

Book Discussion Kits (Non-Fiction)

[Animal, Vegetable, Miracle](#)

by Barbara Kingsolver

When Kingsolver and her family move from suburban Arizona to rural Appalachia, they take on a new challenge: to spend a year on a locally produced diet, paying close attention to the provenance of all they consume. "Our highest shopping goal was to get our food from so close to home, we'd know the person who grew it. Often that turned out to be ourselves as we learned to produce what we needed, starting with dirt, seeds, and enough knowledge to muddle through. Or starting with baby animals, and enough sense to refrain from naming them."

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

[Blink](#)

by Malcolm Gladwell

Utilizing case studies as diverse as speed dating, pop music, and the shooting of Amadou Diallo, Gladwell reveals that what we think of as decisions made in the blink of an eye are much more complicated than assumed. Drawing on cutting-edge neuroscience and psychology, he shows how the difference between good decision-making and bad has nothing to do with how much information we can process quickly, but on the few particular details on which we focus.

Approximate number of books in kit: 7

[The Bookseller of Kabul](#)

by Asne Seierstad

Capturing the harsh realities of life in modern-day Afghanistan and plight of Afghan women, the Norwegian journalist provides a portrait of a committed Muslim man, a bookseller, and his family living in post-Taliban Kabul, Afghanistan.

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

[Botany of Desire](#)

by Michael Pollan

Focusing on the human relationship with plants, the author of *Second Nature* uses botany to explore four basic human desires--sweetness, beauty, intoxication, and control--through portraits of four plants that embody them: the apple, tulip, marijuana, and potato.

Approximate number of books in kit: 11

[The Crucible](#)

by Arthur Miller

A veiled reflection of the anticommunist witch-hunts of the 1950s, this play portrays seventeenth-century Salem, Massachusetts as a rigid theocracy eager to ferret out real or imagined deviations from the norm, and indicts everyone in Salem--and by extension American society--for the crimes of intolerance and blind hatred.

Approximate number of books in kit: 10

[Devil in the White City](#)

by Erik Larson

A compelling account of the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 brings together the divergent stories of two

very different men who played a key role in shaping the history of the event--visionary architect Daniel H. Burnham, who coordinated its construction, and Dr. Henry H. Holmes, an insatiable and charming serial killer who lured women to their deaths.

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

[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

[Galileo's Daughter: A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith and Love](#)

by Dava Sobel

Galileo Galilei's telescopes allowed him to discover a new reality in the heavens. But for publicly declaring his astounding argument--that the earth revolves around the sun--he was accused of heresy and put under house arrest by the Holy Office of the Inquisition. Living a far different life, Galileo's daughter Virginia, a cloistered nun, proved to be her father's greatest source of strength through the difficult years of his trial and persecution.

Approximate number of books in kit: 11

[The Girls From Ames](#)

by Jeffrey Zaslow

The story of eleven girls from Ames, Iowa, the ten women they became, and the mysterious death of their eleventh member demonstrates how female friendships can shape every aspect of women's lives.

Approximate number of books in kit: 8

[How to Be Compassionate](#)

by Dalai Lama

Through practical exercises and personal anecdotes, the revered spiritual leader shows how individuals' compassion can lead to global changes.

Approximate number of books in kit: 9

[Leap of Faith](#)

by Queen Noor

Leap of Faith is the story of a young American woman who became wife and partner to an Arab monarch. Queen Noor of Jordan provides a compelling portrait of her late husband King Hussein and his lifelong effort to bring peace to his war torn region and an insider's view of the growing gulf between the United States and the Arab nations. But most of all it is a love story--the intimate account of a woman who lost her heart to a king, and to his people.

Approximate number of books in kit: 6

[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

[Longitude](#)

by Dava Sobel

Longitude is the dramatic human story of an epic scientific quest, and of John Harrison's forty-year obsession with his perfect timekeeper, known today as the chronometer. Full of heroism and chicanery, brilliance and the absurd, it is also a fascinating brief history of astronomy, navigation, and clockmaking.

Approximate number of books in kit: 7

[Mayflower](#)

by Nathaniel Philbrick

A history of the Pilgrim settlement of New England challenges popular misconceptions, discussing such topics as the diseases of European origin suffered by the Wampanoag tribe, the fragile working relationship between the Pilgrims and their Native American neighbors, and the devastating impact of the King Philip's War. By the author of Sea of Glory.

Approximate number of books in kit: 8

[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

[Mennonite in a Little Black Dress](#)

by Rhoda Janzen

A poet describes how, after her husband left her for a relationship with a man and she subsequently was seriously injured in a car crash, she returned home to her close-knit Mennonite family and came to terms with her failed marriage and her choices in life.

Approximate number of books in kit: 9

[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

[Musicophilia](#)

by Oliver Sacks

In this book, Oliver Sacks explores the power music wields over us; a power that sometimes we control and at other times don't. He explores, in his inimitable fashion, how it can provide access to otherwise unreachable emotional states, how it can revivify neurological avenues that have been frozen, evoke

memories of earlier, lost events or states or bring those with neurological disorders back to a time when the world was much richer.

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

[Nickel and Dimed](#)

by Barbara Ehrenreich

Nickel and Dimed is a modern classic that deftly portrays the plight of America's working-class poor. Author Barbara Ehrenreich decides to see if she can scratch out a comfortable living in blue-collar America. What she discovers is a culture of desperation, where workers often take multiple low-paying jobs just to keep a roof overhead.

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

[The Odyssey](#)

by Homer/ translated by Robert Fagles

The award-winning translator of Iliad and Oresteia introduces a new translation of Homer's age-old tale of the wanderings of Odysseus during his ten-year voyage back home to Ithaca after the Trojan War as he overcomes both divine and natural forces.

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

[Reading Lolita in Tehran](#)

by Azar Nafisi

Lolita in Tehran? Yes, and plenty of other Western classics, read and discussed by a group of women who met secretly with Nafisi, an instructor at the University of Tehran until she was expelled in 1997 for shunning the veil and left the country.

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

[The Shadow Effect](#)

by Deepak Chopra

Three popular spiritual teachers examine the dark side of human nature--the emotions and traits that people fear and instinctively hide--and discusses how to embrace the power of the dark side as part of a journey to wholeness.

Approximate number of books in kit: 10

[Small Wonder](#)

by Barbara Kingsolver

Twenty-two optimistic essays cover such topics as nature, family, literature, and the joys of everyday life while examining the challenges of war, poverty, and violence.

Approximate number of books in kit: 9

[The Spirit Catches You And You Fall Down](#)

by Anne Fadiman

A tragic tale of cultural differences chronicles the fight over the proper care of an epileptic Hmong child between a California medical center and her tradition-minded Laotian refugee family.

Approximate number of books in kit: 10

[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: 8

[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

[Thunderstruck](#)

by Erik Larson

A portrait of the Edwardian era recounts two parallel stories--the case of Dr. Hawley Crippen, who murdered his wife and fled to America, and Guglielmo Marconi, the inventor of wireless communication--as the new technology is used to capture a killer.

Approximate number of books in kit: 7

[The Tipping Point](#)

by Malcolm Gladwell

By exposing the importance of the "tipping point" in human affairs--that moment when a trend, idea, or social behavior crosses the threshold into acceptability--the author sheds important light on the forces that drive group dynamics and mass culture.

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

[Undaunted Courage](#)

by Stephen Ambrose

A chronicle of the two-and-a-half year journey of Lewis and Clark covers their incredible hardships, first encounters with Native Americans, the contributions of Sacajawea, and Lewis' post-journey depression.

Approximate number of books in kit: 11

[Under the Tuscan Sun](#)

by Frances Mayes

Popular poet and author Frances Mayes transports you to the spectacular Tuscan countryside with her memoirs. She explores the fascinating people, landscape, and history of Italy--and seasons them with

hearty recipes.

Approximate number of books in kit: 12

[A Walk in the Woods](#)

by Bill Bryson

Bryson shares his breath-taking adventures and the fascinating history of the 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail, in this wry account of his arduous trek past the Trail's natural pleasures, human eccentrics, and offbeat comforts.

Approximate number of books in kit: 8

[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: 12