Book Discussion Kits (Non-Fiction)

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness
by Michelle Alexander
Argues that the War on Drugs and policies that deny convicted felons equal access to employment, housing, education, and public benefits create a permanent under caste based largely on race.
Approximate number of books in kit: 8

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: 10

The Boys in the Boat
by Daniel James Brown
Traces the story of an American rowing team from the University of Washington that defeated elite rivals at Hitler's 1936 Berlin Olympics, sharing the experiences of such contributors as their enigmatic coach, a visionary boat builder and a homeless teen rower.
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

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: 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

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 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 epilectic Hmong child between a California medical center and her tradition-minded Laotian refugee family.
Approximate number of books in kit: 10

Eyes Wide Open
by Paul Fleischman
Paul Fleischman offers teens an environmental wake-up call and a tool kit for decoding the barrage of conflicting information confronting them.
Approximate number of books in kit: 12

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

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

Unbroken
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

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: 10

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

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

The Sixth Extinction
by Elizabeth Kolbert
Drawing on the work of geologists, botanists, marine biologists and other researchers, an award-winning writer for The New Yorker discusses the five devastating mass extinctions on earth and predicts the coming of a sixth.
Approximate number of books in kit: 12

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

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: 8

Dead Wake
by Erik Larson
Gripping and important, Dead Wake captures the sheer drama and emotional power of a disaster whose intimate details and true meaning have long been obscured by history.
Approximate number of books in kit: 12

What It Is Like To Go To War
by Karl Marlantes
Drawing on his background as a decorated Vietnam War veteran, the author offers insight into his war experiences, maintaining that combat troops are ill prepared for the psychological and spiritual trauma of battle.
Approximate number of books in kit: 12

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: 10

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

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 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

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

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

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: 6

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

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 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 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