

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.

[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.

[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.

[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."

[The Rainbow Comes and Goes](#)

by Anderson Cooper

A poignant correspondence between the CNN journalist and his iconic designer mother, exchanged in the aftermath of the latter's brief illness, shares a rare window into their relationship and the life lessons imparted by an aging mother to her adult son.

[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.

[Monk of Mokha](#)

by Dave Eggers

Mokhtar Alkhanshali is twenty-four and working as a doorman when he discovers the astonishing history of coffee and Yemen's central place in it. He leaves San Francisco and travels deep into his ancestral homeland to tour terraced farms high in the country's rugged mountains and meet beleaguered but determined farmers. But when war engulfs the country and Saudi bombs rain down, Mokhtar has to find a way out of Yemen without sacrificing his dreams or abandoning his people.

[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.

[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.

[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.

[Steve Jobs](#)

by Walter Isaacson

Based on more than forty interviews with Steve Jobs conducted over two years--as well as interviews with more than 100 family members, friends, adversaries, competitors, and colleagues--Walter Isaacson has written a riveting story of the roller-coaster life and searingly intense personality of a creative entrepreneur whose passion for perfection and ferocious drive revolutionized six industries: personal computers, animated movies, music, phones, tablet computing, and digital publishing. Isaacson's portrait touched millions of readers. At a time when America is seeking ways to sustain its innovative edge, Jobs stands as the ultimate icon of inventiveness and applied imagination. He knew that the best way to create value in the twenty-first century was to connect creativity with technology. He built a company where leaps of the imagination were combined with remarkable feats of engineering. Although Jobs cooperated with the author, he asked for no control over what was written. He put nothing off-limits. He encouraged the people he knew to speak honestly. He himself spoke candidly about the people he worked with and competed against. His friends, foes, and colleagues offer an unvarnished view of the passions, perfectionism, obsessions, artistry, devilry, and compulsion for control that shaped his approach to business and the innovative products that resulted. His tale is instructive and cautionary, filled with lessons about innovation, character, leadership, and values.

[Benjamin Franklin: An American Life](#)

by Walter Isaacson

Chronicles the founding father's life and his multiple careers as a shopkeeper, writer, inventor, media baron, scientist, diplomat, business strategist, and political leader, while showing how his faith in the wisdom of the common citizen helped forge an American national identity based on the virtues of its middle class.

[Einstein: his life and universe](#)

by Walter Isaacson

A narrative portrait based on the complete body of Einstein's papers offers insight into how the iconic thinker's mind worked as well as his contributions to science, in an account that describes his two marriages, his receipt of the Nobel Prize, and the influence of his discoveries on his personal views about morality, politics, and tolerance.

[Leonardo Da Vinci](#)

by Walter Isaacson

Based on thousands of pages from Leonardo da Vinci's astonishing notebooks and new discoveries about his life and work, Walter Isaacson "deftly reveals an intimate Leonardo" (San Francisco Chronicle) in a narrative that connects his art to his science. He shows how Leonardo's genius was based on skills we can improve in ourselves, such as passionate curiosity, careful observation, and an imagination so playful that it flirted with fantasy.

[Lab Girl](#)

by Hope Jahren

An illuminating debut memoir of a woman in science; a moving portrait of a longtime friendship; and a stunningly fresh look at plants that will forever change how you see the natural world

[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.

[Melissa come back](#)

by Patrice Keet

"Is that our Melissa?" Patrice cries when she recognizes the woman at the speaker's podium. It is their Melissa-the foster child Patrice and her husband, Bob, haven't seen since she ran away from their comfortable home at the age of eleven. Now, she's a thirty-year-old woman at a fundraising dinner, describing her journey through foster care, teenage pregnancy, abuse, and the loss of her own children to the social services system. In an instant, two decades of buried shame and guilt come roaring back to Patrice: If only she hadn't failed Melissa as a foster mother. When they are finally reunited after twenty years, Melissa and her pre-teen daughters are facing eviction, presenting Patrice and Bob with the opportunity to make Melissa part of their family once again.

[How to be an antiracist](#)

by Ibram Kendi

"The only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it -- and then dismantle it." Ibram X. Kendi's concept of antiracism reenergizes and reshapes the conversation about racial justice in America -- but even more fundamentally, points us toward liberating new ways of thinking about ourselves and each other. In *How to Be an Antiracist*, Kendi asks us to think about what an antiracist society might look like, and how we can play an active role in building it. In this book, Kendi weaves an electrifying combination of ethics, history, law, and science, bringing it all together with an engaging personal narrative of his own awakening to antiracism. *How to Be an Antiracist* is an essential work for anyone who wants to go beyond an awareness of racism to the next step: contributing to the formation of a truly just and equitable society."

[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.

[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.

[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.

[The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks](#)

by Rebecca Makkai

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.

[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.

[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.

[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.

[Born a crime](#)

by Trevor Noah

One of the comedy world's fastest-rising stars tells his wild coming of age story during the twilight of Apartheid in South Africa and the tumultuous days of freedom that followed.

[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.

[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.

[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.

[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.

[And the band played on](#)

by Randy Shilts

An examination of the AIDS crisis critiques the federal government for its inaction, health authorities for their greed, and scientists for their desire for prestige in the face of the AIDS pandemic, in a twentieth anniversary edition of the acclaimed exposé.

[Old age is another country: a traveler's guide](#)

by Page Smith

Smith tells us how to grow old with dignity, humor, and active participation in life during the sometimes puzzling retirement years.

[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.

[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.

[The body keeps the score](#)

by Bessel Van der Kolk

Bessel revisits his clinical experience and reconfirms the impact of PTSD on his patients.

[Dear America : notes of an undocumented citizen](#)

by Jose Antonio Vargas

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Vargas, who is Filipino, learned of his undocumented status at the age of 16, when he tried to get a driver's license. With a reporter's instinct for detail, he writes about the challenges of surviving as an outsider in America.

[The Warmth of Other Suns](#)

by Isabel Wilkerson

In an epic history covering the period from the end of World War I through the 1970s, a Pulitzer Prize winner chronicles the decades-long migration of African Americans from the South to the North and West through the stories of three individuals and their families.

[Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents](#)

by Isabel Wilkerson

In this brilliant book, Isabel Wilkerson gives us a masterful portrait of an unseen phenomenon in America as she explores, through an immersive, deeply researched narrative and stories about real people, how America today and throughout its history has been shaped by a hidden caste system, a rigid hierarchy of human rankings.

[Refuge: an unnatural history of family and place](#)

by Terry Williams

The author of Leap describes her Mormon upbringing, juxtaposing these reminiscences with discussions of the flooding of a wildlife bird sanctuary and its effect on that ecosystem, and her family's legacy of cancer.

[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.

[Crying in H Mart](#)

by Michelle Zauner

The memoir explores Zauner's search for identity, her relationship with her Korean mother, and her beginnings as a musician. Key moments and emotions are constantly linked with food, which lies at the heart of Zauner's connection with her mother, her heritage, and her true self.