

## Book Discussion Kits (Biography)

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### [Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight](#)

by Alexandra Fuller

An intimate memoir of growing up in Africa during the Rhodesian civil war of 1971 to 1979 describes her life on farms in southern Rhodesia, Malawi, and Zambia, detailing her hardscrabble existence with an alcoholic mother, frequently absent father, and three lost siblings, as well as her fierce love for Africa.

Approximate number of books in kit: 10

### [Dreams From My Father](#)

by Barack Obama

In this lyrical, unsentimental, and compelling memoir, the son of a black African father and a white American mother searches for a workable meaning to his life as a black American. It begins in New York, where Barack Obama learns that his father--a figure he knows more as a myth than as a man--has been killed in a car accident. This sudden death inspires an emotional odyssey, first to a small town in Kansas, from which he retraces the migration of his mother's family to Hawaii, and then to Kenya, where he meets the African side of his family, confronts the bitter truth of his father's life, and at last reconciles his divided inheritance.

Approximate number of books in kit: 10

### [Eat, Pray, Love](#)

by Elizabeth Gilbert

Traces the author's decision to travel the world for a year after suffering a midlife crisis and divorce, a journey that took her to three places in her quest to explore her own nature and learn the art of spiritual balance.

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

### [Farewell to Manzanar](#)

by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston

The American-born author describes her family's experience and impressions when they were forced to relocate in a camp for the Japanese in Owens Valley, California, during World War II.

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

### [The Glass Castle](#)

by Jeannette Walls

The second child of a scholarly, alcoholic father and an eccentric artist mother discusses her family's nomadic upbringing from the Arizona desert, to Las Vegas, to an Appalachian mining town, during which her siblings and she fended for themselves while their parents outmaneuvered bill collectors and the authorities.

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

## [Heart of a Woman](#)

by Maya Angelou

This engaging book chronicles the changes in Maya Angelou's life as she enters the hub of activity that is New York. There, at the Harlem Writers Guild, she rededicates herself to writing, and finds love at an unexpected moment. Reflecting on her many roles--from northern coordinator of Martin Luther King's history-making quest to mother of a rebellious teenage son--Angelou eloquently speaks to an awareness of the heart within us all.

Approximate number of books in kit: 7

## [A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius](#)

by Dave Eggers

A moving memoir of a college senior who, in the space of five weeks, loses both of his parents to cancer and inherits his eight-year-old brother. This is an account that manages to be simultaneously hilarious and wildly inventive, as well as a deeply heartfelt story of the love that holds a family together.

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

## [The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks](#)

by Rebecca Skloot

Henrietta Lacks was a poor Southern tobacco farmer who worked the same land as her slave ancestors, and whose cells--taken without her knowledge when she was treated for cancer in 1951--have become one of the most important tools in medicine. The Lacks family did not learn of Henrietta's cells until 20 years after her death, but these first "immortal" human cells grown in culture are still alive today: they've been bought and sold by the billions and have been vital in fighting polio, cancer, and many viruses. This incredible book explores race, bioethics, scientific research, human rights, the power of family, and the question of whether we control the very cells we're made of.

Approximate number of books in kit: 8

## [Little Heathens](#)

by Mildred Armstrong Kalish

An evocative memoir of growing up in the heart of the Midwest during the Great Depression describes life on an Iowa farm during a time of endless work, resourcefulness, family and kinship, and no tolerance for idleness or waste.

Approximate number of books in kit: 9

## [The Measure of a Man](#)

by Sidney Poitier

The acclaimed actor reveals the depth, passion, and intellectual fervor that have driven his life and career, citing the elements of his childhood that gave him his sense of worth, family, and ethics and how these qualities are essential to spiritual development.

Approximate number of books in kit: 7

## [A Million Little Pieces](#)

by James Frey

A memoir of drug and alcohol abuse and the rehabilitation experience examines addiction and recovery through the eyes of a man who had taken his addictions to deadly extremes, describing the battle to confront the consequences of his life.

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

### [Mountains Beyond Mountains](#)

by Tracy Kidder

A portrait of infectious disease expert Dr. Paul Farmer follows the efforts of this unconventional Harvard genius to understand the world's great health, economic, and social problems and to bring healing to humankind.

Approximate number of books in kit: 8

### [My Life in France](#)

by Julia Child

A memoir begun just months before Child's death describes the legendary food expert's years in Paris, Marseille, and Provence and her journey from a young woman from Pasadena who cannot cook or speak any French to the publication of her legendary Mastering cookbooks and her winning the hearts of America as "The French Chef."

Approximate number of books in kit: 7

### [The Orchid Thief](#)

by Susan Orlean

A staff writer for The New Yorker describes the life and times of John Laroche, a plant smuggler and orchid thief, and the eccentric world of Florida's obsessed collectors of rare plants.

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

### [Safe Passage](#)

by Ida Cook

Reveals how two decidedly ordinary Englishwomen and sisters, Ida and Louise Cook, decided, after hearing an aria from Madame Butterfly, to save their earnings and go "undercover" as eccentric opera fans to rescue dozens of people from the Nazis.

Approximate number of books in kit: 5

### [The Tender Bar](#)

by J.R. Moehringer

In a memoir of growing up with a single mother, the author describes how he received valuable life lessons and friendship from an assortment of characters at the neighborhood bar, who provided him with a kind of fatherhood by committee.

Approximate number of books in kit: 6

### [Tender at the Bone](#)

by Ruth Reichl

Ruth Reichl's deliciously crafted non-fiction memoir, Tender at the Bone, is the story of a life determined, enhanced, and defined in equal measure by a passion for food, unforgettable people, and the love of tales well told.

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

## [Into The Wild](#)

by Jon Krakauer

The story of Chris McCandless, a young man who embarked on a solo journey into the wilds of Alaska and whose body was discovered four months later, explores the allure of the wilderness  
Approximate number of books in kit: 7

## [The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts](#)

by Maxine Hong Kingston

A man fleeing from the repressive social conformity required by China's communist government journeys into the remote mountain regions of southwest China in search of meaning in his life and the elusive Soul Mountain.

Approximate number of books in kit: 9

## [The Year of Magical Thinking](#)

by Joan Didion

An autobiographical portrait of marriage and motherhood by the acclaimed author details the critical illness of her daughter, Quintana Roo, followed by the fatal coronary of her husband, John Gregory Dunne, and her daughter's second bout with a life-threatening ailment, and her struggle to come to terms with life and death, illness, sanity, personal upheaval, and grief.

Approximate number of books in kit: 10