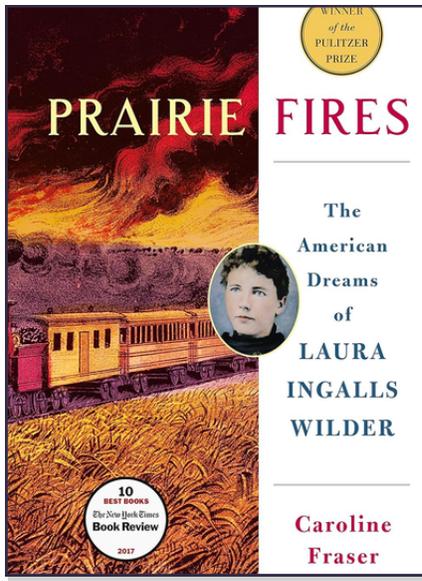


Best Reads of 2023

HLG

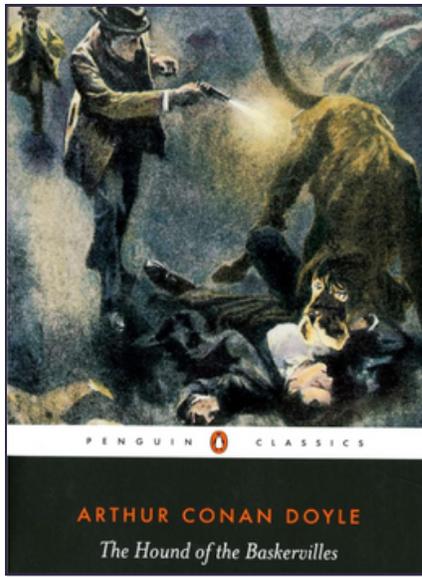


Olivia Canie

Prairie Fires

Caroline Fraser

As someone who was obsessed with the *Little House on the Prairie* books as a kid, this historical biography of the main character (and series author) Laura Ingalls Wilder gives a lot more context to a very idealistic story – both in the lives of those people living on the frontier, but also gives space to consider the impact of the westward expansion by settlers on Native Americans who were displaced. *Prairie Fires* won the Pulitzer Prize for Biography in 2018 and has received numerous other accolades.



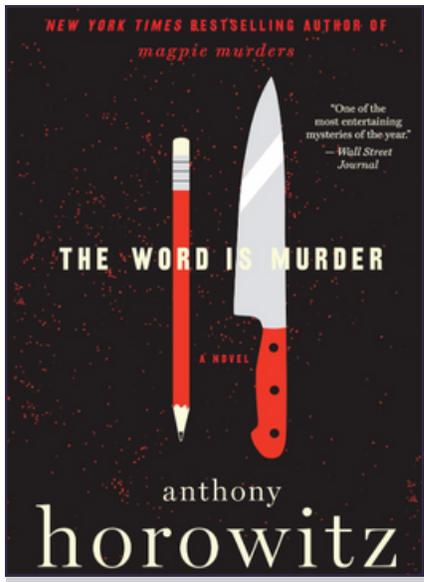
Daniel Casse

The Hound of the Baskervilles

Arthur Conan Doyle

The third of the four Sherlock Holmes mysteries was a blockbuster, elevating the British detective-savant into the colossus of the mystery and crime world. Holmes is the single-most portrayed character in the history of film and theater. *Baskerville* might explain the popularity. Its themes endure today: rationalism vs. mysticism; cold analysis vs. stealthy diversion; wealthy families vs. their ne'er-do-well heirs; the civility of London vs. the wilds of the countryside; the tradition of hunting vs. the dangers of a demon-possessed dog. One hundred and twenty-plus years after publication, the plot still thickens.

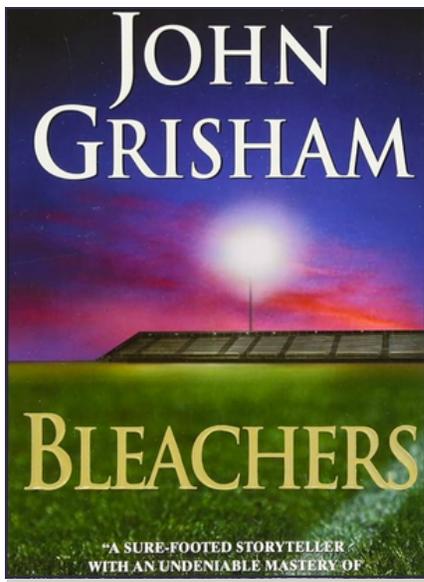




The Word is Murder

Anthony Horowitz

Is there any writer more productive than Anthony Horowitz? Each year he seems to churn out one more best-selling novel, a BBC police thriller, another whodunnit series, or the latest installment of his teen fiction series. *The Word is Murder* is the first of his five novels featuring the cranky, misanthropic detective Daniel Hawthorne who is followed around by a fictional chronicler named... "Anthony Horowitz." Yes, it is a modernist play on Sherlock Holmes and Watson, but with twist: while Watson lionized Holmes, the fictional "Anthony Horowitz" can't stand the disagreeable Hawthorne – the lead character the writer Anthony Horowitz created. Confusing, possibly. Addictive, definitely.



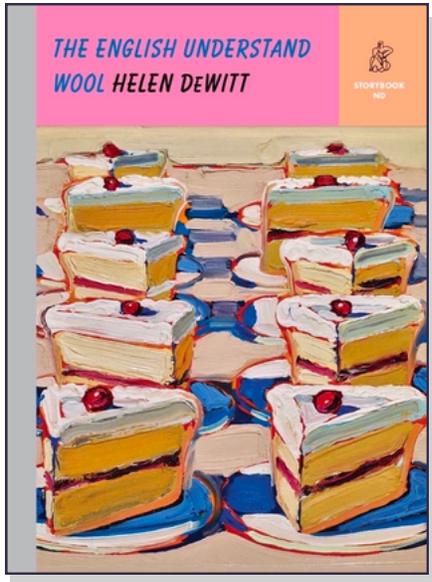
Jordan DelOrefice

Bleachers

John Grisham

This book was recommended to me this year by a family member. I have a love for sports stories and the underdog team that wins at the end of the novel. However, this story takes a different approach to a typical sports story. With a hint of mystery, this book dives into the past of a successful football team who returns home to honor the memory of their coach. They reflect on their past and present and go through their own journey of learning more about themselves, their lives, and how their time on the team impacted their futures. They learn of the importance of the relationships that were built over time, not just the wins and loses. It's an interesting read, especially for sports enthusiasts!



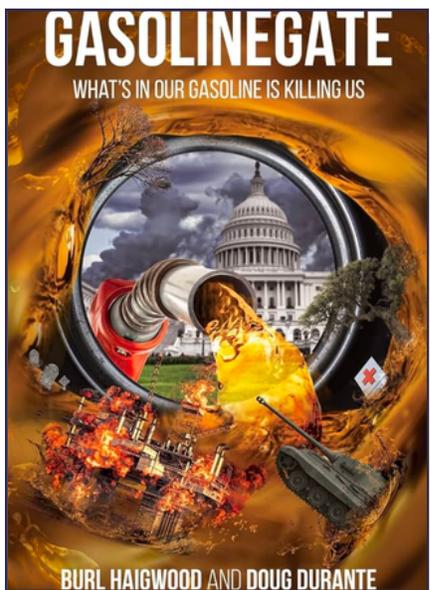


Cassie Dormond

The English Understand Wool

Helen DeWitt

I'd like to add *The English Understand Wool* to this year's book list. It's apparently now sold-out everywhere after becoming a "Tik-Tok sensation" – I thought I'd be providing a hidden gem, a delightful little gift for everyone to discover over the holidays, but alas, TikTok got there first! That being said, it is absolutely worth registering on the waitlist for a restock. It's part of a relatively new series from New Directions Publishing called StoryBook ND that aims to "deliver the pleasure one felt as a child reading a marvelous book from cover to cover in an afternoon." I read it during a train ride and had the best time – really cannot recommend it enough. It's a psychological thriller and some of the sharpest, most deliciously snobby satire I've read in some time. It's only 70-pages long, so I don't want to say anymore. It's a morsel-sized read that is best enjoyed without too much context.

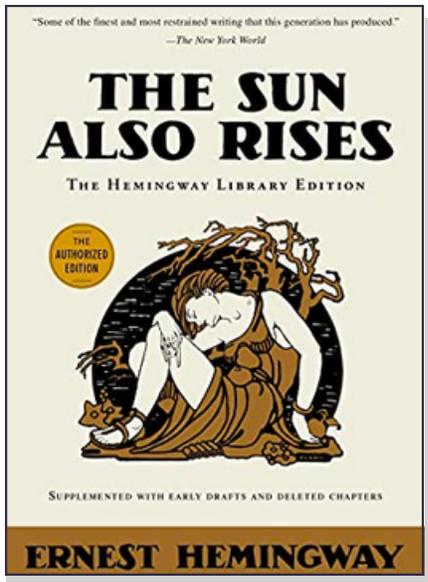


Kim Durante

Gaslinegate

Burl Haigwood and Doug Durante

This book is the culmination of my dad's lifelong career in the clean fuels space. It sheds light on the 40-year struggle to reduce U.S. dependence on petroleum and gasoline, revealing adverse effects on public health and the economy, as well as congressional inaction, EPA failures, and oil industry obstruction.

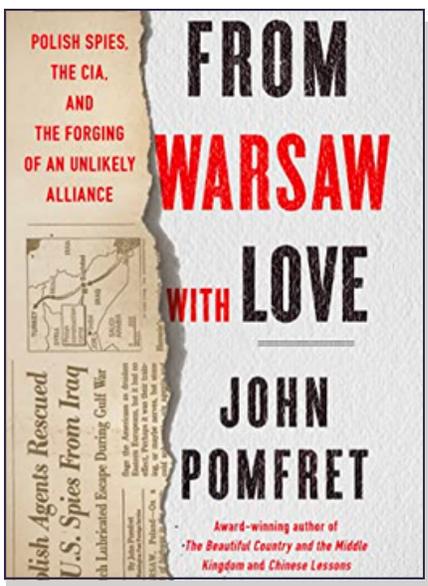


Emma Edney

The Sun Also Rises

Ernest Hemingway

The Sun Also Rises is a timeless good time. The story follows a motley group of expatriates as they journey from the wild nightlife of 1920s Paris to the brutal bullfighting rings of Spain. Hemingway portrays an age of moral bankruptcy, spiritual dissolution, unrealized love, and vanishing illusions in a poignant look at the angst of a post-World War I generation.

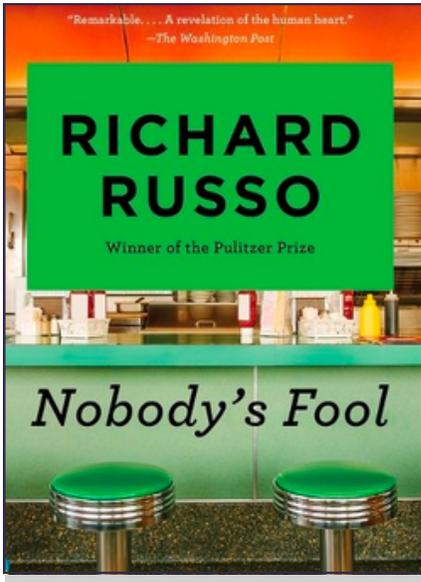


Mike Hodin

From Warsaw With Love

John Pomfret

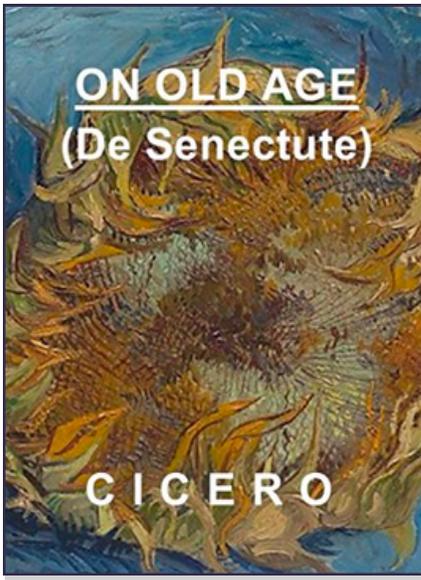
From Warsaw With Love is about the fascinating Polish contributions to American (Western) Intelligence War(s).



Nobody's Fool

Richard Russo

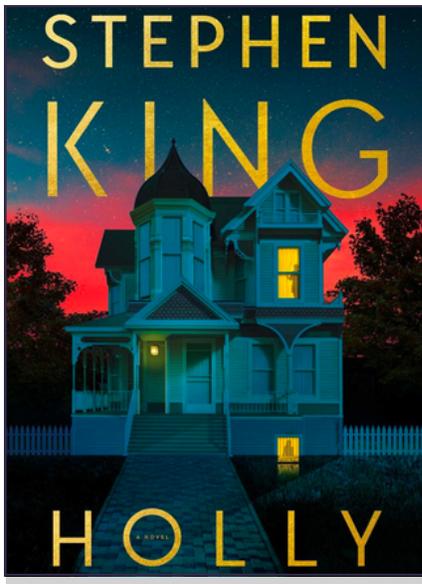
Richard Russo's *Nobody's Fool* is a well written story about real people in a small town mid-20th century. A good "read" of what seems like a far-off different, small-town America. Before social media; before the political drama of today's ever anxiety-producing social conflicts taking precedence over daily life, which Russo chronicles well through the portrait of his characters.



On Old Age

Cicero

Cicero's *On Old Age* was written in 44BC on the subject of "aging." It's written as an essay for its time, two millennia ago, but has insights and learnings applicable today.

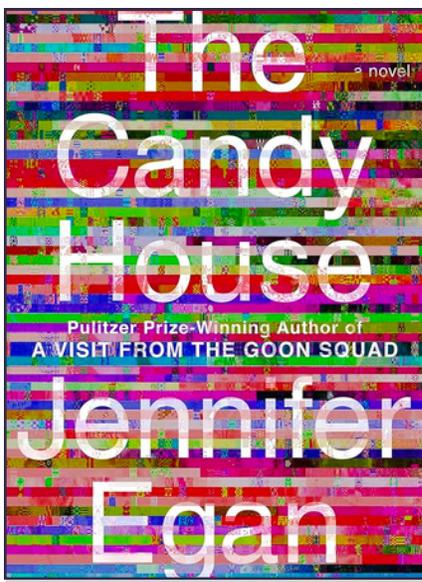


Mark Hoffmann

Holly

Stephen King

Recommended for anyone else who is disappointed by how insufficiently art has responded to COVID. The lockdowns brought unimaginable disruption to our daily lives, yet we've seen little reflection in TV, movies, books, and music. An exception is King's latest novel, *Holly*. It is not a masterpiece. But it does offer a new and meaningful experience to engage in a story whose characters navigate the complex pressures of early vaccine-era COVID. Side note: One exception to my overgeneralization about art's COVID whiff is Nick Cave's tremendous live album, *Idiot Prayer: Alone at Alexandra Palace*, which finds Cave at a piano, playing to an empty concert hall. If you buy the record, there's a photo on the sleeve of a masked-up roadie spraying disinfectant.

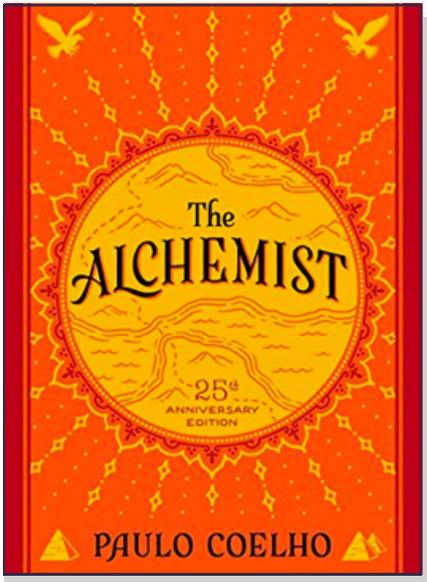


The Candy House

Jennifer Egan

Recommended for anyone who wants to nervously laugh. Like other great works of satire, *The Candy House* walks the fine edges between humor and devastation, sophisticated social critique and plainspoken storytelling. Of the many fun characters who animate these pages, my favorite may be the guy who has grown tired of the artifice of social life, and so he screams – in buses, at the drugstore, wherever he pleases – because he finds his screaming shocks people into displaying genuine candor.



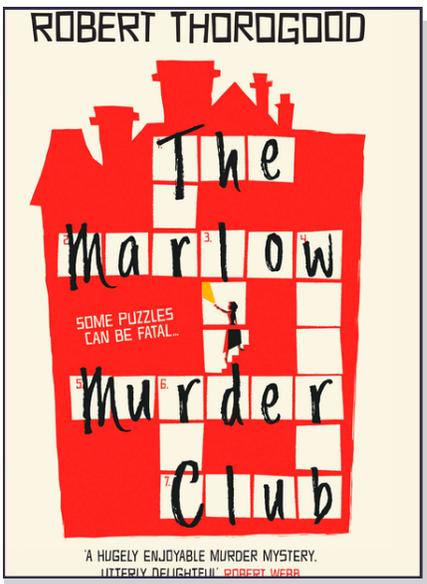


Muminah Idris

The Alchemist

Paulo Coelho

Santiago, a young shepherd living in the hills of Andalucia, feels that there is more to life than his humble home and his flock. One day he finds the courage to follow his dreams into distant lands, each step galvanised by the knowledge that he is following the right path: his own.

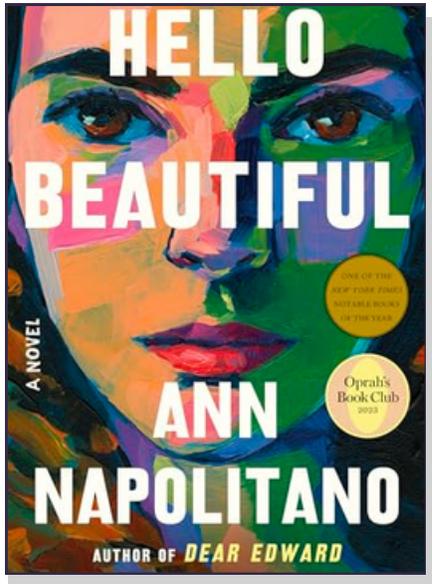


Kira Jones

The Marlow Murder Club

Robert Thorogood

A great cozy mystery that pairs well with a cup of tea and a fuzzy blanket. The main character is a whiskey-drinking, skinny-dipping, mystery-solving septuagenarian who forms friendships with an unlikely cast of characters. This charming and captivating story has the added bonus of providing insights into how to solve British crossword puzzles.

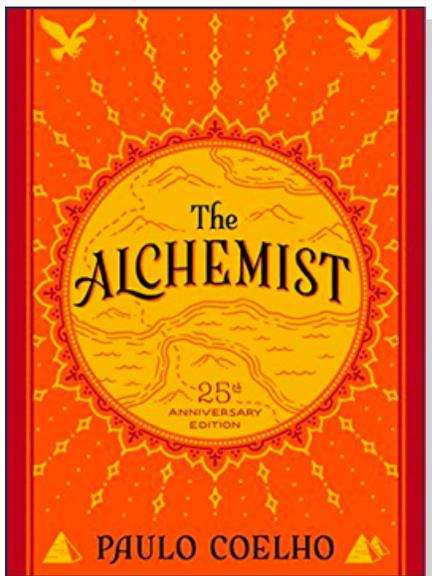


Jill Keasel

Hello Beautiful

Ann Napolitano

My book of the year is *Hello Beautiful* by Ann Napolitano. First of all, it is an Oprah Book Club book, and I don't question that woman. Second, it is filled with just the right amount of basketball, Chicago and family dysfunction to make my heart happy. It is about a boy that was raised in a home without love who marries into the Padavano family that is brimming with it. This book tells the story of this family comprised of four sisters. It shows how, even the strongest of families can crumble, but that there is hope for them, and all of us, in the end.



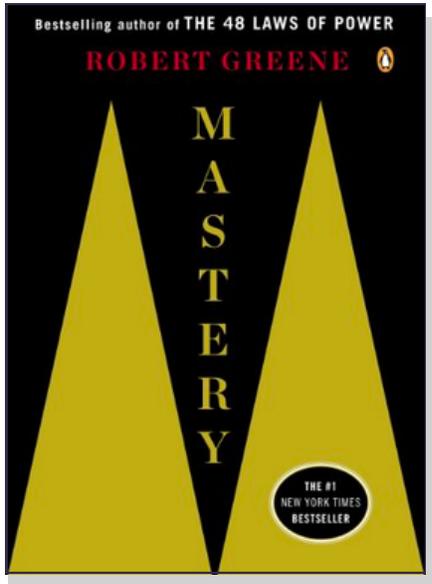
Kattie Krewer

The Alchemist

Paulo Coelho

It's always fun to revisit a classic, and *The Alchemist* is certainly a fun read. Dive into the adventures of Santiago and rediscover the lesson that your 10th grade English teacher tried so hard to convey: worldly treasures are far less valuable than seeking your purpose.



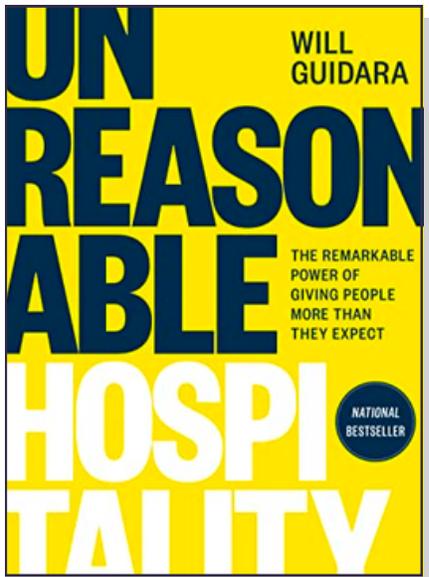


Olivia LeSueur

Mastery

Robert Greene

I discovered Robert Greene through listening to his enlightening Huberman Lab podcast episode. His profound insights on complex subjects like time, power, and relationships intrigued me. In this book, Greene challenges the notion that icons are inherently destined for success due to innate genius. Instead, he convincingly argues that there is a process to mastery that makes it attainable for everyone. Full transparency – I haven't finished the book yet (so I can't offer the secret to mastery), but it's already reshaping my perspective.

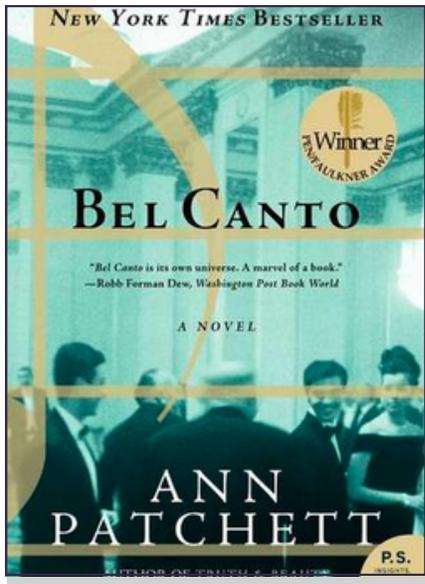


Emily Lizotte

Unreasonable Hospitality

Will Guidara

This year I hit my goal of reading one book a month, and a favorite from the list was *Unreasonable Hospitality* by Will Guidara. As a foodie, I enjoyed learning about the ins and outs of fine dining and the hundreds of small details that make or break a diner's experience. What resonated most was Guidara's viewpoint on how creating a hospitality first culture can improve any business for both the customers and employees. Whether you're a foodie or not, the book offers valuable lessons and insights for everyone.

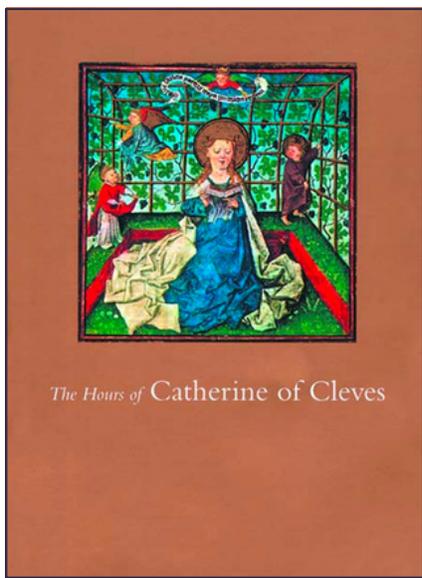


Susannah Loss

Bel Canto

Ann Patchett

How can it be that I have only just now discovered the inspired writing of Ann Patchett? Award-winning author, independent bookseller, and crusader against censorship and book bans, Ann Patchett is literary royalty in my hometown of Nashville. She deserves the acclaim, which is why her 2001 book *Bel Canto* is my recommended read for this year. A birthday dinner party turned hostage standoff, *Bel Canto* is at once a meditation on politics, art, music, and love—a book I got lost in and couldn't put down. Next up? Patchett's 2023 NYT notable book, *Tom Lake*.

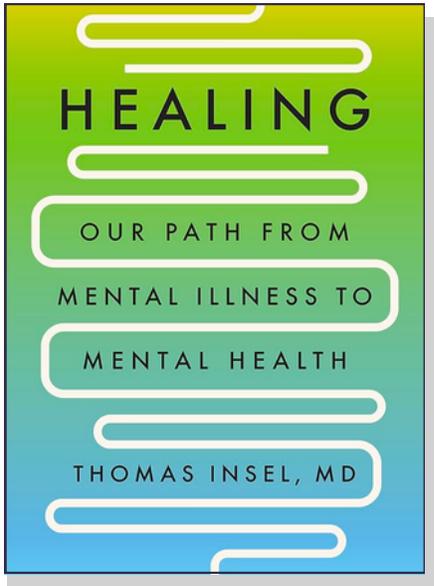


Matt McEnany

The Hours of Catherine of Cleves

Anonymous

This is a reprint of a 1960s edition of a book of hours made for Catherine of Cleves in 1480 as a wedding gift. A book of hours is a collection of illuminated religious texts categorized by the hours of the liturgical day that is designed to guide private worship. Catherine is remembered for receiving this book, the artist or artists that made it are not. I have dreamt of creating an illuminated manuscript, and for practicing calligraphy and illumination, this book of hours, together with the *Shahnameh*, which I would also recommend, were very useful and enlightening to me this year. My copy of this book was the last gift I ever received from my grandma, so it does hold special significance for me. As with everything else, if I ever complete my manuscript, it will only be because she enabled me to do so.

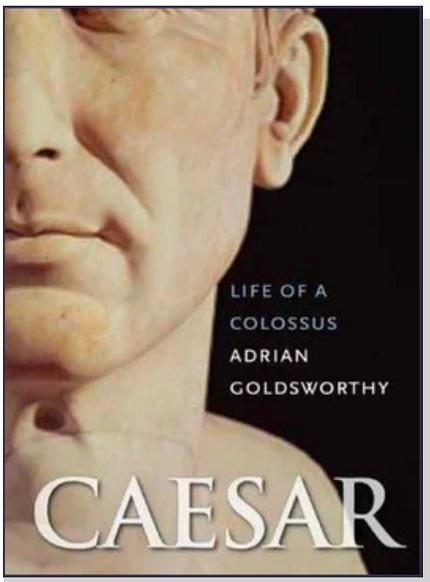


Connor McLaughlin

Healing: Our Path From Mental Illness to Mental Health

Thomas Insel

America is facing a mental health crisis. We have treatments that work, but our system fails at every stage to deliver care well. In *Healing*, Tom Insel, the former Director of the National Institute of Mental Health, offers a roadmap to a healthier society built upon the three Ps (people, place, and purpose).



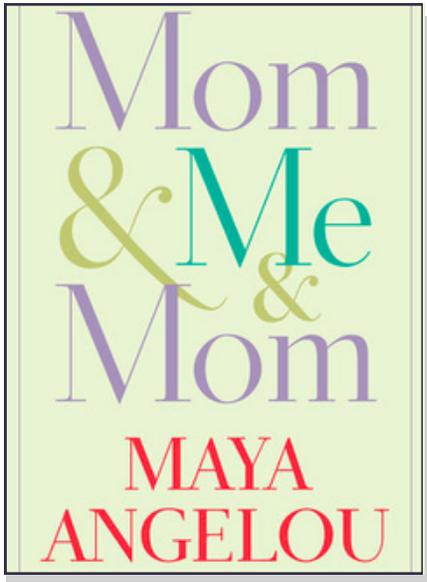
Cortland Mercer

Caesar: Life of a Colossus

Adrian Goldsworthy

I think about the Roman empire a lot. This is my favorite history covering not just the extraordinary life of Julius Caesar, but the conditions that led to his rise and the fall of the Roman republic. Leaders who viewed themselves above the law, the use of mob violence as a political tool, the steady erosion of civic institutions – any of these themes sound familiar?



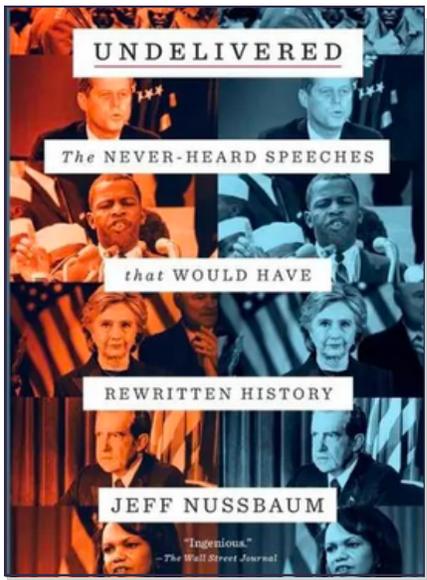


Florence Mooser

Mom & Me & Mom

Maya Angelou

Raw and honest, peppered with unexpected bits of humor, this autobiography explores Maya Angelou's relationship with her mother, Vivian Baxter. Vivian's character is utterly fascinating: a liberated, handgun-toting, whiskey-slinging, larger-than-life personality, she epitomizes a feminist ethos that was ahead of her time. While not everyone has a Vivian Baxter in their lives, Angelou's narrative resonates universally, reflecting the complexities and deep affections in our relationships with mothers or other family members. I listened to the Audiobook version narrated by Angelou herself, and couldn't put my earpods down!



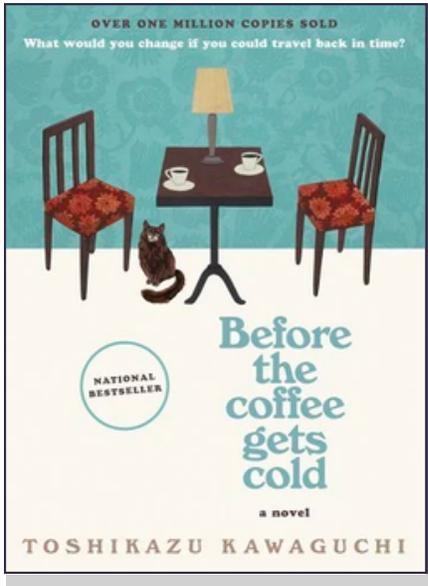
Danny O'Keefe

Undelivered: The Never-Hard Speeches That Would Have Rewritten History

Jeff Nussbaum

Anyone who has toiled over a dozen or so drafts understands the dreaded feeling when that deliverable never leaves the table. Part history lesson and part speechwriting guidebook, *Undelivered* reviews the most seminal speeches that history never heard. Whether it's Eisenhower's apology for D-Day's failure or Nixon's refusal to resign from office, the book introduces the reader, notes and all, to some of the world's most important near-final drafts.



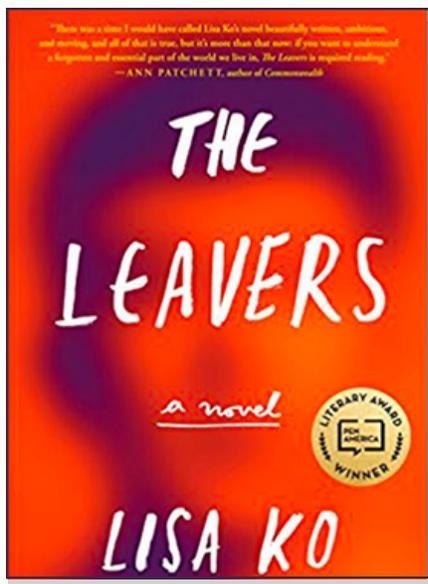


Ryan Paolicelli

Before the Coffee Gets Cold

Toshikazu Kawaguchi

A collection of short stories all taking place in the same coffee shop where patrons can relive moments from their past. At its core, this book is about the variety of relationships in our lives and how they change overtime. The characters are well developed and feel realistic in a book that keeps the story moving at an engaging pace.

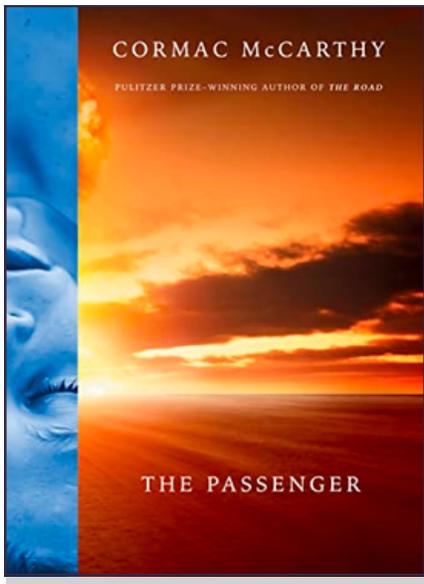


Chandler Pearson

The Leavers

Lisa Ko

How do you define "home"? *The Leavers* attempts to answer this question through the tale of 11-year-old Deming Guo, growing up in a completely different life after his mom's disappearance. For me, his story remains unforgettable, due to how Ko explores belonging and identity, through experiences similar to those of my own life. Though I'm not 100% satisfied with its writing, I guarantee that *Leavers* speaks to relevant ideas for all of us — and Deming's story will also stay with you, long after you finish it.

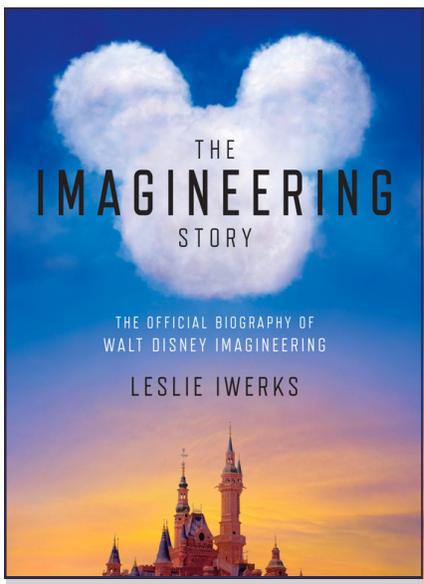


Charles Pennell

The Passenger

Cormac McCarthy

Saddle up for one last ride with the GOAT.

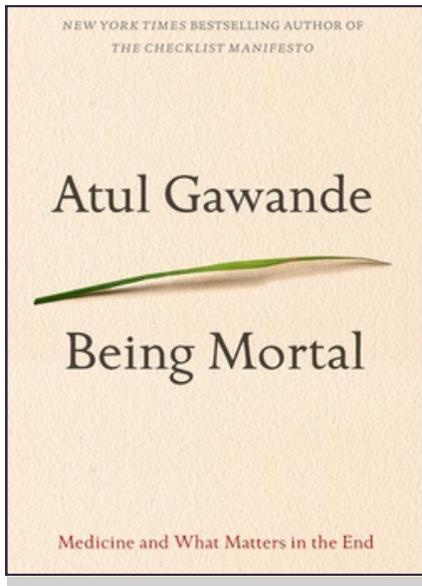


Michiel Peters

The Imagineering Story: The Official Biography of Walt Disney Imagineering

Leslie Iwerks

I admit I've never been good at creating things with my hands. I think that's one of the reasons why I have learned to use words to tell a convincing story and find a career where my hands can be as useless as they are. The Disney Imagineers, on the other hand, do the exact opposite. They create stories that we can visit, see, and touch. They build worlds, and I have always wondered how they do that so convincingly. This book tells the story of the work of these amazingly creative people, where they draw inspiration, and how they translate words and pictures into real-life experiences.

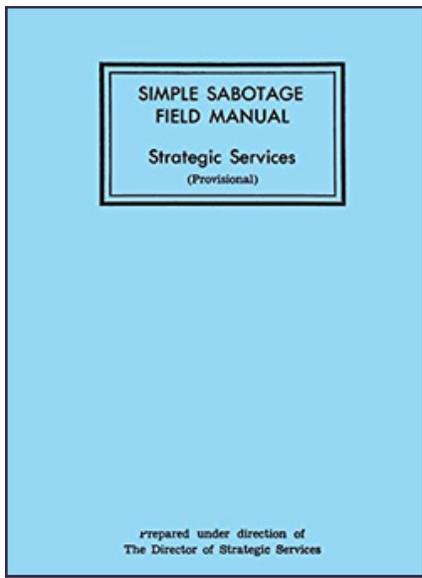


Katy Riddick

Being Mortal

Atul Gawande

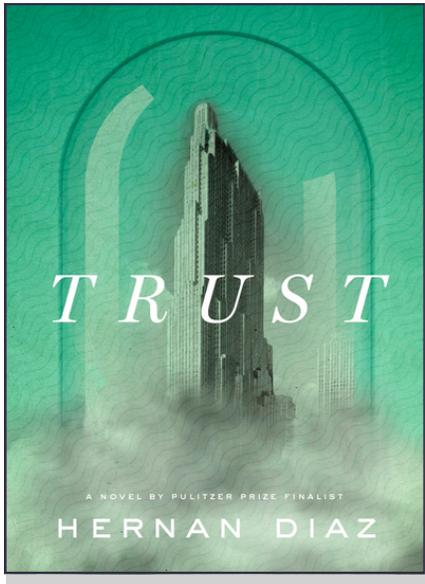
An exploration of the limitations of modern medicine in addressing the inevitabilities of aging and death. It's a must-read for its honest, humane perspective and eye-opening stories, offering insight into improving life quality to the very end, appealing to both medical professionals and consultants.



Simple Sabotage Field Manual: Strategic Services

U.S. Office of Strategic Services

A unique glimpse into World War II-era espionage and subterfuge, detailing how ordinary individuals can disrupt enemy operations. Its relevance for modern management and its historical significance make it a compelling read for business leaders and consultants.

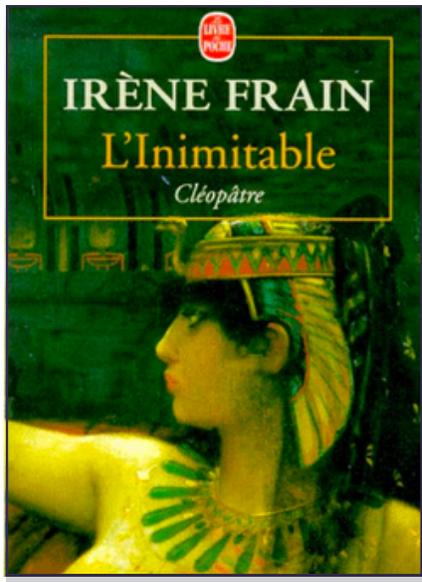


Jaishree Singh

Trust

Hernan Diaz

This 2023 Pulitzer Prize winner was sublime. Like a pear pastry, it was delicately sweet and demanded that I savor each line. It describes the life of a shrewd financier and his wife during and after the 1929 financial crash. It provided a fascinating, artistic perspective on money. The main character describes "capital" as "...an antiseptically living thing. It moves, eats, grows, breathes, falls ill, and may die...it [bends] back upon itself, to be force-fed its own body." This book took patience when it got technical, but it was so worth it! It showed me a level of writing excellence that I didn't know was possible. Further, the audiobook featured four actors, and all were perfect.

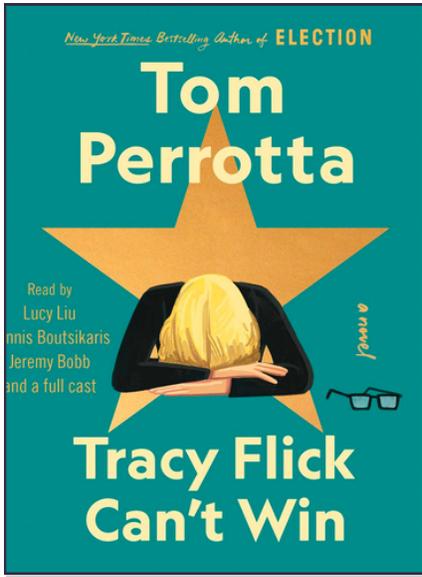


Sophie Robert

L'inimitable: Cléopâtre (The Inimitable: Cleopatra)

Irène Frain

This is the first book I read by Irene Frain and became a big fan of her since then – she manages to combine in-depth historical research and analysis with fictive narration like no one else. In this book, she dives into Cleopatra's story to give us the portrait of history's first female politician buried under the stereotypes: "She discovered a first-rate politician, who pursued with the greatest men of her time - Caesar, then Antony - the dream of reconstituting Alexander's empire, of uniting East and West. A woman of flesh, too, who was a mother and a lover, who dreamed, loved, despaired." The book was truly addictive, and I cannot recommend Frain's work enough if you want to learn about less well-known parts of history as well!

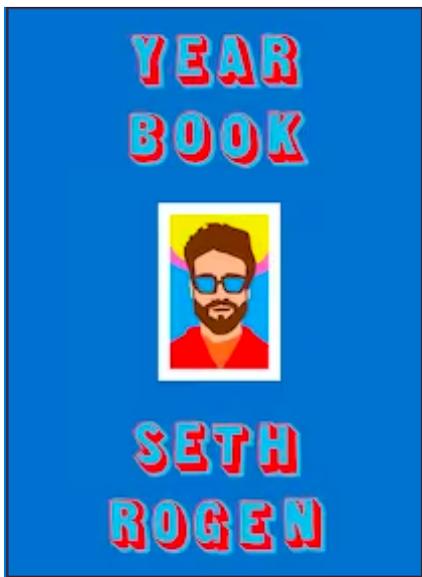


Sagar Sane

Tracy Flick Can't Win

Tom Perrotta

In *Tracy Flick Can't Win*, author Tom Perrotta delivers a savvy, modern, and highly engaging follow-up to his award-winning 1998 novel, *Election*. Employing the same multi-character point-of-view style as he did in the first book, in *Can't Win*, Perrotta tells the interconnected tales of several individuals within the immediate orbit of the protagonist, Tracy Flick, who now, several decades removed from her time as an overeager, ambitious teenager, serves as the vice principal of her local high school. Cynical, somewhat humorous, and easy to read, this book will resonate with anyone interested in following the lives of deeply and fundamentally flawed characters as they experience and navigate highly relatable professional and personal challenges.



Emily Scholler

Yearbook

Seth Rogen

Just a collection of anecdotal essays by the hilarious Seth Rogen. It's funny, delightful, self-effacing, and genuine. It's not a life-changing book, but it's an easy, uplifting read that's a great way to end a long hard day of work.

Jane Schumacher

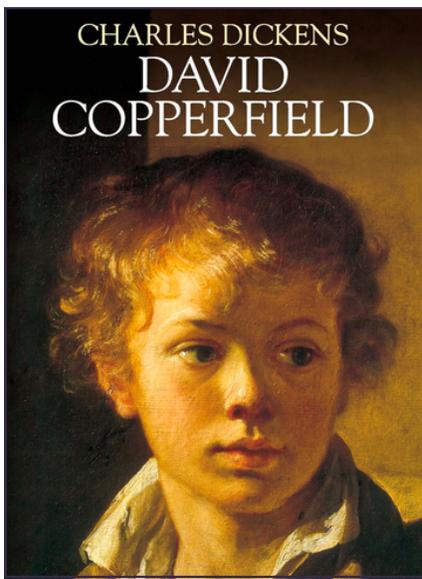
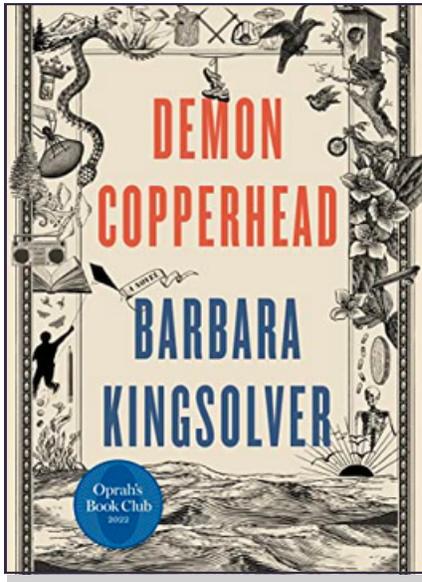
Demon Copperhead

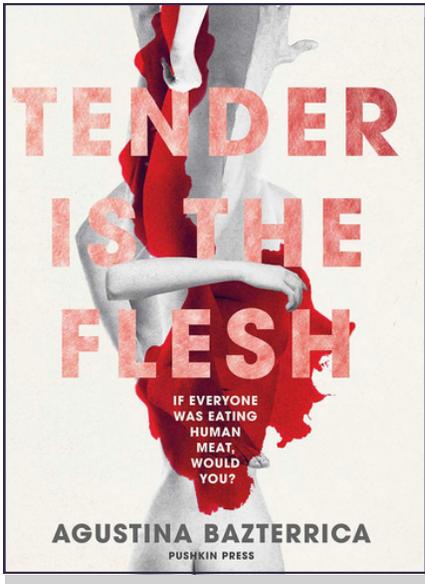
Barbara Kingsolver

David Copperfield

Charles Dickens

Given *Demon Copperhead* won the Pulitzer Prize this year, it shouldn't come as any surprise somebody included this book on this list. I'm the odd duck who really enjoyed *A Tale of Two Cities* despite its treatment in English class (though I opted out of memorizing the first paragraph for extra credit) and yet despite enjoying Dickens, I had yet to read *David Copperfield* before reading Kingsolver's rendition – I managed to make it halfway into *Demon Copperhead* before realizing! I highly recommend reading them "backwards," if you haven't gotten to either of these yet, or have forgotten Copperfield since your high school English class (mine didn't include it). I have a feeling I enjoyed *David Copperfield* more having read it after *Demon Copperhead*, so I highly recommend reading them in tandem – with the "new" before the "old"!



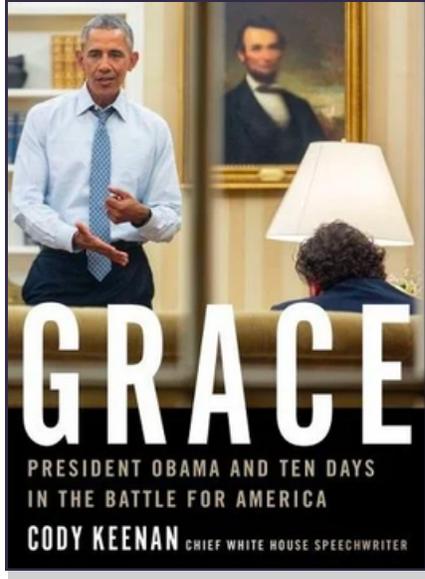


Emma Stutts

Tender is the Flesh

Agustina Bazterrica

Truly disgusting, bleak read. This dystopian horror provokes hard-to-swallow (pun intended) questions about individual and collective moral reasoning: How far is too far? What lines will we cross to protect ourselves and our families, if we're in a position of power to do so? How is word choice used to dehumanize and normalize cruelty? How does groupthink help us avoid personal accountability? While we're not facing anything as horrific as the premise of this book, there are undoubtedly other events these questions bring to mind.



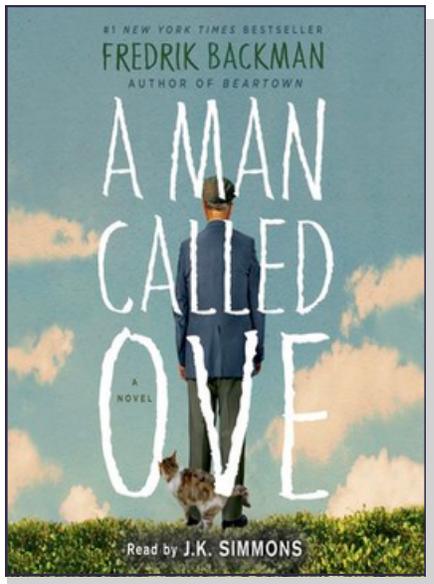
Ben Tiede

Grace: President Obama and Ten Days In the Battle for America

Cody Keenan

Former Obama chief speechwriter Cody Keenan chronicles the ten days between the tragic Charleston shooting and President Obama's eulogy delivered at the Emanuel AME Church. In between, landmark Supreme Court rulings on Obamacare and gay marriage changed the trajectory of our nation. For anyone working in communications or speechwriting, Keenan's memoir is a fascinating look inside what it takes to harness another's voice. Oh, and the writing is pretty good too.



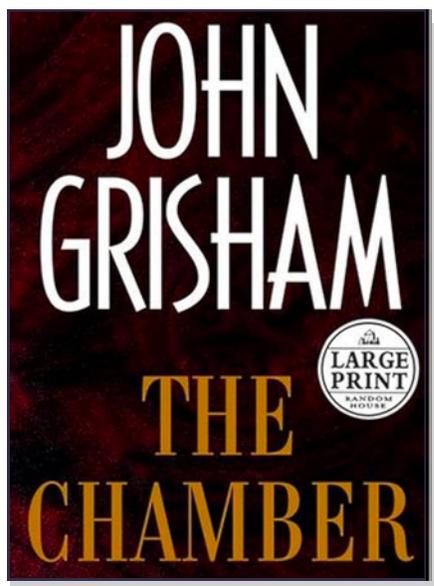


Parm Thind

A Man Called Ove

Fredrik Backman

A Man Called Ove is a touching and unexpectedly emotional novel that explores the themes of loneliness, compassion, and the power of community. The narrative revolves around Ove, a widower whose unwavering sense of morality shapes his interactions with the world and his neighbors. The story cleverly weaves between past and present, offering a blend of humor and emotion that captures the essence of Ove's life. It's a heartwarming story that really tugs at your heartstrings and makes you think about aging in a different light.



Trent Ullrich

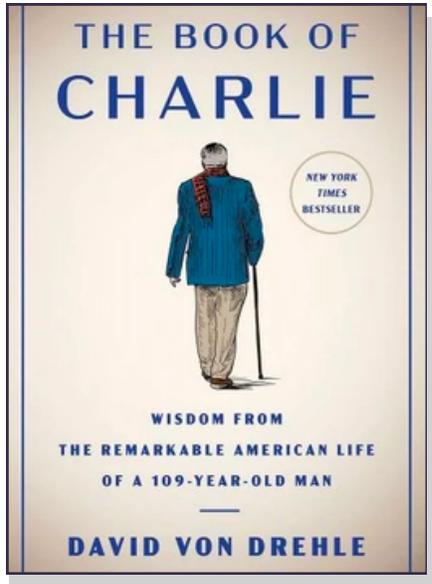
The Chamber

John Grisham

I went on a John Grisham kick in high school, where I read nearly every one of his novels, but I never got to *The Chamber*. My father gifted me a paperback version in high school, but I disliked the title and the cover, and based on that information alone, I read practically every Grisham story but this one. I finally picked it up this summer just as something to read on a long Amtrak ride, and I am glad I did.

This thought-provoking novel follows the story of a man on death row responsible for many terrible crimes, except, maybe, for the crime for which Mississippi is preparing to execute him. Told from the perspective of Adam Hall, the accused's attorney and grandson, the reader must assess whether the state should condemn an evil man for a crime he may not have committed.





Peter Varnum

The Book of Charlie: Wisdom from the Remarkable American Life of a 109-Year-Old Man

David Von Drehle

This book, by a former Washington Post columnist and transplant to Kansas City, explores the history of that city and the U.S. through the eyes of someone who lived it. Charlie White is a fascinating character, but the appeal to me is the interplay between Charlie's story, the historic moments he lived through, and his response to those events. It was gifted to me by my father, himself nearing 90 and a lifelong Kansas Citian, for whom I suspect the book resonated because of Charlie's unwavering optimism — a trait my father shares, and one which the author clearly promotes as critical to longevity. This perspective is not without cost.

Ultimately, this book is a love letter from the author to adult daughters. Such a project resonates with me as I settle into the current chapter of my life, with roles as a son with aging parents and a father to a young daughter.