

Open Book Group
2025-26 Book List
Rev. December, 2025

August 2025 - discussion lead Kay Iwanski

Island by Aldous Huxley, 1962 (fiction)

The final novel from Aldous Huxley, Island is a provocative counterpoint to his worldwide classic *Brave New World*, in which a flourishing, ideal society located on a remote Pacific island attracts the envy of the outside world. In the novel Huxley transports us to the remote Pacific island of Pala, where an ideal society has flourished for 120 years. Inevitably, this island of bliss attracts the envy and enmity of the surrounding world. A conspiracy is underway to take over Pala, and events are set in motion when an agent of the conspirators, a newspaperman named Faranby, is shipwrecked there. What Faranby doesn't expect is how his time with the people of Pala will revolutionize all his values and--to his amazement--give him hope.

September 2025 – discussion lead Laura Nelke

Tip of the Iceberg: My 3,000-Mile Journey Around Wild Alaska, The Last Great American Frontier by Mark Adams, 2018 (non-fiction)

In the summer of 1899 at the height of the Gilded Age, railroad magnate Edward H. Harriman organized a voyage to Alaska. He converted a steamship into a luxury "floating university," and invited on board some of America's best artists, photographers, writers, and scientists. Included in the group were the anti-capitalist eco-prophet and 6-time Alaskan explorer John Muir and the naturalist C. Hart Merriam. The expedition culminated in 12 volumes of writings and photographs compiled by the expedition members and edited by Merriam--*The Harriman Alaska Series*. Mark Adams's book retraces this 1899 expedition and investigates how lessons learned in 1899 might relate to Alaska's current pressures in a changing world.

October 2025 - discussion lead Janet Wolfe

The Road to Wisdom: On Truth, Science, Faith and Trust by Francis Collins (nonfiction)

As the COVID-19 pandemic revealed, we have become not just a hyper-partisan society but also a deeply cynical one, distrustful of traditional sources of knowledge and wisdom. Francis Collins reminds us of the four core sources of judgement and clear thinking: truth, science, faith, and trust. Drawing on his work from the Human Genome Project and heading the National Institutes of Health, as well as on ethics, philosophy, and Christian theology, Collins makes a robust, thoughtful case for each of these sources—their reliability, and their limits.

November 2025 - discussion lead Kamie Buddemeier

Orbital: A Novel by Samantha Harvey (fiction)

A slender novel of epic power and the winner of the Booker Prize 2024, *Orbital* deftly snapshots one day in the lives of six women and men traveling through space. Selected for one of the last space station missions of its kind before the program is dismantled, these astronauts and cosmonauts—from America, Russia, Italy, Britain, and Japan—have left their lives behind to travel at a speed of over seventeen thousand miles an hour as the earth reels below. Most of all, we are with them as they behold and record their silent blue planet. Their experiences of sixteen sunrises and sunsets and the bright, blinking constellations of the galaxy are at once breathtakingly awesome and surprisingly intimate.

December 2025 - discussion lead Bridget O'Brien

The Island of Sea Women by Lisa See, 2020 (fiction)

Mi-ja and Young-sook, two girls living on the Korean island of Jeju, are best friends who come from very different backgrounds. When they are old enough, they begin working in the sea with their village's all-female diving collective, led by Young-sook's mother.

Despite their love for each other, Mi-ja and Young-sook find it impossible to ignore their differences. *The Island of Sea Women* takes place over many decades, beginning during a period of Japanese colonialism in the 1930s and 1940s, followed by World War II, the Korean War, through the era of cell phones and wet

suits for the women divers. Little do the two friends know that forces outside their control will push their friendship to the breaking point.

January 2026 - discussion lead Julie Horton

On the Brink of Everything: Grace, Creativity and Getting Old by Parker Palmer (non-fiction)

A soul-nourishing reflection on aging, legacy, and the wisdom of lived experience. Drawing on eight decades of life -- and his career as a writer, teacher, and activist -- Palmer explores the questions age raises and the promises it holds. "Old," he writes, "is just another word for nothing left to lose, a time to dive deep into life, not withdraw to the shallows." But this book is not for elders only. It was written to encourage adults of all ages to explore the way their lives are unfolding.

February 2026 – discussion lead Linda Hitchman

James: A Novel by Percival Everett (fiction).

PULITZER PRIZE WINNER • #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • NATIONAL BOOK AWARD WINNER • A brilliant, action-packed reimagining of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, told from the enslaved Jim's point of view. "When Jim overhears that he is about to be sold to a man in New Orleans, separated from his wife and daughter forever, he runs away until he can formulate a plan. Meanwhile, Huck has faked his own death to escape his violent father. As all readers of American literature know, thus begins the dangerous and transcendent journey by raft down the Mississippi River toward the elusive and unreliable promise of the Free States and beyond. ... this brilliant and tender novel radically illuminates Jim's agency, intelligence, and compassion as never before."

March 2026 – discussion lead Kristina Stone Kaiser

Secrets of the Talking Jaguar: Memoirs from the Living Heart of a Mayan Village by Martin Prechtel, 1999 (nonfiction)

Twenty-five years ago, a young musician and painter named Martin Prechtel wandered through the brilliant landscapes of Mexico and Guatemala. Arriving at Santiago Atitlan, a Tzutujil Mayan village on the breathtaking shores of Lake Atitlan, Prechtel met Nicolas Chiviliu Tacaxoy--perhaps the most famous shaman in Tzutujil history--who believed Prechtel was the new student he had asked the gods to provide. For the next thirteen years, Prechtel studied the ancient Tzutujil culture and became a village chief and a famous shaman in his own right. In *Secrets of the Talking Jaguar*, Prechtel brings to vivid life the sights, sounds, scents, and colors of Santiago Atitlan: its magical personalities, its beauty, its material poverty and spiritual richness, its eight-hundred-year-old rituals juxtaposed with quintessential small-town gossip.

April 2026 – discussion lead Gisele Berninghaus

Untamed by Glennon Doyle (non-fiction)

"For many years New York Times bestselling author Glennon Doyle denied her discontent. Then one day, at a conference, she glanced up at a woman and three words flooded her mind: There. She. Is. At first Glennon assumed these words came from on high but soon she realized they had come from within. This was the voice she had buried beneath decades of numbing addictions and social conditioning. Glennon decided to let go of the world's expectations of her and reclaim her true untamed self. Forceful and tender, *Untamed* is both an intimate memoir and a galvanizing wake-up call about what is possible when we step out of our cages and say: Here I am."

May – discussion lead Sandy Borman

New and Selected Poems- Volume Two by Mary Oliver(non-fiction)

Oliver's poems are very beautiful and very understandable. She's absolutely in love with creation, but her poetry is not of the usual "God made it and I love it" sort. Her vivid descriptions show a very personal and intentional relationship with the natural world. A keen observer, she sees much beyond the surface and deftly communicates themes without stating them obviously. Her poems are short and to the point, but she says so much, which, I believe, is one of the marks of a good poet.