewed novel.

[LEAVING BERLIN](#). By *Joseph Kanon*. Amazon readers 4 stars. 384 p. MCPL 25 copies, 17 avail.

In Kanon’s thriller, a German-born American writer becomes a spy in East Berlin. Compare to John LeCarre and Alan Furst.

“Engaging. . . . deftly captures the ambience of a city that’s still a wasteland almost four years after the Nazis’ defeat. . . . Kanon keeps the story humming along, enriching the main narrative with vignettes that heighten the atmosphere of duplicity and distrust.” (*The New York Times Book Review*)

“Joseph Kanon’s thought-provoking, pulse-pounding historical espionage thriller [is] stuffed with incident and surprise. . . . Mr. Kanon, author now of seven top-notch novels of period political intrigue, conveys the bleak, oppressive, and creepy atmosphere of occupied Berlin in a detailed, impressive manner. . . . *Leaving Berlin* is a mix of tense action sequences, sepia-tinged reminiscence, convincing discourse and Berliner wit.” (*Wall Street Journal*)

“The old-fashioned spy craft, the many plot twists and the moral ambiguities that exist in all of the characters make *Leaving Berlin* an intriguing, page-turning thriller. There’s also a star-crossed love story — and an airport farewell — that might remind some readers of Bogie and Bergman. But it’s the author’s attention to historical detail — his ability to convey the sights, sounds and feel of a beaten-down Berlin — that makes this book so compelling.” (*Ft. Worth Star Telegram*)

Apr 9 *The Sympathizer: A Novel* by [Viet Thanh Nguyen](#) (Pulitzer Prize for Fiction) 384 p Many copies in mcpl, but popular Amazon [4.2 out of 5 stars](#)

The winner of the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, as well as six other awards, *The Sympathizer* is the breakthrough novel of the year. With the pace and suspense of a thriller and prose that has been compared to Graham Greene and Saul Bellow, *The Sympathizer* is a sweeping epic of love and betrayal. The narrator, a communist double agent, is a “man of two minds,” a half-French, half-Vietnamese army captain who arranges to come to America after the Fall of Saigon, and while building a new life with other Vietnamese refugees in Los Angeles is secretly reporting back to his communist superiors in Vietnam. *The Sympathizer* is a blistering exploration of identity and America, a gripping espionage novel, and a powerful story of love and friendship.

May 14 **The Life We Bury** by [Allen Eskens](#), 2014 303 p Amazon readers 4.5 stars mcpl has 13 copies, but popular

College student Joe Talbert has the modest goal of completing a writing assignment for an English class. His task is to interview a stranger and write a brief biography of the person. With deadlines looming, Joe heads to a nearby nursing home to find a willing subject. There he meets Carl Iverson, and soon nothing in Joe's life is ever the same.

Carl is a dying Vietnam veteran--and a convicted murderer. With only a few months to live, he has been medically paroled to a nursing home, after spending thirty years in prison for the crimes of rape and murder.

As Joe writes about Carl's life, especially Carl's valor in Vietnam, he cannot reconcile the heroism of the soldier with the despicable acts of the convict. Joe, along with his skeptical female neighbor, throws himself into uncovering the truth, but he is hamstrung in his efforts by having to deal with his dangerously dysfunctional mother, the guilt of leaving his autistic brother vulnerable, and a haunting childhood memory.

Thread by thread, Joe unravels the tapestry of Carl's conviction. But as he and Lila dig deeper into the circumstances of the crime, the stakes grow higher. Will Joe discover the truth before it's too late to escape the fallout?

June 12 **[THE WHITES](#)**. By Richard Price writing as Harry Brandt. 333 p, Amazon 3.5 stars, Plenty available in mcpl.

"A masterpiece, to stand with such earlier Price classics as *Clockers* and *Lush Life* . . . [*The Whites* has] a compelling plot, yet the real joy of the book lies page by page, line by line, in its brilliant characterizations, rich detail, endless surprises, crackling dialogue, [and] absurdist humor." —*The Washington Post*

Most readers will never come close to a New York homicide investigation, but they will instinctively know that Price's insightful crime novel has this world down right.

Sept 10 We have a number of longer books to choose from for our summer reading. TBD

Oct 9 – Tues **[The Underground Railroad](#), by Colson Whitehead** Amazon readers 4 stars 320 pages
Many copies in mcpl, but popular

For a smart melding of realism and allegory that combines the violence of slavery and the drama of escape in a myth that speaks to contemporary America.

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, the #1 *New York Times* bestseller from Colson Whitehead, a magnificent tour de force chronicling a young slave's adventures as she makes a desperate bid for freedom in the antebellum South.

Nov 12 **[THE INCARNATIONS](#)**. By Susan Barker. (Amazon readers 4 stars, 400 p, 10 copies in mcpl and available

***New York Times* Notable Book of 2015 *Kirkus Reviews* Best Fiction Book of 2015**

In Barker's astonishing novel, a Beijing taxi driver learns of his previous lives as a bit player during 15 centuries of China's past.

[A] kaleidoscopically imaginative novel...Barker stitches together an unnervingly perceptive portrait of China and of the enduring influence that its past has on the present." (*The New Yorker*)

"Wildly ambitious . . . [Barker's] dazzling use of language and natural storytelling gifts shine from every paragraph. As with David Mitchell, whose books can similarly hopscotch through times and places, each episode stands alone as a terrific tale in itself. You can become so immersed in one story that you have to almost physically drag yourself away to commit to the next. . . . Mesmerizing storytelling." (Sarah Lyall *The New York Times*)

"Astonishing, amazing . . . It's the small sagas of Chinese history contained in the letters, together with Barker's vivid descriptions of today's China, that set this book apart as a work of considerable, if unnerving, importance. . . . Tightly

wound, intensely wrought, fantastically exciting . . . Beguiling, readable, intense . . . The book's stellar narrative carries us briskly along." (Simon Winchester *The New York Times Book Review*)