

Book Discussion Kits (Biography)

[Let's Take the Long Way Home](#)

by Gail Caldwell

Traces the author's close friendship with the late fellow writer Caroline Knapp, describing their shared experiences with sobriety, a love of dogs, and Caroline's battle with cancer.

Approximate number of books in kit: 6

[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 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: 12

[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: 9

[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

[Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption](#)

by Laura Hillenbrand

Relates the story of a U.S. airman who survived when his bomber crashed into the sea during World War II, spent forty-seven days adrift in the ocean before being rescued by the Japanese Navy, and was held as a prisoner until the end of the war.

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

[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: 10

[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: 10

[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: 10

[Catherine the Great: Portrait of a Woman](#)

by Robert K. Massie

The Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer of Peter the Great presents a reconstruction of the 18th-century empress's life that includes coverage of such topics as her efforts to engage Russia in the cultural life of Europe, her creation of the Hermitage and her numerous scandal-free romantic affairs.

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

[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: 9

[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

[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: 11

[Wild](#)

by Cheryl Strayed

Traces the personal crisis the author endured after the death of her mother and a painful divorce, which prompted her ambition to undertake a dangerous thousand-mile solo hike that both drove her to rock bottom and helped her to heal.

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

[The Dressmaker of Khair Khana](#)

by Gayle Tzemach Lemmon

Presents the story of a fearless young woman who became a dress-making entrepreneur in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, thus saving her family and bringing hope to the lives of dozens of women in her war-torn nation.

Approximate number of books in kit: 10