

Open Book Group Selections for 2026-27 Year July 8, 2026

September 17, 2026 - led by Laura Nelke

A Pilgrimage to Eternity: From Canterbury to Rome in Search of a Faith by Timothy Egan

Timothy Egan is a Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award-winning author. This 2019 book takes the reader on a spiritual and physical journey with Egan as he makes the 1000-mile pilgrimage along the Via Francigena. In the aftermath of the death of his staunchly Catholic mother, Egan uses this pilgrimage as a means to explore his own Catholic faith...or, more precisely, to come to grips with his skepticism and possible lack of faith. The book blends memoir with travelogue, and factual knowledge is imparted with both wonder and humor.

October 15, 2026 – led by Chuck McCauley

Spitfires: The American Women Who Flew in the Face of Danger During World War II by Becky Aikman

The heart-pounding true story of the daring American women who piloted the world's most dangerous aircraft through the treacherous skies of Britain during World War II. Great Britain, desperately fighting for survival, would let anyone-even Americans, even women-transport warplanes. Thus, twenty-five daring young aviators bolted for England in 1942, becoming the first American women to command military aircraft. In a faraway land, these "spitfires" lived like women decades ahead of their time. Risking their lives in one of the deadliest jobs of the war, they ferried new, barely tested fighters and bombers to air bases and returned shot-up wrecks for repair, never knowing what might go wrong until they were high in the sky.

November 19, 2026 – led by Kamie Buddemeier

Wild Dark Shore by Charlotte McConaghy

Dominic Salt and his three children are caretakers of Shearwater, a tiny weather-lashed island that is home to the world's largest seed bank. As Shearwater risks being lost to rising sea levels, the island's researchers have fled, and only the Salts remain. Until, during the worst storm in living memory, a stranger washes ashore. The family nurse the woman, Rowan, back to strength, but it seems she isn't telling the whole truth about why she's there. And when Rowan stumbles upon sabotaged radios and a recently dug grave, she realizes that she's not the only one on the island with a secret. *Wild Dark Shore* is about the impossible choices we make to protect the people we love.

December 17, 2026 – led by Kay Iwanski

Tribe by Sebastian Junger

Tribe takes a critical look at post-traumatic stress disorder and the many challenges today's returning veterans face in modern society. There are ancient tribal human behaviors - loyalty, inter-reliance, cooperation-that flare up in communities during times of turmoil and suffering. These are the very same behaviors that typify good soldiering and foster a sense of belonging among troops. Junger shows us just how at odds the structure of modern society is with our tribal instincts, arguing that the difficulties many veterans face upon returning home from war do not stem entirely from the trauma they've suffered, but also from the individualist societies they must reintegrate into.

January 21, 2027 – led by Julie Horton

The Correspondent by Virginia Evans

The Correspondent is a gem of a novel about the power of finding solace in literature and connection with people we might never meet in person. Sybil Van Antwerp has throughout her life used letters to

make sense of the world and her place in it. Most mornings, around half past ten, Sybil sits down to write letters—to her brother, to her best friend, and to one person to whom she writes often yet never sends the letter. Sybil expects her world to go on as it always has—a mother, grandmother, wife, divorcee, distinguished lawyer, she has lived a very full life. But when letters from someone in her past force her to examine one of the most painful periods of her life, she realizes that the letter she has been writing over the years needs to be read and that she cannot move forward until she finds it in her heart to offer forgiveness.

February 18, 2027 – led by Linda Hitchman

Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt (suggested by Sharon Lavender)

An exploration of friendship, reckoning, and hope, tracing a widow's unlikely connection with a giant Pacific octopus....After Tova Sullivan's husband died, she began working the night shift at the Sowell Bay Aquarium, mopping floors, and tidying up. Keeping busy has always helped her cope, which she's been doing since her eighteen-year-old son, Erik, mysteriously vanished on a boat in Puget Sound over thirty years ago. Tova becomes acquainted with curmudgeonly Marcellus, a giant Pacific octopus living at the aquarium. He forms a remarkable friendship with Tova. Ever the detective, Marcellus deduces what happened the night Tova's son disappeared. And now Marcellus must use every trick his old invertebrate body can muster to unearth the truth for her before it's too late.

March 18, 2027 – led by Janet Wolfe

Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul: Celtic wisdom for reawakening to what our souls know and healing the world by John Philip Newell

John Philip Newell shares the long, hidden tradition of Celtic Christianity, explaining how this earth-based spirituality can help us rediscover the natural rhythms of life and deepen our spiritual connection with God, with each other, and with the earth. Newell introduces some of Celtic Christianity's leading practitioners. He is connected to the community on the Isle of Iona off the west coast of Scotland, a place that Janet finds very meaningful.

April 15, 2027– led by Bridget O'Brien

World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks, and Other Astonishments by

Aimee Nezhukumatathil

From beloved, award-winning poet Aimee Nezhukumatathil comes a debut work of nonfiction--a collection of essays about the natural world, and the way its inhabitants can teach, support, and inspire us. As a child, Nezhukumatathil called many places home: the grounds of a Kansas mental institution, where her Filipina mother was a doctor; the open skies and tall mountains of Arizona, and the chillier climes of western New York and Ohio. But no matter where she was transplanted--no matter how awkward the fit or forbidding the landscape--she was able to turn to our world's fierce and funny creatures for guidance.

May 20, 2027 – led by Janet Wolfe

The Second Mountain, by David Brooks

David Brooks explores the four commitments that define a life of meaning and purpose: to a spouse and family, to a vocation, to a philosophy or faith, and to a community. Our personal fulfillment depends on how well we choose and execute these commitments. Brooks looks at a range of people who have lived joyous, committed lives. This book is meant to help us all lead more meaningful lives but it's also a provocative social commentary. We live in a society, Brooks argues, that celebrates freedom, that tells us to be true to ourselves, at the expense of surrendering to a cause, rooting ourselves in a neighborhood, binding ourselves to others by social solidarity and love. We have taken individualism to the extreme—and in the process we have torn the social fabric in a thousand different ways. The path to repair is through making deeper commitments.

Other Suggested Reads

Here Comes the Sun by Bill McKibben

“...Tells the story of the sudden spike in power from the sun and wind—and the desperate fight of the fossil fuel industry and their politicians to hold this new power at bay. From the everyday citizens who installed solar panels equal to a third of Pakistan’s electric grid in a year to the world’s sixth-largest economy—California—nearly halving its use of natural gas in the last two years, Bill McKibben traces the arrival of plentiful, inexpensive solar energy. And he shows how solar power is more than just a path out of the climate crisis: it is a chance to reorder the world on saner and more humane grounds. You can’t hoard solar energy or hold it in reserves—it’s available to all.”

French Women Don’t Get Fat: The Secret of Eating for Pleasure by Mireille Guiliano

Internationally best-selling author Mireille Guiliano was for over 20 years the spokesperson for Champagne Veuve Clicquot as well as CEO of Clicquot, Inc., the US firm she helped found in 1984 and was its first employee. Her first book, French Women Don't Get Fat: The Secret of Eating for Pleasure, became a runaway best seller around the globe in 2005. She followed up this book in fall 2006 with French Women for All Seasons: A Year of Secrets, Recipes and Pleasure. In both, through her personal stories and illustrations, she espouses living life to the fullest by embracing quality, sensitivity, seasonality, and pleasure while maintaining a healthy equilibrium.

Freedom by Sebastian Junger

Throughout history, humans have been driven by the quest for two cherished ideals: community and freedom. The two don’t coexist easily. We value individuality and self-reliance and yet are utterly dependent on community for our most basic needs.

For much of a year, Junger and three friends walked the railroad lines of the East Coast. It was an experiment in personal autonomy, but also in interdependence. Dodging railroad cops, sleeping under bridges, cooking over fires, and drinking from creeks and rivers, the four men forged a unique reliance on one another.

Junger weaves his account of this journey together with primatology and boxing strategy, the history of labor strikes and Apache raiders, the role of women in resistance movements, and the brutal reality of life on the Pennsylvania frontier. Written in exquisite, razor-sharp prose, the result is a powerful examination of the primary desire that defines us.

Night magic: adventures among glowworms moon gardens, and other marvels of the dark by Leigh Anne Henion

New York Times bestselling nature writer Leigh Ann Henion makes the case for embracing night as a profoundly beautiful part of the world we inhabit. We are surrounded by animals that rise with the moon, gigantic moths, and nocturnal blooms that reveal themselves as light fades. She ventures into the dark alongside naturalists, biologists, primitive-skills experts, and others who’ve dedicated their lives to cultivating relationships with darkness and the creatures who depend on it.

Every page of this lyrical book feels like an opportunity to ask: How did I not know about this before? For example, we learn that there are thousands of firefly species on earth, each with flash patterns as unique as fingerprints—with one million tourists making pilgrimages to witness synchronous fireflies

every year. In this age of increasing artificial light, *Night Magic* is an invitation to focus on the biodiversity that surrounds us.

Dawn by Elie Wiesel

Most readers are familiar with Wiesel's non-fiction work *Night*; this fictional narrative is its sequel, written less than a year later. It may be a slim little volume, but it packs an ethical punch that is as relevant today as it was when it was published in 1960. This quote on the book jacket cuts to the heart Wiesel's subject: "An illuminating document...the plight of traditional Jewish morality confronted with the modern world of power politics and of murder." (Maxwell Geismar) You can read this book in a few hours, but the questions that are raised will haunt you long after you have finished reading.

Here One Moment by Liane Moriarty

From Goodreads: Aside from a delay, there will be no problems. The flight will be smooth; it will land safely. Everyone who gets on the plane will get off. But almost all of them will be forever changed. Because on this ordinary, short, domestic flight, something extraordinary happens. People learn how and when they are going to die. For some, their death is far in the future—age 103! —and they laugh. But for six passengers, their predicted deaths are not far away at all.

Laura's notes: Moriarty's book might be considered a lighter offering, intended to add a bit of variety and balance to our book list. Entertaining as this imaginative novel is, however, its author raises serious issues: determinism vs. free will; certainty vs. uncertainty; human nature's desire to "know," and the problems that come from "knowing too much." Death and the need to grapple with grief are all part of the human condition, and in this, Moriarty's 10th novel, it's all on the table. I'm thinking there is fodder here for some lively discussion! Additionally, if you have ever been stuck on the tarmac with a planeload of humanity, you'll possibly recognize some of the characters that are introduced in the opening pages. What would you do if someone told you the exact date and cause of your own death? Would you change your life? Would you live differently? What is 'fate' anyway?

This is Not About Us by Allegra Goodman

When their beloved sister passes away, Sylvia and Helen Rubinstein are unmoored. A misunderstanding about apple cake turns into a decade of stubborn silence.

Master storyteller Allegra Goodman—whose prior collection was heralded as "one of the most astute and engaging books about American family life" (*The Boston Globe*)—returns to the form and subject that endeared her to legions of readers. Sharply observed and laced with humor, *This Is Not About Us* is a story of growing up and growing old, the weight of parental expectations, and the complex connection between sisters—a big-hearted book about the love that binds a family across generations.

This is Happiness by Niall Williams

Change is coming to Faha, a small Irish parish that hasn't changed in a thousand years.

For one thing, the rain is stopping. Nobody remembers when it started; rain on the western seaboard is a condition of living. But now – just as Father Coffey proclaims the coming of the electricity – the rain clouds are lifting. Seventeen-year-old Noel Crowe is idling in the unexpected sunshine when Christy makes his first entrance into Faha, bringing secrets he needs to atone for. Though he can't explain it, Noel knows right then: something has changed.

Harking back to a simpler time, *This Is Happiness* is a tender portrait of a community – its idiosyncrasies and traditions, its paradoxes and kindnesses, its failures and triumphs – and a coming-of-age tale like no other. Luminous and lyrical yet anchored by roots running deep into the earthy and everyday, it is about the power of stories: their invisible currents that run through all we do, writing and rewriting us, and the transforming light that they throw onto our world.

What We Can Know by Ian McEwan

A quest, a literary thriller, and a love story, *What We Can Know* spans the past, present and future to ask profound questions about who we are and where we are going.

2014: A great poem is read aloud and never heard again. For generations, people speculate about its message, but no copy has yet been found.

2119: The lowlands of the UK have been submerged by rising seas. Those who survive are haunted by the richness of the world that has been lost.

Tom Metcalfe, a scholar at the University of the South Downs, part of Britain's remaining archipelagos, pores over the archives of the early twenty-first century, captivated by the freedoms and possibilities of human life at its zenith. When he stumbles across a clue that may lead to the great lost poem, revelations of entangled love and a brutal crime emerge.

What We Can Know is a masterpiece that reclaims the present from our sense of looming catastrophe and imagines a future world where all is not quite lost.