# TALK

CATALOG

**TALK ABOUT LITERATURE IN KANSAS**

**AVAILABLE SUMMER 2023**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

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# TALK

## TALK ABOUT LITERATURE IN KANSAS

**Welcome to Talk About Literature in Kansas (TALK), a Humanities Kansas program for Kansans who love to read and discuss good books. Literature is a way for us to consider diverse stories, seek connections with one another across time and place, and spark ideas that will shape a future worthy of the generations of Kansans to come.**

### HOW TALK WORKS:

Each TALK series is built around a theme. The books in each series are selected for reader appeal, literary quality, and relevance to expanding the ideas of the theme. The local sponsor—a public library, historical society, senior center, or other nonprofit group—selects the series to offer to the community. Humanities Kansas provides copies of the books in a series, book discussion leaders, and special publicity materials to the sponsoring group free of charge.

### HOSTING A TALK BOOK DISCUSSION:

Local sponsors are encouraged to use the TALK program to create dynamic book discussions in your communities. Where, when, and how often is you meet is up to you! The most popular TALK model is to host book discussions monthly for three months. Participants check out and read the books in advance of the discussions. Then, during each book discussion event, HK's discussion leader will provide informal comments, background information about the author and the book, and ask thoughtful questions to start the conversations among participants. A TALK event usually lasts between 60 to 90 minutes—or longer when the discussion is particularly lively!

### WHO CAN HOST A TALK BOOK DISCUSSION?

TALK book discussions are available to Kansas nonprofits and are intended for adult, out-of-school audiences.

# GET STARTED

## HOW TO CREATE A TALK BOOK DISCUSSION IN YOUR COMMUNITY:

- Review the catalog and select a TALK series (up to 3 books) and discussion leader(s).
- Reserve the TALK books from the Northwest Kansas Library System. Visit **nwkls.org/talk-books** to reserve your books.
- Use the directory at the end of the catalog to contact discussion leader(s) and confirm time, date, and location.
- Apply online at humanitieskansas.org for funding support to bring the discussion leader(s) to your community.
- Publicize your event. Download a press release, discussion leader bios, and Humanities Kansas's logo poster.
- Tell us how it went. After the event, fill out an evaluation.
- Some books are labeled LP (Large Print), DB (Digital Talking Book), BR (Digital Braille), DBSP (Spanish Digital Talking Book), and DBFR (French Digital Talking Book). These titles are available to individuals via the State Library of Kansas, Talking Books Service. Kansans with a visual or physical impairment that keeps them from reading traditional print materials should contact Kansas Talking Books at 1-800-362- 0699 or KTB@ks.gov to learn more.

**CONTACT:** Abigail Kaup, Program Officer
785-357-0359 or abigail@humanitieskansas.org

The opinions expressed by the discussion leaders or authors do not necessarily reflect those of Humanities Kansas.

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# African Experiences of Migration

**Immigrants from Africa have settled into Kansas's communities over the past several decades, seeking escape from social conflict, pursuing educational opportunities, or simply hoping for a better quality of life. Like immigrants who came before them, they often suffer in their struggles to adjust to differences in language, culture, and some of the stereotypes they hold of Americans, as well as the stereotypes through which they are perceived. The books in this series provide intimate portraits of African immigrants' efforts to understand what it takes to fit into American culture, and how to preserve their own cultural values in the process. Perhaps most insightful, however, is the extent to which these stories illuminate what it means to be American in a place where nearly all of us have come from somewhere else.**

***Open City: A Novel*** **by Teju Cole (2011) DB, BR**
In the streets of Manhattan, a young Nigerian doctor named Julius wanders, reflecting on his relationships, his recent breakup with his girlfriend, his present, his past, meeting people from different cultures during his journey from Brussels, and back to the Nigeria of his youth.

***Brooklyn Heights*** **by Miral al-Tahawy (2010)**
The story of Hind and her eight-year-old son, who have arrived in New York to start a new life, finds the two of them drawing parallels between their new urban community and memories of the Bedouin village where Hind was raised. Set in New York's Brooklyn Heights, this novel unfolds the relationship between mother and son struggling in a new culture.

***The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*** **by Dinaw Mengestu (2007) DB, BR**
In 1990, Sepha Stephanos fled the Ethiopian revolution. Now he finds himself running a grocery store in a poor African American neighborhood in Washington, DC. Told in a haunting and powerful first-person narrative that casts the streets of DC and Addis Ababa through Sepha's eyes, this novel illuminates what it means to lose a family and country—and what it takes to create a new home.

***A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*** **by Ishmael Beah (2007) DB, BR**
Ishmael Beah's life in war-torn Sierra Leone did not prepare him for his move to the United States in 1998, where he finished his last two years of high school at the United Nations International School in New York. He went on to earn a degree in political science from Oberlin College and become a member of the Human Rights Watch Children's Division Advisory Committee. His personal experiences now inform his work in addressing children's conditions in countries ravaged by war throughout the world.

***What Is the What*** **by Dave Eggers (2006) DB**
This moving novel traces the story of Valentino Achak Deng, one of thousands of Lost Boys of Sudan, who fled on foot to escape the death squads of militias overtaking their villages. They walked hundreds of miles, evading government bombers, wild animals, and environmental dangers to reach freedom. Many of these boys, like Valentino, were settled in the United States, where new challenges tried their resilience.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Annette Billings, Lori Brack, Rachel Goossen, Rosemary Kolich, Margy Stewart, Tim Bascom**

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# After the Fact

**Some events in our lives are so pivotal that once they occur everything changes. The Great Depression, World War II, and 9/11 represent large-scale cultural events, while marriage, job loss, and major illness serve as more intimate examples. This series is about the changes that happen during and after major traumas. The books in this series take on the topics of war, illness, and murder. Each author depicts the transformations shaped by the main characters due to a variety of stressors. How does each character handle change?**

***The Things They Carried*** **by Tim O'Brian (1990) DB, BR, LP**

Written nearly 30 years ago about his experiences in the Vietnam War, O'Brian's book still resonates with readers young and old. In fact, some critics refer to this prize-winning work that defies genres as the best book ever written about war. As O'Brien has stated, "stories are for joining the past and the present," and that is exactly what this book does. The work served as a catharsis for the author and his memories of Vietnam. He begins the work with the literal weight of the objects in the soldiers' packs—steel helmets five pounds, letters four ounces, .45 caliber pistol 2.9 pounds, etc. Interviewed for the book's 20th anniversary in 2010, O'Brien remembered, "I carry the memories of the ghosts of a place called Vietnam, the people of Vietnam, my fellow soldiers. . .I carry the weight of responsibility and a sense of abiding guilt."

***Station Eleven*** **by Emily St. John Mandel (2014) DB, BR, LP**

This fascinating work depicts the lives of characters after a flu pandemic that decimates 99% of the world's population. Set 20 years after the fact, small groups of people live in abandoned gas stations (the fossil fuel economy no longer exists) and abandoned fast food restaurants such as Wendy's. Readers meet Kirsten, an actress with the traveling symphony that tours the upper peninsula of Michigan performing Shakespeare (because audiences prefer it to more modern plays). The novel examines a post-apocalyptic world consisting of "ferals," starvation, and loneliness through themes of nostalgia, memory, and art. Mandel weaves together this cast of characters with an air of mystery and suspense that propels the reader forward wanting to learn more.

***The Hate U Give*** **by Angie Thomas (2017) DB, BR, LP, DBSP**

This young adult novel revolves around the aftermath of the murder of a young Black teenager by a police officer during a traffic stop. The story is told through the eyes of Starr, the sole witness to the murder. Prior to the shooting, Starr lived in two worlds kept strictly separate—one of her majority white private school and the second of her majority Black neighborhood. The book explores how unstable the boundary between these two worlds is. As the Los Angeles Review of Books notes, this is a "powerful novel that strikes to the heart of contemporary race relations in the United States."

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Lisa Moritz, Lori Brack, Miranda Ericsson, Randee Baty, Marilyn Klaus, Matt Copeland**

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# Between Fences

**"Good fences make good neighbors," Robert Frost famously declared in his poem "Mending Wall," but not all fences do. In the same poem, Frost notes nature's own resistance to man-made boundaries: "Something there is that doesn't love a wall." Fences mark our territory, define our boundaries, limit our movement, and convey our sense of property. We define ourselves and our space with fence. Metaphorically, fences can mark different states of being—ins and outs, the included and excluded, the sacred and taboo, and even life and death.**

***Farewell to Manzanar*** **by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston (1973) DB, BR**
In this memoir, Houston recalls life in the camp from a child's point of view, from dining to schooling to cultivating the land, in addition to recounting her reentry into American life and her return to Manzanar in 1972.

***Fences*** **by August Wilson (1985) DB**
For Troy, an old baseball player, fences mark the boundary for a home run yet also mark the racial restrictions that kept Troy from the big leagues and demarcate Troy's struggle with his own mortality.

***The Tortilla Curtain*** **by T. C. Boyle (1995) DB**
Boyle juxtaposes two Los Angeles couple's lives: one of privilege; the other of illegal immigration. Boyle's plot brings the two families into tragic collision, exposing issues of class divides, problems of illegal Mexican immigration, and environmental degradation.

***The Wire-Cutters*** **by Mollie E. Moore Davis (1899) DB**
Set during the 1880s Texas Wire-Cutting War, when fencing off the open plains set smallholders against the rich large-tract owners, this novel has all the trappings of a classic Western: cowboys, duels, and outlaws framed against the canvas of the struggle to survive on the frontier.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Sheena Hernandez, Marilyn Klaus, Deborah Peterson, Carmaletta Williams, Trish Reeves, Anne Hawkins, Annette Billings, Sara Tucker, Dan Eells, Kevin Rabas**

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# Beyond the Border: Latino Immigration Experiences

**Latino immigration narratives are essential to the entire multicultural landscape of American literature. Although no single text tells the whole story of immigration, the books in this series center around key themes: the ways immigrants see themselves, their journeys, and their communities left behind; generational conflicts between parents and their teens in Latino families; and the power to (re)define their fluid identities amidst border politics and the global economy.**

***Antonio's Gun and Delfino's Dream: True Tales of Mexican Migration*** **by Sam Quinones (2007)**
Quinones delivers nine astounding pieces of narrative journalism that situate individual migrant experiences within a broader social, political, cultural, and economic context. One of the most powerful stories follows a soccer season in Garden City, Kansas. The development of soccer is "a metaphor for Mexican immigrants' standing in town." It illustrates both the challenges high school immigrant students face in their communities and also the ways in which the meat-packing industry job prevents social mobility for second generations of Mexican youth.

***The House of Broken Angels*** **by Luis Alberto Urrea (2018) DB**
In a novel overflowing with joy, sorrow, and humor, Urrea skillfully weaves the voices of four generations of a Mexican American family caught in border politics. Urrea unveils the stories of an exuberant cast of characters, from their move to southern California after the Mexican Revolution in 1910, the great wave of deportation of 1932 that took them back to Mexico, and their current lives in San Diego and Seattle.

***I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*** **by Erika L. Sánchez (2017) DB, DBSP**
Julia is an irreverent young daughter of Mexican immigrants who aspires to become a writer. She refuses to have a quinceañera and to stay at home after completing high school. As she struggles to break free of her parents' expectations, she also tries to understand her parents' migration experience: their journey and border crossing, their sacrifices, and their status as undocumented immigrants. In this *New York Times* bestseller and National Book Awards finalist, Sanchez also questions the stigma associated with mental health conditions, raises awareness about depression, and addresses the issue of suicide among young Latinas.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Gene Chávez, Nic Shump, Deborah Peterson, Marilyn Klaus, Dennis Etzel Jr., Lisa Moritz, Rosemary Kolich, Kevin Rabas, Rachel Goossen, Kim Stanley, Miranda Ericsson**

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# Civil Rights Revisited

**The books in this series offer a look at Civil Rights from the launch pad of the 21st century. John Lewis's graphic novel memoir reveals the power of pictures and words in his intimate retelling of pivotal events of the Civil Rights Movement and how these actions can be directly linked to the election of this country's first African American president. Coates, Rankine, and Alexander forefront the injustices that still exist through systemic racism, microaggressions, or outright hostility. Themes of the body, citizenship, and dreams—and dreams deferred, to invoke Langston Hughes—thread all these volumes together.**

***March* by John Lewis (2013) DB, LP**

Civil Rights icon and United States Congressman John Lewis wrote this series of three graphic novels based on his experiences in the Civil Rights Movement during the early 1960s. A 1958 comic about Martin Luther King Jr. inspired him as a young man growing up in rural Alabama, and he sought to instill that same sense of pride in a new generation of youth. The illustrations and firsthand account bring this period to life.

**Book 1**

This volume begins the day of the inauguration of Barack Obama, and through a series of flashbacks, Lewis recalls the impact of Martin Luther King Jr. and the philosophy of nonviolence that characterized the Civil Rights Movement.

**Book 2**

Book 2 follows Lewis's rise within SNCC and the growing influence of the organization on the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. We witness the struggles of the 1961 Freedom Riders, the voter registration campaign in Mississippi, and the 1963 March on Washington. As Lewis states, "Human dignity is the most important thing in my life."

**Book 3**

The final volume in the trilogy focuses on the Selma to Montgomery march, which led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The longest of the three volumes, it covers the death of the three girls in the Birmingham church bombing and Freedom Summer in Mississippi.

***Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) DB, BR, LP, DBSP**

Author Ta-Nehisi Coates won the National Book Award for this searingly honest reflection on contemporary race relations in the United States. Written as a letter to his teenage son, this slim volume provokes a myriad of emotions. Part autobiography, part history lesson, Coates forces the reader to grapple with the meaning of being American.

***Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine (2014) DB, BR, LP**

This poetic work crosses boundaries in its sojourn into American race relations in the 21st century. Rankine turns a critical eye to everything from tennis superstar Serena Williams to everyday microaggressions on the subway. As one of the blurbs on the back of her book reads, "[Citizen] lovingly embraces and articulates the trauma and contradictions of what happens when one person is spat upon and another person spits."

***The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander (2010) DB, LP, DBSP**

Author Michelle Alexander meticulously examines the role of race in the American judicial system. In a powerful tour de force, she steps back, looks at the big picture, and concludes that the prison industrial complex picks up where slavery and Jim Crow segregation left off.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Gene Chávez, John Edgar Tidwell, Nic Shump, Marilyn Klaus, Margy Stewart, Carmaletta Williams**

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# The Civil War

**After commemorating the Civil War's sesquicentennial from 2011–2015, the reasons to continue exploring its impact are clear: because no political dispute came closer to destroying the United States, but the work is not over. The war left deep scars, and its legacy remains unresolved. Contemporary disputes—over the display of Confederate flags and monuments, over Southern politicians returning to the discourse of "state's rights" that had informed secession, over the continued struggle of African Americans to claim a full share of political rights and economic power in America, even over what to call this war that divided America—all reflect the continuing legacy of the Civil War on the contemporary American scene.**

***A Diary from Dixie* by Mary Boykin Chesnut (1905/2006)**
Mary Chesnut (1823-1886) was a woman of the Southern plantation elite, well connected, and passionately committed to the Confederacy's losing cause. Through the course of the war, she worked in hospitals and witnessed the social costs of the Civil War and the slow destruction of her way of life.

***March* by Geraldine Brooks (2005) DB**
The March of Brooks's title is not Sherman's, but Alcott's. In Louisa May Alcott's classic *Little Women*, the father of the girls of the March family is absent for much of the novel, serving as a chaplain for Union forces during the Civil War. Brooks's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel reimagines the absent March as an abolitionist with utopian inclinations, testing his ideological commitments in the theater of war.

***The March* by E.L. Doctorow (2005) DB, BR**
General William Tecumseh Sherman's famous March, the rapacious scorched earth tromping of Union forces across Georgia and the Carolinas, seemed designed to prove his slogan that "war is hell." Doctorow in this novel brings to bear a perspective that blends panoramic overview with local experience, freely mixing fictional creations with historical figures.

***The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane (1895/2004) DB, BR**
For Henry Fleming, the protagonist of Crane's classic Civil War novel, the fundamental contrast between his anticipation of war and his experience of battle frames the hero's growing consciousness of the realities of war. That new consciousness brings into question the hero's initial idealized quest for a "red badge of courage," the wound that proves his manhood.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Deborah Peterson, Linda Lewis, Trish Reeves, Margy Stewart, Thomas Prasch, Jane Holwerda, Sara Jane Richter**

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# Community: The Way We Live

**The quest for community has taken many forms in the history of the United States, the quintessential nation of the individual. Today we worry about the erosion of community as growing incivility, ethnic diversity, and fear of crime seem to weaken the ties that bind our towns and neighborhoods. This series explores some of the many ways we live together, from rural New Mexico and Alabama to our aging cities. Neighbors who've known each other all their lives and lonely folks slipping through the cracks of society all have something to teach us about how to depend on one another—about our need for support, for tolerance, for forgiveness.**

***Bailey's Cafe*** **by Gloria Naylor (1992) DB**
No one comes to Bailey's Cafe for the food—they're drawn by the grace and magic that attracts souls like alcoholic Sadie; sweet Esther, who accepts only roses for her "services"; and Mariam, the Ethiopian child who may be the bearer of a miracle.

***Mama Day*** **by Gloria Naylor (1988) DB, BR**
On the Georgia sea island of Willow Springs, people still use only herbal medicine and honor ancestors who came over as slaves. Matriarch Mama Day, who can call up lightning storms and see secrets in her dreams, tests her powers when her great-niece, a stubbornly emancipated woman, finds her life and soul in danger from the island's darker forces.

***Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe*** **by Fannie Flagg (1987) DB**
This endearing novel travels from the 1980s back to the 1930s, when Idgie and Ruth's Alabama cafe offered good barbecue, love, laughter, and even an occasional murder.

***The Milagro Beanfield War*** **by John Nichols (1974) DB**
When feisty Joe Mondragon decides to irrigate his bean crop with "stolen" water, he drags the neighbors in his New Mexico village into a hilarious battle to save their community.

***Snow Falling on Cedars*** **by David Guterson (1994) DB, BR**
A fisherman drowns and a Japanese American is charged with his murder, forcing the island residents of San Piedro to come to terms with their past, including the exile of local Japanese families during World War II.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Anne Hawkins, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, John Edgar Tidwell, Rachel Goossen, Trish Reeves, Carmaletta Williams**

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# Dearly Beloved

**Society admonishes us to live now, be in the moment, don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today. This conveniently allows us not to think about our own end. Death and dying are uncomfortable topics. The three volumes in this series take on this taboo subject from a variety of perspectives. In *Being Mortal* Dr. Atul Gawande looks at aging from a medical point of view and explores how the profession has dealt with death incorrectly. Roz Chast adds whimsy and humor in her illustrated memoir based on her experiences dealing with the decline of her parents. Finally, author Richard Wagamese offers a fictional story of a father trying to make amends before he dies.**

***Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*** **by Atul Gawande (2014) DB, LP**
Our culture idealizes youth. People are so busy trying to look, act, or feel younger that we ignore the fact of our aging. *Being Mortal* offers a brutally honest truth: We will all someday die. Dr. Gawande writes compassionately and engagingly about the sensitive topic of death and dying. He argues that our medicalization of aging and dying merely prolongs life without regard to whether or not it is enjoyable.

***Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?*** **by Roz Chast (2014) DB, LP**
Chast's memoir discusses the emotional struggles of caring for aging parents without shying away from the gritty reality. How and when to help? How much, how often? When to downsize, what to do with all the stuff? How will the extended care be paid for? She takes on this tough topic in a lighthearted manner and in an unconventional way—through drawing.

***Medicine Walk*** **by Richard Wagamese (2014) LP, DB**
"So far it's all been stories," remarks Franklin Starlight. "It's all we are in the end, our stories," replies his companion. Wagamese, widely considered one of Canada's best novelists, writes about redemption, reconciliation, and the healing process in this rich novel filled with lush landscape. Sixteen-year-old Franklin agrees to take his estranged father to the back country of British Columbia to die the "warrior way" and along the way receives the stories his father must tell.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Annette Billings, Lori Brack, Rachel Goossen, Rosemary Kolich, Margy Stewart**

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# Entangled World

**Globalization, typically considered in economic terms, has sparked cultural collisions and ignited new multicultural identities. Although these cultural exchanges are as old as human history, patterns of globalization have accelerated dramatically over the past century. Whereas new forms of trade and exchange of ideas have elevated living standards, wars and ethnic clashes have dislocated peoples and remapped the world. To all this, literature has responded, producing a range of works that investigate the complex interactions of people and cultures in our increasingly entangled world.**

***Bel Canto* by Anne Patchett (2001) DB, BR**
An American opera singer, a Japanese industrialist, a French diplomat with skills in the kitchen, and a translator who falls in love with a Latin American terrorist are taken hostage by revolutionary terrorists in an unnamed Latin American embassy. Low comedy and high suspense, romance and tragedy blend in Patchett's Orange Prize-winning novel, inspired by the actual seizure of the Japanese ambassador's residence in Peru by Tupac Amaru guerillas in 1996.

***People of the Book* by Geraldine Brooks (2007) DB, BR, DBSP**
Book restorer Hannah Heath's project, the 500-year-old illuminated Sarajevo Haggedeh manuscript, is a repository of tragic episodes throughout human history: As a friend tells her, "this book has survived the same disaster over and over again," referring to "this fear, this hate, this need to demonize 'the other.'" As Heath unpacks the clues in the book that illuminate its history—an insect wing, a wine stain, a missing silver clasp—her life in Sarajevo at the end of the fratricidal Bosnian war enriches her own perspectives on humankind's potential for violence and redemption.

***Anil's Ghost* by Michael Ondaatje (2000) DB, BR**
Canadian novelist Michael Ondaatje explores his own Sri Lankan roots in his fourth novel, limning the violence of the conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan state. Anil has fled her increasingly violent homeland to train in America as a forensic archaeologist. She comes to Sri Lanka on a UN mission after work in the killing fields of Guatemala's "dirty war." She is teamed with local archaeologist Sarath, whose Buddhist perspective and murky political connections balance her Western perspective on events.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Dennis Etzel Jr., Erin Pouppirt, Joanne Janssen, Kim Stanley, Lisa Moritz, Tim Bascom, Margy Stewart, Thomas Prasch**

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# The Exile's Place

**The exile's place is a site of construction: Old ideas, foodways, religious beliefs, language, and habits are used to build a new life in a place newly settled. This place is always also a site of contest, of struggles with residents already there who might reject the newcomer's religion or skin color or anything else that differs from the new land's norm. What drives the exile to this new place colors both the memories of the land left behind and the perspectives on the new homeland. The exile straddles frontiers; finding a balance is always a question, always a negotiation.**

***The Lazarus Project*** **by Aleksandar Hemon (2008) DB**
Bosnian Vladimir Brik is caught in exile in Chicago by the wars that broke up Yugoslavia. Obsessed with Lazarus Averbach, an immigrant who had fled Moldavian pogroms in the early 1900s only to be gunned down by Chicago police as a presumed anarchist, Brik returns to Eastern Europe to explore the roots of the earlier tragedy. The parallels illuminate the recurrent motifs of exile and the sufferings of Central Europeans through the bloody history of the 20th century.

***The Namesake*** **by Jhumpa Lahiri (2003) DB, BR DBSP**
This story of the Ganguli family centers on Gogol, the eldest son, and highlights the different ways in which his parents, first-generation immigrants, and Gogol's generation, American-born children of immigrants, interact with India as a place, a culture, and an ethnic identity, and how they work to shape these identities within the New World.

***Things I've Been Silent About*** **by Azar Nafisi (2008) DB**
Iranian exile Azar Nafisi recognizes that "the ease with which all that you call home, all that gives you an identity, a sense of self and belonging, can be taken away from you." Her memoir covers both her increasing alienation from the theocratic state in Iran and her complex relationships with her mother, whose "coffee hours" with other women offered a refuge from an increasingly controlled public sphere, and her father, who kept his own secret diary.

***Brick Lane*** **by Monica Ali (2003) DB**
Nazneen is an 18-year-old Bangladeshi brought to Britain in an arranged marriage with almost no preparation—the only words she knows in English are "sorry" and "thank you." She must make a life with her much older, comically incompetent husband and survive her impoverished and violent surroundings in the Brick Lane territory of East London that has been the refuge for waves of immigrants from the 18th century onward.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Joanne Janssen, Trish Reeves, Marilyn Klaus, Thomas Prasch**

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# Faith in Fiction: World Faiths

**Do our lives unfold at random, or do the things that happen to us have a larger purpose? Do love and compassion matter in a world that often lacks both? Questions such as these have led people in every society, throughout history, to seek answers in the spiritual realm. In this series, readers will encounter characters whose lives are shaped by faith—both in the formal sense of an inherited religious tradition, and in their personal struggles with questions of doubt and belief, fate and free will, forgiveness and redemption.**

***Distant View of a Minaret and Other Stories*** **by Alifa Rifaat (Islam) (1983)**
The private, hidden world of women in Egypt unfolds in 15 tales—a disloyal husband, a pregnant daughter, a naive wife, an aging spinster—all permeated by the call of the mosque and the daily rituals of prayer.

***Go Tell It on the Mountain*** **by James Baldwin (Christianity) (1953) DB, BR**
John is supposed to become a preacher like his father, Gabriel, but at 14 he is tempted to reject the strict faith of a family whose buried secrets and struggles gradually unfold.

***Harp of Burma*** **by Michio Takeyama (Buddhism) (1967)**
When a carefree, harp-playing Japanese soldier is wounded in Burma at the close of World War II, he is saved by a Buddhist priest and undergoes a conversion that takes him and his country on the road to peace.

***Nectar in a Sieve*** **by Kamala Markandaya (Hinduism) (1954) DB**
A simple peasant woman in India never loses her faith in life or her love for her family, even as she endures the uncertainties of farming, poverty, and changing times.

***The Romance Reader*** **by Pearl Abraham (Judaism) (1995) DB**
The daughter of a Hasidic rabbi, Rachel is expected to care for her siblings, dress modestly, and submit to an arranged marriage. But there's a more enticing world in the pages of her forbidden paperback books.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Deborah Peterson, Nic Shump, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Carmaletta Williams, Lisa Moritz, Anne Hawkins, Sara Tucker, Jane Holwerda, Rosemary Kolich, Kevin Rabas, Rachel Goossen, Kim Stanley, Thomas Prasch, Sanda Wiechert**

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# Family Land (NEW)

**Family stories are rooted in place. Home is not only where we live, but the homestead our ancestors tamed, a site of discovery, love, and loss for generations. Sometimes this home is in the past, a place we were not able to hold on to, or a place we had to flee. The stories in this series make direct connections to how people are shaped and sometimes burdened by their connection to land. When the land has made us into who we are today, these authors also look to how we have also shaped the land in return.**

***Running Out: In Search of Water on the High Plains*** **by Lucas Bessire (2021) DB**
Guided by his grandmother Fern's diaries, author Lucas Bessire takes the long view as he explores the possible future of the endangered Ogallala Aquifer. The aquifer has enabled a way of life in western Kansas that defines us as a people, but its imminent depletion will soon change the environmental and cultural landscape when the water runs out. Bessire returns to his family's farm in Grant County to reconnect with his father, and together they attend groundwater management district meetings, reconnect with old friends and fellow farmers, and search for answers to the pending water crisis.

***The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature*** **by J. Drew Lanham (2016) DB, BR**
Growing up in Edgefield County, South Carolina, young Drew Lanham fell in love with the rich natural world around him. "There are still priceless places where nature hangs on by tooth, talon, and tendril." The Lanham "Home Place" held three worlds: his family's 1970s ranch house; his Mamatha's ramshackle, tin-roofed Depression-era Southern home; and a world of wildlife in between. Exploring this fecundity of plants and animals as he learned both his parents' pragmatic and his grandmother's old-fashioned ways, Lanham developed a keen love for the more-than-human world.

***Four Winds*** **by Kristin Hannah (2021) DB, DBSP**
"My land tells its story if you listen. The story of our family." It's 1934, and Elsa Martinelli is in a desperate fight to save her family and their farm. A place that was once abundant has now been decimated by drought. Like others across the Great Plains, Elsa must fight to keep her children alive, but she also must ask herself, who will she be if she leaves the land she loves?

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Rachel Goossen, Margy Stewart, Deborah Peterson, Carmaletta Williams, Trish Reeves, Anne Hawkins, Dan Eells, Tim Bascom, Rachel Goossen, Erin Pouppirt, Kim Stanley, Miranda Ericsson, Nic Shump, Sara Jane Richter**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Food for Thought

**Food is more than sustenance. Cooking and serving food have always been important emotionally. Old and new generations learn family recipes and share family traditions. Communities come together at events and eating places to get to know one another and to build common identities. At the same time, conflict can appear wherever people raise, cook, or eat food. The books in this series were shaped by both the power and the conflicts surrounding the way we eat.**

***Empire Falls*** **by Richard Russo (2001) DB**
Richard Russo offers a different relationship between food and human interaction. Miles Roby, runs the local diner, the Empire Grill. "His daily parade of customers provides him with ample evidence of both the restrictions and forced intimacy of small-town life."

***Epitaph for a Peach*** **by David Mas Masumoto (1995) BR**
Masumoto details his struggle to survive the rigors of modern-day grocery cold storage and distribution timetables while addressing the importance of family and learning to work with, rather than against, nature.

***Miriam's Kitchen*** **by Elizabeth Ehrlich (1997) DB**
Erhlich tells how and why, as the child of mostly secular Jewish parents, she came to reclaim the kosher cooking ways of her Holocaust-survivor mother-in-law, Miriam. Erhlich writes gently and with humor, taking time to talk about the small details of how things are done to "keep kosher."

***Secrets of the Tsil Café*** **by Thomas Fox Averill (2001)**
Wes Hingler's parents had one marriage, but two kitchens—his father's Native American Tsil Café, and his mother's European-heritage catering business. Wes's search for his cooking style, and thus his own adult identity, comes interwoven with a number of memorable characters, family crises and secrets, and whole-world recipes.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Dan Eells, Dennis Etzel Jr., Sheena Hernandez, Lisa Moritz, Sara Tucker, Kevin Rabas, Erin Pouppirt, Thomas Prasch**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Friends and Neighbors

**"Of all possessions a friend is the most precious," stated Greek historian, Herodotus. From Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn to Jo and Laurie, literature is filled with stories of friendships. This series is about forging friendships in unexpected places and the changes these relationships bring to our lives.**

***A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman (2012) DB, BR, LP**
In Ove, author Fredrik Backman creates a loveable curmudgeon. Ove, a recent widower and forced retiree, likes things to be orderly and fair. He spends his days as self-appointed neighborhood watch overlord in his Swedish housing complex making sure bicycles remain in designated areas and sheds are securely locked. He's the type of guy who goes out of his way to ensure that a tailgating Mercedes misses out on a prime parking space near the mall by physically blocking the space with his Saab—the only brand of car that people should drive. New neighbors disrupt his world, beginning with knocking over his mailbox, driving over his flowerbed, and bringing him dinner as an apology.

***All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr (2014) DB, BR, DBSP**
This book follows the lives of Marie-Laure Leblanc, a French girl who is visually impaired eventually tasked with looking after the legendary diamond called the Sea of Flames, and Werner Pfenning, an orphan German boy extremely gifted in mathematics and technological knowledge. Their paths collide in occupied France as they both try to survive and endure the devastation of World War II.

***The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* by Dinaw Mengestu (2007) DB, BR, LP**
Ethiopian shopkeeper Sepha Stephanos states, "I was hit with the sudden terrible and frightening realization that everything I cared for and loved was either lost or living on without me seven thousand miles away, and that what I had here was not a life, but a poorly constructed substitution made up of one uncle, two friends, a grim store, and a cheap apartment." This novel follows Stephanos as he chronicles his life in the rapidly gentrifying Washington, D.C., neighborhood of Logan Circle and his path there from war-torn Ethiopia as a young man in the 1970s. The story is about the pain of exile, a changing neighborhood, and friendships forged and lost. Though his friendship with two other African immigrants helps ease his transition, it is the companionship of Judith and her biracial 11-year-old daughter, Naomi, that transform his world into something hopeful.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Dennis Etzel Jr., Lisa Moritz, Miranda Ericsson, Rachel Goossen, Randee Baty, Tim Bascom, Matt Copeland, Jane Holwerda, Dr. Michaeline Chance-Reay**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Ghost Stories

**Literature, like folklore, is filled with the spirits of the dead: King Saul asks the Witch of Endor to call up Samuel's ghost; Odysseus tries to embrace his mother's wraith in Hades; and Hamlet asks whether his father's image is ghost or demon. People tell stories to try to explain what death is, where loved ones go, and why the good suffer. The books in this series represent some classic explanations.**

***The Haunting of Hill House*** **by Shirley Jackson (1959) DB, LP**
A lonely woman is strangely drawn to a house that others find hateful. We gradually discover what it is in her past and in the house's past that draws them together. This story provides some truly scary moments.

***The Woman in Black*** **by Susan Hill (1983) LP**
In this modern ghost story, all the classic elements are brought together: the isolated mansion and its dark past, described in riffs from yellowed letters; the young innocent charged with telling a dead woman's story; and the devastating final turn.

***The Graveyard Book*** **by Neil Gaiman (2008) DB, BR, LP**
"There was a hand in the darkness, and it held a knife," so begins Neil Gaiman's Newberry Medal winning work of fiction. A small child wanders off into a graveyard pursued by a mysterious man named Jack who murdered the child's family. The boy is dubbed "Nobody Owens" by his adoptive ghostly parents who nickname him Bod. Bod's companions include an undead guardian named Silas and a graveyard full of ghosts who grant Bod the "freedom of the graveyard." As Bod grows, he learns to read from gravestones, is someone's imaginary friend, develops a crush on a witch, and experiences more adventures.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Kim Stanley, Lori Brack, Randee Baty, Rosemary Kolich, Sheena Hernandez, Trish Reeves, Dan Eells, Sara Jane Richter**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# The Great Plains Spirit

**Stretching from Texas north to the Dakotas, the vast Great Plains region has generated its share of myths and stereotypes, from the hardy pioneer farmer and the vanishing American Indian to the Dust Bowl refugee. It has also produced some of our best American writers and inspired a rich and varied literary tradition.**

***The Bones of Plenty*** **by Lois Hudson (1962)**
Proud, independent Dakota wheat farmer George Armstrong Custer and his hardworking wife Rachel must battle both the land and their landlord during the depression years of 1933–34.

***Great Plains*** **by Ian Frazier (1989) DB**
Taking us on a journey of 25,000 miles up, down, and across the myth-inspiring Great Plains, Frazier's adventures range from the site of Sitting Bull's cabin to Homecoming in Nicodemus, Kansas.

***Little House on the Prairie*** **by Laura Ingalls Wilder (1932–1943/1971) DB, BR**
The Ingalls family leaves the Big Woods of Wisconsin and settles in the Indian territory of Kansas, a land of prairie fires, wolves, adventure, and startling beauty.

***O Pioneers!*** **by Willa Cather (1913) DB, BR**
Alexandra Bergson's dying father leaves their struggling Nebraska homestead to her, not her brothers. With her iron will and intelligence, she overcomes family tragedy and tames wild land that she loves.

***Touching the Fire: Buffalo Dancers, the Sky Bundle, and Other Tales*** **by Roger Welsch (1992)**
The fictional Nehawka Indians wage a battle for the return of their sacred Sky Bundle, a medicine pouch whose stories take us back in time to the first Nehawka village on the Plains.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Anne Hawkins, Marilyn Klaus, Trish Reeves, Margy Stewart, Dennis Etzel Jr., Annette Billings, Sara Tucker, Dan Eells, Tim Bascom, Rosemary Kolich, Nic Shump, Sandra Wiechert, Sara Jane Richter**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Growing Up

**"Rites of passage" is the term for rituals used by different cultures to mark the entrance of an individual into adulthood and full membership of the community. Western societies have not routinely marked the passage to adulthood with such dramatic and ritualized events as those chronicled by anthropologists like Margaret Mead and Victor Turner, but our own culture's ceremonial markers—driver's licenses, draft cards, restrictions on drinking age, voting rights—have their own unique mix of drama and ritual. The transition to adulthood is a deeply fraught passage, involving coming to terms with sexuality, choosing a career path, and generally making one's way in an adult world. However, if coming of age is broadly universal, it is also deeply particular and personal.**

***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*** **by Mark Haddon (2003) DB, BR**
Finding a dead dog, any child might begin an investigation to find the murderer. However, Christopher Boone, a boy with autism, must not only carry out an investigation, but he must find a way to operate in the often-terrifying world, thereby bringing us into the world of the high-functioning autistic child.

***The Kite Runner*** **by Khaled Hosseini (2003) DB, BR, DBSP**
Amir recalls his childhood in Afghanistan, prior to the Soviet invasion and the rise of the Taliban. His memories focus on his relationship with Hassan, his loyal servant and best friend, whom Amir betrayed. Returning to Afghanistan to rescue Hassan's son from the clutches of the Taliban, Amir comes to terms with his past.

***My Last Days as Roy Rogers*** **by Pat Cunningham Devoto (1999) DB**
Devoto's novel recalls life in small-town, 1950s Alabama where Tabitha's favorite cowboy is Roy Rogers, and her best friend Maudie May's is Gene Autry. As their friendship develops and challenges social conventions, Tabitha understands the racial and class dynamics of her hometown, and the limits of her own possibilities as the white-hatted hero who can come to the rescue.

***The Secret Life of Bees*** **by Sue Monk Kidd (2002) DB, BR, DBSP, DBFR**
Fleeing from the law, 14-year-old Lily and her Black nanny, Rosaleen, head to South Carolina, where they find refuge in a pink house of African American sisters who cultivate bees and a cult of the Black Madonna. Lily comes to terms with her own past and struggles toward autonomy.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Kevin Rabas, Rachel Goossen, Sandra Wiechert**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Growing Up American

**Coming-of-age literature captures the liminal state of adolescence while also serving as a tool for broader social critique, providing a cultural examination through the eyes of someone still a bit outside of the adult world's norms and values. It comprehends both the terrain of the personal and the historically specific territory of a work's moment of creation. In this sense, that fancy German term, Bildungsroman, provides some illumination: the notion that a person is an act of construction, and all of the experiences of a person's life are building blocks that create that final product, the self-conscious adult. In the American context, the very complexity of the American mosaic makes the coming-of-age genre such rich territory.**

***Catcher in the Rye*** **by J. D. Salinger (1951) DB, BR**
"I keep picturing all these kids playing some game in this big field of rye…What I have to do," Holden explains, "I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff." Can J. D. Salinger's classic still tell us anything about what it means to be American? Let's start this series by revisiting that too-wise-for-his-age, smart aleck Holden Caulfield and his quest for the un-phony.

***Tender at the Bone: Growing Up at the Table*** **by Ruth Reichl (1998) DB**
"I was slowly discovering that if you watched people as they ate, you could find out who they were." Through food, Ruth Reichl also comes to learn who she is. By turns moving and hilarious, nostalgic and hopeful, she recalls the long road from her upbringing (with parents indifferent to the appeals of the palate) to her chosen profession of restaurant reviewer, with foreign travel and dumpster diving along the way, and a recipe to punctuate each chapter.

***Sag Harbor*** **by Colson Whitehead (2009) DB, BR**
Benji explains the central terms of his summers away: "First you had to settle the question of out." The "out" is out from school, out for vacation, and out to Sag Harbor, but for the African American elites who made the resort their vacation home, the ins and outs of it were more complex. Fifteen-year-old Benji must try to come to terms with growing up, with African Americanness, and with American popular culture.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**John Edgar Tidwell, Nic Shump, Thomas Prasch, Dan Eells**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Hispanic Heritage: Mothers, Sisters, Daughters

**In this series, readers will discover authors who are helping to create a new and vibrant Latino literature in the United States. Their novels center around family ties, particularly the universal bonds between mother and daughter, grandmother and granddaughter, and among sisters.**

***Brand New Memory* by Elias Miguel Muñoz (1998)**
Cuban American teenager Gina Domingo's life revolves around Southern California pop culture and her wealthy parents—until her grandmother arrives from Cuba for an unexpected visit.

***Esperanza's Box of Saints* by María Amparo Escandón (1999) DBSP**
Guided by her favorite saint, the beautiful young widow Esperanza sets off on a humorous journey from Mexico to Los Angeles in search of her missing daughter.

***The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1984) DB, DBSP**
This classic story of a young Mexican American girl growing up in the Latino section of Chicago is sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes deeply joyous.

***In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez (1994) DB, DBSP**
The four Mirabal sisters sacrificed safe and comfortable lives to become symbols of hope—the butterflies—who dared to oppose the Dominican Republic's cruel 30-year dictatorship.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Gene Chávez, Linda Lewis, Deborah Peterson, Marilyn Klaus, Sheena Hernandez, Lisa Moritz, Jane Holwerda, Rosemary Kolich, Joanne Janssen, Rachel Goossen, Kim Stanley, Miranda Ericsson**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# It's a Hard Knock Life

**Orphans have populated literature for centuries, from Little Goody Two-Shoes to Oliver Twist to Jane Eyre to Harry Potter. Many roamed the streets, some lived in orphanages, while others were placed with cruel and heartless relatives—but all longed for someone to love and shelter them. Though often found out of place and out of home in real life, orphans have held a special place and function in literature, especially in 19th century novels. These parentless children revealed a bleak social history as they negotiated the streets and world.**

***Orphan Train*** **by Christina Baker Kline (2013) DB, BR, LP, DBSP**
When foster-teen Molly Ayer steals a copy of *Jane Eyre* from the library, she is assigned community service with the elderly Vivian Daly. As the troubled foster-care juvenile helps 91-year-old Vivian clean out the tucked-away trunks in her attic, Molly learns that Vivian is an Orphan Train survivor. An unexpected relationship develops between the two, and together, they find answers about their separate pasts.

***The Chaperone*** **by Laura Moriarty (2012) DB, LP**
Thirty-six-year-old Mrs. Cora Carlisle chaperones teen Louise Brooks to New York City from Wichita, Kansas, when the budding silent-film star secures an opportunity to study at the prestigious Denishawn school of dance. While Louise attends dance lessons, Cora secretly embarks on her own personal quest, finding herself knocking at the door of the New York Home for Friendless Girls.

***The Light Between Oceans*** **by M.L. Stedman (2012) DB, LP**
A boat with a dead man and a living infant wash ashore an isolated island off the coast of mainland Australia where a lighthouse keeper and his young wife reside. Isabel, who has suffered two miscarriages and a stillbirth, pleads and convinces her husband, Tom, that they must keep and raise this child as their own. An impossible dilemma ensues when, after a visit to the mainland, the true identity of the child is discovered.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Anne Hawkins, Miranda Ericsson, Rosemary Kolich, Sara Jane Richter**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# The Kansas Experience (NEW)

**The Kansas state motto, "Ad Astra per Aspera," translates as "to the stars through difficulty." It's a nod to the can-do, pioneer spirit of our people, but also references the struggles, violence, and bloodshed that marked the state's entry to the union. In Kansas, the path to personal success is filled with more social and systemic obstacles for some than for others. This series explores the experiences of individuals who pushed back against poverty, racism, violence, and hatred to reach the stars, then advocated for others in a similar situation. Through advocacy, art, and writing, the authors in this series shine a light to guide the next generation of Kansans to a clearer path for all.**

***Heartland* by Sarah Smarsh (2018) DB, BR**
The American Dream says that in the United States, anyone who works hard enough can get ahead. By that logic, the working poor are often assumed to be lazy, or just not trying. Sarah Smarsh sets out to challenge that line of thinking by sharing the story of a family working hard to get by alongside an examination of the economic policies and class inequalities that lead to generations of poverty. Smarsh is a fifth-generation Kansan from a family of farmers on her father's side. Growing up in a poor family in the 1980s and 1990s, Smarsh could see that her family worked incredibly hard but always struggled to make ends meet. *Heartland* is a moving, personal testimony, but it also speaks up for generations of hardworking Kansans who have fed the nation and still found the American dream to be just out of reach.

***The Learning Tree* by Gordon Parks (1963) DB, BR**
Thirteen-year-old Newt Winger is surrounded by a warm family and the idyllic countryside of southeast Kansas, but he must learn hard lessons about growing up Black in a small town in the 1920s.

***No Place Like Home: Lessons in Activism from LGBT Kansas* by C. J. Janovy (2018)**
Why would a person want to live in a community or state that does not protect their rights? Often the answer is as simple as "home." The fight for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, and Trans) rights in Kansas is historical and political, but it is also deeply personal. *No Place Like Home* is an inspiring story of everyday people who banded together to launch a grassroots effort for change, and it is also an important timeline of the struggle for LGBT rights in the heartland and the nation. Journalist C. J. Janovy traveled across Kansas to speak to courageous individuals who became activists by raising their voices and fighting for equal rights for everyone in the place they call home.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Anne Hawkins, Dennis Etzel Jr., John Edgar Tidwell, Kevin Rabas, Lori Brack, Nic Shump, Randee Baty, Matt Copeland, Margy Stewart, Thomas Prasch**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Literature with Kansas Connections

**Even if it isn't completely accurate, almost everyone has a picture of 19th century Kansas—Free State Bleeding Kansas, Sod House Early Settler Kansas, Populist Farmer Kansas, and other conceptions of the state we call home. There's less agreement about what it means to live in Kansas today. Urbanization, rural decline, and social changes in the roles of women and the races have fundamentally altered what it means to be a Kansan. The desire to cling to tradition is set at odds with the changing technological and social landscape.**

***The Center of Everything*** **by Laura Moriarty (2003) DB**
Evelyn Bucknow, a 10-year-old growing up in fictional Kerrville, Kansas, seeks the certainty provided by a very conservative church, where she is assured that she is at the "center of everything." Difficulties and humor appear when her own interest in evolutionary science conflicts with church teachings.

***Not Without Laughter*** **by Langston Hughes (1930) DB**
Set in the fictional Kansas town of Stanton—purportedly based on Hughes's Lawrence boyhood experiences, the novel follows Sandy as he negotiates a world of prejudice and segregation, struggling to be the best that he can be despite the realities of racial inequality and poverty.

***One Soldier's Story*** **by Bob Dole (2005) DB, BR**
Long before he was a United States senator, Bob Dole was first a boy growing up in Russell, Kansas. Although *One Soldier's Story* focuses on his wartime years with a gripping account of the years he spent recovering from his wounds, themes of family and community are a vital part of the story.

***The Slow Air of Ewan MacPherson*** **by Thomas Fox Averill (2003) DB**
Ewan MacPherson was brought as an infant from Scotland to the neo-Scottish town of Glasgow, Kansas. Times are hard, young love is harder, and everybody makes mistakes... but eventually, with perseverance, some good things do happen.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Dennis Etzel Jr., Kevin Rabas, Matt Copeland, Dan Eells**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Middle Eastern Culture and Society

**The Middle East can seem so far from daily life in Kansas. The information we receive is often through images in the media that become stereotypes generalized to all people of the region—terrorists, fundamentalists, women who suffer gender inequality. Just as we in Kansas are frequently called upon to defend our state's diversity and rich culture, so too the Middle East is a diverse region with multiple histories, cultures, and peoples of varied backgrounds. This series moves beyond stereotypes to delve into the complexities of the region's people and cultures.**

***The Israelis: Ordinary People in an Extraordinary Land*** **by Donna Rosenthal (2003)**
Living in a state frequently at war within its territories and with its neighbors, Israelis have had to adjust to a climate of fear. Young people, who face compulsory military service, lead lives that are necessarily entwined with religion and politics. A nation of immigrants, Israel is much more religiously and ethnically diverse than many would guess.

***My Prison, My Home: One Woman's Story of Captivity in Iran*** **by Haleh Esfandiari (2009)**
This autobiography provides a window into modern-day Iran and Iranian American relations. Ms. Esfandiari is an American citizen and native of Iran who travels from the United States to visit her mother in Tehran, where she is arrested and incarcerated.

***Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*** **by Marjane Satrapi (2000) BR**
This 2004 graphic novel, also made into a film, offers a quick read. Political changes following the 1979 revolution affect a young girl's daily life and the lives of those around her in ways that are difficult for her to understand. It is a *New York Times* Notable Book, *Time Magazine* "Best Comix of the Year," and *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Los Angeles Times* bestseller.

***The Yacoubian Building*** **by Alaa Al Aswany (2002) DB**
A bestseller in the Arab world, this novel was also made into a film in 2006. It follows the lives of a group of people who live in one apartment building in Cairo during the first Gulf War. The diversity of the inhabitants reveals a cross-section of gritty lives in a big city.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Kim Stanley, Marilyn Klaus, Dennis Etzel Jr., Sheena Hernandez, Lisa Moritz, Sara Tucker, Jane Holwerda, Joanne Janssen, Kim Stanley, Thomas Prasch, Nic Shump**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# The Modern Family

**Beginning in the mid-20th century, the stereotypical American family has comprised mother, father and 2.5 children—the so-called nuclear family. Yet, in reality, very few families meet this standard. Adoptive, step, blended, multigenerational—families realistically come in all shapes and sizes. Relationships between family members are also complex and run the gamut from loving and nurturing to traumatic. The books in this series challenge and complicate our notion of what it means to be a family.**

***The Burgess Boys*** **by Elizabeth Strout (2013) DB, LP**
Author Elizabeth Strout crafts an engaging story about three siblings from Maine—Jim, a successful New York attorney and twins Bob, a less-successful New York attorney, and Susan, who stayed behind in Maine. A family crisis involving Susan's teenage son brings Jim and Bob back to their hometown as adults where they must deal with the current crisis and the aftermath of the childhood tragedy that shaped their entire adult lives and family relationships.

***Family Man*** **by Elinor Lipman (2009) LP, BR**
The reviewers agree this lighthearted book by Elinor Lipman is funny, clever, and whimsical. The plot begins when Henry, a Manhattan lawyer, receives a call from his ex-wife, who is about to be kicked out of her posh apartment by her two stepsons after the death of her third husband. The call brings Denise—his ex-wife–and her daughter, Thalia, back into the lonely bachelor's life. The ensuing plot twists and dialogue are worthy of Jane Austen according to both the *Washington Post* and the *Chicago Tribune.*

***LaRose*** **by Louise Erdrich (2016) DB, LP**
The novel opens when Landreaux Iron accidentally shoots his neighbor's son while hunting. Overcome with guilt and grief, Landreaux turns to his Native American ancestors for guidance. Hoping for redemption and forgiveness, he and his wife give their own son, LaRose, to the grieving family. The narrative chronicles the effect of the adoption on both families and their small North Dakota community while looking back at the life of the first LaRose beginning in 1839. With this story, Erdrich shows us a fluid notion of family in some Native American communities.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Erin Pouppirt, Joanne Janssen, Kevin Rabas, Kim Stanley, Lisa Moritz, Miranda Ericsson, Tim Bascom, Dr. Michaeline Chance-Reay, Sandra Wiechert**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Native American Identity from Past to Present (NEW)

**Beginning as early as the 1500s, Europeans produced fantastical, exotic images of America's original inhabitants as a part of the fanciful portrayal of the "New World." Over the centuries that followed, newspapers, captive narratives, novels, art, photography, movies, and television extended old or even created new stereotypes of Native American people. Even as our world becomes more connected and people gradually become more conscious of cultural appropriation, these stereotypes persist, often with harmful consequences for Indigenous people. This series challenges the stereotypical and fantastical images and stories of Native people as living in a mythical past or as a pure but vanishing race who are isolated to reservations, far removed from the rest of American society. Instead, the books in this series present Native American identity through the lens of Native writers and Native experiences. These writers speak to the diversity and complexity of Native identity. This series was created by Dr. Brian Burkhart (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma) in collaboration with the Oklahoma Humanities.**

***Firekeeper's Daughter*** **by Angeline Boulley (Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians) (2021) DB, BR**

This novel follows an 18-year-old Ojibwe woman named Daunis Fontaine, a science geek and hockey star, as she grapples with two identities: that of her privileged, white, French-Canadian mother and the Sugar Island Sault tribe of her late father. Daunis is strongly connected to her Ojibwe family, but because she is unenrolled, she does not feel that she belongs anywhere. After the tragic death of her maternal uncle, Daunis is presented with an opportunity to investigate—by becoming a confidential informant for the FBI—the mystery surrounding his death as well the recent drug overdoses of young people in her community. As she journeys deeper into these mysteries, Daunis must reconcile her different identities in order to protect her communities, both Native and non-Native.

***There There*** **by Tommy Orange (Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma) (2018) DB, BR**

Tommy Orange shows the "there" that is still there for Native people who have moved or been relocated to urban places that are filled with popular media's fantastical imaginings of Native identity. *There There* follows a multigenerational cast of 12 characters in and around Oakland, California, as they wrestle with the broken alternatives of identity filtered through stereotypical misconceptions but with the power of Cheyenne stories and traditions fragilely held together in the largely colonial world of the urban city. Their lives, identities, and traumas intersect in various ways until they converge at the Big Oakland Powwow.

***The Removed*** **by Brandon Hobson (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma) (2021) DB**

This novel follows the Echota family 15 years after the tragic death of their son Ray-Ray. The mother, Maria, struggles to pull her family from their private grief to prepare for a bonfire marking both the anniversary of Ray-Ray's death and the Cherokee National Holiday, which is the annual celebration of the signing of the Cherokee Nation Constitution in 1839. As she attempts to pull them together, her family struggles silently: her husband, Ernest, dealing with mental fog caused by the onset of Alzheimer's; her daughter, Sonja, romantically fixated on a man with ties to her brother's death; her youngest, Edgar, deep in the throes of depression and addiction. But introduction of a foster son, who bears a striking resemblance to Ray-Ray and seems to keep Ernest's mental fog at bay, shifts the family from their grief in startling ways.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Deborah Peterson, Erin Pouppirt, Gene Chávez, Linda Lewis, Sheena Hernandez, Tim Bascom, Marilyn Klaus, Sandra Wiechert**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# On the Lighter Side

**Life can be sad, stressful, and depressing. Fortunately, humor writers come to our rescue, bringing us both immediate laughs and healing new perspectives on the ordinary afflictions of daily living. On the Lighter Side authors do this by giving us worlds populated with off-kilter, eccentric characters thinking and doing unusual things. They make their characters funny and even lovable. Seen through the lens of warm, appreciative humor, maddening things become funny and bearable. The strange becomes the charming; local quirkiness becomes universal humanity.**

***How Elizabeth Barrett Browning Saved My Life*** **by Mameve Medwed (2006) BR**
Harvard-dropout Abby Randolph sells "eclectic" antiques. Dumped by her lover and losing her mother in an earthquake, things begin to look up when Abby makes an appearance on the program Antiques Roadshow with what turns out to be Elizabeth Barrett Browning's chamber pot.

***Quite a Year for Plums*** **by Bailey White (1998) DB**
People want to help Roger, a divorced plant pathologist and peanut virologist, find true love and happiness again. One possibility is Della, a visiting artist who communicates through notes she leaves on discarded dumpster objects. Meanwhile, Roger's ex-mother-in-law is trying to make contact with aliens.

***Standing in the Rainbow*** **by Fannie Flagg (2002) DB**
Flagg takes us to Elmwood Springs, Missouri, where we meet Bobby Smith, a 10-year-old living an idyllic postwar boyhood; his mother, Neighbor Dorothy, who broadcasts her Midwest housewife's radio show; and later on, Tot Whooten, a very incompetent hairdresser; mortician Cecil Figgs; Hamm Sparks, the tractor salesman turned politician; and many, many others.

***Walking Across Egypt*** **by Clyde Edgerton (1988) DB**
Mattie Riggsbee tells everyone she is slowing down and can't be responsible for the stray dog or the orphan that show up in her life. She's busy with her church, planning her funeral, and wishing her two children would marry and give her grandchildren. The disapproval of family and neighbors provides tension but also laughter.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Kevin Rabas, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Trish Reeves, Dennis Etzel Jr., Sheena Hernandez, Anne Hawkins, Annette Billings, Sara Tucker, Dan Eells, Dr. Michaeline Chance-Reay, Rosemary Kolich, Erin Pouppirt**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Once Upon a Time in the West (NEW)

**American literature has had a continual love affair with the Western mythos: cowboys and gunfighters, pioneers and 49ers, saloon workers and drifters—individuals escaping hardship to apply their grit and tenacity to build a better life in the rugged frontier. Historians have revealed that the American West was indeed a hardscrabble but diverse landscape. It's a heritage that remains strong in these newer Westerns, where the authors have been as interested in the inner lives of their characters as they are of the events that shape their stories. How we define ourselves against a land of desperate need and depraved greed is the common theme in these novels. Some rise above the moment to be good people. Others make choices that leave them empty of options.**

***News of the World*** **by Paulette Jiles (2016) DB, BR**

It is 1870, and 71-year-old Captain Kidd is hired to return young Johanna Leonberger to her immigrant German family in Texas. But Johanna thinks of herself as Cicada, and her family as Turning Water and Three Spotted—her adoptive parents among the Kiowa Indians. She has been with them for four years, since she was six years old, and they are the ones she yearns to return to. Kidd is near the end of his life, reflective and honorable, and he finds joy in her stubbornness and wilderness skills. During their journey they form the unlikeliest of friendships, eventually accepting that their fates are not as either expected.

***In the Distance*** **by Hernan Diaz (2017) DB, BR**

It is a real-life nightmare: Two Swedish boys immigrate to America with mere survival in mind. Together. But in the crush of humans at the New York harbor, they are separated in the crowd. Diaz's fascinating story follows the fate of Hakan Soderstrom as he devotes his life to traveling this strange new land in the eternal hope of finding his brother. Along the way he encounters both kindness and evil among his fellow travelers. As time goes by, young Hakan grows into a man and eventually a legend among the people he has encountered.

***Butcher's Crossing*** **by John Williams (1960) DB**

The story launches from Butcher's Crossing, a fictional outpost west of Ellsworth, Kansas, in the early days of statehood. Will Andrews has arrived determined to experience a bison hunt; he is inspired by his Harvard studies of Ralph Waldo Emerson to seek "an original relation to nature." When Andrews arrives in Kansas to discover that bison are dwindling, he follows a man who assures him that a large herd—and therefore a fortune—can be found in the Rocky Mountains. Together they set out across the arid shortgrass plains to their supposed Eden. What follows is a harrowing winter, only for them to return to a changed world and questions about the meaning of it all.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Anne Hawkins, Deborah Peterson, Erin Pouppirt, Gene Chávez, Joanne Janssen, Randee Baty, Rosemary Kolich, Matt Copeland, Dan Eells, Jane Holwerda, Dr. Michaeline Chance-Reay, Sandra Wiechert, Sara Jane Richter**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Stories for Storytelling (NEW)

**For centuries, storytelling has been in our nature. Whether factual or fictional, educational or entertaining, oral or written, a good story can immerse us in new worlds with characters that bring shared and fantastical experiences to life. But the power of a good story goes beyond taking us on great adventures of the mind. Stories carry our culture, help us understand others and ourselves, share knowledge, and so much more. The books in this series celebrate the art of storytelling and the fundamental role stories play in our lives.**

***Cloud Cuckoo Land* by Anthony Doerr (2021) DB, DBSP**
Five strangers, living in different centuries and lands are bound together by a single manuscript—the story of Aethon. In the 15th century, Anna is an orphan living in Constantinople, and Omeir is a village boy conscripted into the Ottoman army. In the present day, Zeno, a veteran, works in a library in Idaho translating Ancient Greek texts, while Seymour, a disturbed youngster, becomes involved with a group of ecoterrorists. And in the not so distance future, aboard an interstellar ship, young Konstance is heading for the distant planet of Beta Oph2. Separated by geography and time, the characters are bound together by the love of storytelling and one particular book.

***Haroun and the Sea of Stories* by Salman Rushdie (1990) DB, BR**
"What's the point of stories that aren't even true?" Haroun, the son of a master storyteller, can't get the question out of his head. When his father loses the gift of storytelling, Haroun sets off on an adventure through fantastical worlds to reclaim his father's gift of gab and vanquish the powerful enemy—the Prince of Silence.

***The Dictionary of Lost Words* by Pip Williams (2020) DB**
Esme's father and a team of lexicographers are assembling the first Oxford Dictionary. As a child, Esme begins to collect stray strips of papers with words written on them that have discarded or neglected by the dictionary men. She hides the word slips in a box and labels them "The Dictionary of Lost Words." But, as Esme grows older, she learns that some words and meanings go unrecorded. Set during the height of the women's suffrage movement and with the Great War looming, this book reveals a lost narrative, hidden between the lines of a history written by men.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Annette Billings, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Dennis Etzel Jr., Joanne Janssen, John Edgar Tidwell, Kevin Rabas, Kim Stanley, Lisa Moritz, Lori Brack, Miranda Ericsson, Nic Shump, Tim Bascom, Trish Reeves, Thomas Prasch, Dan Eells**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# That's Funny: Books That Make Us Laugh

**We are often told that "laughter is the best medicine." Laughter has also made for some of the best reading since the time of the ancient Greeks. Books that make us laugh are often just plain fun to read, as can be seen by their regular presence on bestseller lists. At the same time, the very best funny books are also much more. In the hands of master writers, humor helps us look (warts and all) at what it is to be human and what makes society tick—two topics at the heart of the humanities.**

***The Egg and I*** **by Betty MacDonald (1945) DB, BR**
Betty MacDonald writes about her years as a young bride in the late 1920s, which she spent with her less-than-realistic new husband on a very primitive chicken farm in rural Washington state.

***I'm a Stranger Here Myself*** **by Bill Bryson (1999) DB, BR**
In this collection of essays written for a London magazine, Bryson wonders what modern America looks like to an American newly returned after 20 years in England. Though often bemused by surface absurdities (such as dental floss hotlines), Bryson is fundamentally both loving and appreciative of the core of American life.

***In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash*** **by Jean Shepherd (1966) DB**
Shepherd's wildly witty reunion with his Indiana hometown recalls the days when happiness was a Red Ryder BB gun and station wagons roamed the earth.

***Mama Makes Up Her Mind and Other Dangers of Southern Living*** **by Bailey White (1993) DB**
National Public Radio commentator White's eccentric family includes Aunt Belle, whose alligator bellows on command; Uncle Jimbuddy; and the elderly, endearing Mama, who turns roadkill into gourmet meals.

***The Mammy*** **by Brendan O'Carroll (1994) DB**
This funny, tender, and moving portrait of working-class Dublin life in the 1960s centers on Agnes Browne, widowed mother of seven and indomitable neighborhood character.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Anne Hawkins, Dennis Etzel Jr., Rosemary Kolich, Sheena Hernandez, Carmaletta Williams, Dr. Michaeline Chance-Reay**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Turning Points: Stories of Women Choosing Their Own Paths (NEW)

**Life is formed of countless choices, from tiny details to turning points. Every day we make choices that could change the course of our lives and ripple out to impact the lives of other people. Choices are based on individual needs, feelings, and identity but are also guided by the expectations of family and society. Existing structures, rules, and standards can make it difficult for women to know how to take control of their own lives, and how to balance their own wants and needs with the roles they fill for others. In this series, readers will explore themes such as identity, belonging, self-worth, and stereotypes through the stories of women who faced a turning point and chose to take their own path forward.**

***Lessons in Chemistry*** **by Bonnie Garmus (2022) DB**
Elizabeth Zott is a chemist, a brilliant mind and hard worker. Unfortunately, it's the 1960s, so her male colleagues can't seem to accept that she is actually a scientist. Most look at her as an attractive secretary or notice her work only to steal it and claim it as her own. Then she meets Calvin Evans, a renowned chemist who believes in her abilities and encourages her to succeed, and the two fall in love. Then the path of life twists again, and Elizabeth finds herself unwed and raising a child alone. In a moment of desperation, she accepts a job as the host of a cooking show. Her producer imagines Elizabeth wearing a cute apron and cooking in a kitchen full of kitschy décor and gadgets, but Elizabeth has other ideas.

***The Vanishing Half*** **by Brit Bennett (2020) DB, BR, DBSP**
What happens when a woman cuts ties with her old life and chooses a different identity? This book is a compassionate exploration of public and private identity, and the ways that the choices of one person impact the lives of generations to come. Twins Stella and Desiree Vignes were born and raised in Mallard, Louisiana, an all-Black town where everyone knows everyone. The girls see a hard path of work, marriage, and children ahead if they stay, so they leave for New Orleans at 16 years old. Stella takes a job usually reserved for white girls, letting her employer assume that she is white based on her light-skinned appearance. Her life feels easier and better when she is passing for white, so she chooses to keep her secret and start a new life completely cut off from her past. Desiree, however, moves back to her hometown to raise her Black daughter. Many years later, Stella's and Desiree's daughters meet. When the cousins cross paths at last, the family will have to reckon with long-buried secrets and the truth of who they are.

***The Midnight Library*** **by Matt Haig (2020) DB, BR**
What truly matters in life? How do we define our own meaning in the world, or our success? Nora Seed is overwhelmed and exhausted with her life, and she does not see how it could possibly get better. She believes that she only hurts the people that she cares about and makes their lives worse, and she carries a heavy burden of regrets. At a low point, she decides to end her life but instead finds herself in a space between life and death—The Midnight Library. In this library, the shelves are infinite and filled with books. Each book contains a version of Nora, a life story that could have existed if she had made different choices. As Nora faces her regrets, she sees how her life could be different, and how others have been impacted by her choices. Before her time runs out, Nora must decide for herself what is important, and why life is worth living.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Annette Billings, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg, Kim Stanley, Linda Lewis, Lisa Moritz, Miranda Ericsson, Rachel Goossen, Rosemary Kolich, Sheena Hernandez, Trish Reeves, Marilyn Klaus, Carmaletta Williams, Jane Holwerda**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Voices from Appalachia (NEW)

**Appalachia is a geographic region in the eastern United States that spans 13 states—stretching from Southern New York State to Northern Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi—and is named for the Appalachian Mountains that run through the area. Though Appalachian literature often explores themes unique to the Appalachian region, including economic and ecological plight, the voices and souls of these characters struggling to survive and make life worth living are deeply human and recognizable to all of us. Themes in all three books center around education, marriage, family, community, and caring. Authors of the Appalachian experience strive to both expose the complexities of life in Appalachia and dispel misunderstandings and stereotypes that plague the region, showing how alike and human we all are. The books in this series provide a cast of remarkable and memorable characters with human strength that endures and spirit that soars. Every reader will find an individual to love, connect with, to champion.**

***All the Forgivenesses*** **by Elizabeth Hardinger (2019)**
Set in Appalachia and the Midwest at the turn of 20th century, this story revolves around 15-year-old Albertina "Bertie" Winslow, who must take on the responsibility of raising her four younger siblings when her mother dies and her father proves unreliable. Bertie marries young and eventually moves some of the family from rural Kentucky to the oil fields of Kansas, but grief and guilt from a childhood tragedy haunts and consumes her on her journey to creating a home and a place. Only when Bertie confronts ugly truths about herself, her family, and their past can she learn how to live and love truly, and to give and forgive fully.

***The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*** **by Kim Michele Richardson (2019) DB, BR**
Set in 1936 Kentucky, this story is inspired by both the "blue-skinned" people of Kentucky and the female librarians of Roosevelt's Kentucky Pack Horse Library Project. Cussy Mary Carter, the protagonist, both blue-skinned and a book woman, must first confront age-old tradition in her father, who has promised his dying wife to marry off Cussy when Cussy does not want to marry. Once courting and the marriage issue are settled, Cussy must confront various forms of prejudice, doubt, and danger as she travels treacherous terrain—on a mule as stubborn and determined as she—to deliver books to isolated children and families in the hills and hollers of the Appalachian region. This novel is refreshing, engaging, and enlightening as it introduces topics not yet explored in story form.

***If the Creek Don't Rise*** **by Leah Weiss (2017) DB**
Set in the 1970s in fictional Baines Creek, North Carolina, this character-driven novel is told from the point of view of 10 different narrators and portrays both powerfully and beautifully an array of folks filled with pluck and determination, knowledge and know-how, and real sorrow. Just 15 days into her marriage, young Sadie Blue realizes she should never have married Roy Tupkin, baby or no baby. When Kate Shaw comes to town, having been fired from a previous teaching position, Sadie discovers she has options. Gladys Hicks, Marris Jones, Eli Perkins, Tattler Swann, Birdie Rocas, and others add to the character and color of this fascinatingly structured and brilliantly written novel. In the end, Baines Creek proves to be hard on folks who give in or give up, but for those who stay and endure, Baines Creek proves to be enough.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Rosemary Kolich, Deborah Peterson, Trish Reeves, Annette Billings, Jane Holwerda, Rachel Goossen, Erin Pouppirt, Miranda Ericsson**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Westering

**The westward movement of settlers and the existence of a frontier of settlement in the last century played an important role in shaping our country's character. The Old West retains its hold on our imagination as a theme in literature, film, and history, while the contemporary West still exerts a strong influence on the national culture. Popular ideas of the West still play a role in how the rest of the world perceives the United States, and in how we perceive ourselves. This series examines, through fact and fiction, the settling of the American West and its enduring influence on our patterns of thought.**

***The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck (1939) DB, BR, DBSP**
Forced from their Oklahoma farm by the Dust Bowl, the Joad family sets out for the promised land of California. As they travel across the country, joined by other migrants, they confront an America deeply divided between rich and poor.

***A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* by Isabella L. Bird (1879) DB**
In 1873, Isabella Bird made an unlikely journey alone on horseback through the Rockies of Colorado, climbing Longs Peak, staying in mountain cabins, and observing the tumultuous world of the mining camps.

***The Last Cattle Drive* by Robert Day (1977) DB, BR**
Spangler Star Tukle, a cantankerous rancher, and his no-nonsense wife, Opal, defy the truckers and drive their cattle to market the old-fashioned way in a hilarious journey from Hays to the eastern stockyards.

***Letters of a Woman Homesteader* by Elinore Pruitt Stewart (1914) DB**
Stewart took up homesteading in 1909 to prove that a woman could ranch. Her captivating letters reveal the isolation, the beauty, and the joy of working the prairie.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Erin Pouppirt, Linda Lewis, Randee Baty, Matt Copeland, Dr. Michaeline Chance-Reay, Sara Jane Richter**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Wit and Grit: Women Characters in Contemporary Fiction

**Throughout literary history, the depiction of women has varied from writer to writer. Although exceptions exist, today's female characters appear more prominently and are cast from reality rather than dream. In this series, women of contemporary literature face situations and decisions that would challenge a shipload of whalers. These women display the wit to think their way through obstacles, sometimes with humor and always with the grit to persist: whether Cora deciding on a dangerous path to seek freedom from slavery, Amabelle facing losses and brutal killings, or Christina shouldering the load of a household and insights into her own shortcomings. In this series we meet women who think, act, and engage life on their own terms in search of their freedom and their dreams.**

***A Piece of the World*** **by Christina Baker Kline (2017) DB, BR, LP, DBSP**

The protagonist of this historical novel, Christina Olson, is none other than the mysterious young woman of Andrew Wyeth's painting *Christina's World*. Christina reveals great strength and independence no matter the deprivation, hardship, and thwarted dreams of her life as a principal support of her family, even though her lifelong neuromuscular disease, always debilitating, progresses to the point that she has to crawl to pick blueberries or climb the stairs. The novel, written as Christina's memoir, reveals her frailties, her strengths, her flaws, and the importance of her friendship with Andrew Wyeth, who saw her as kindred spirit, model, and muse.

***The Farming of Bones*** **by Edwidge Danticat (1998) DB, LP**

The same day eight-year-old Amabelle Désir watches her parents drown in the swollen Massacre River that separates Haiti from the Dominican Republic, she is taken into the home of a prominent Dominican couple to become their servant and playmate for their daughter. The greater part of the novel follows Amabelle as she deals with the dreams and nightmares that result from her early trauma; her love for Sebastian, another Haitian immigrant; and the terror of the 1937 slaughter of Haitian immigrants when Dominicans turn on these laborers. How Amabelle survives her losses, her servitude, and the senseless terror brought down upon her and her fellow immigrants is a lesson in courage.

***The Underground Railroad*** **by Colson Whitehead (2016) DB, BR, LP, DBSP**

It's hard to imagine a more daunting struggle for life and sanity than what young Cora faces as the novel's protagonist as a third-generation slave on a Georgia plantation. Nevertheless, Cora possesses the intelligence and tenacity of her grandmother and mother and flees the unrelenting brutality and cruelty of the plantation to thread her way through swamp, sickness, and harrowing journey on the underground railroad in search of freedom. This novel is long researched and deeply felt by a writer whose ancestors were enslaved, shows the human race at its worst and at its best, and portrays women of true wit and grit.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Annette Billings, John Edgar Tidwell, Linda Lewis, Lori Brack**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# Women Around the World

**This series introduces readers to the voices of women novelists from Latin America, Africa, and Ireland, a European nation with a colonial past. The worlds these writers evoke are remarkably diverse, from the gritty South Africa of Nadine Gordimer to the magical terrain of Laura Esquivel's Mexico. They put us on intimate terms with some realities unfamiliar to Americans: revolution, polygamy, the crimes of dictatorship. At the same time, readers will identify with universal themes that shape the lives of women everywhere: love, growing up, the joys and disappointments of marriage, and the struggle for respect and identity.**

***The Country Girls Trilogy*** **by Edna O'Brien (Ireland) (1986) DB**
Kate and Baba are ambitious Irish country girls in search of life: Romantic Kate seeks love while pragmatic Baba will take whatever she can get. Together they set out to conquer Dublin and the world.

***The House of the Spirits*** **by Isabel Allende (Chile) (1982) DB, DBSP**
This is the epic tale of the proud Trueba family: stubborn patriarch Esteban, sweet but rebellious daughter Blanca, and Alba, the granddaughter who is part of both the old aristocratic order and the turbulent new Chile.

***Like Water for Chocolate*** **by Laura Esquivel (Mexico) (1989) DB, BR, DBSP**
Obedient daughter Tita rebels when tradition and a tyrannical mother conspire to keep her from true love in this enchanting story of romance, recipes, and magic.

***None to Accompany Me*** **by Nadine Gordimer (South Africa) (1984) DB**
The evolving relationships of two couples, one Black, one white, illustrate the hazards and hopes of life in post-apartheid South Africa, especially for Vera Stark, a mature, self-possessed woman on the brink of change.

***So Long a Letter*** **by Mariama Bâ (Senegal) (1979)**
In a lively letter to a childhood friend, the recently widowed Ramatoulaye reminisces about her husband's devastating decision to take a second wife and about how she rebuilt her life and her emotional serenity.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Annette Billings, Deborah Peterson, Joanne Janssen, Jane Holwerda**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# World War II Generation

**World War II profoundly reshaped the world, in part because it was so total a war, engaging civilian populations so fully and covering so much of the globe. As a result, it has proven to be an irresistible subject for literature and film. A generation of authors, including American novelists Norman Mailer, James Michener, and Kurt Vonnegut, began their writing careers by processing their experiences of World War II. Ever since, writers have continued to be drawn by the wide range of subject matter the war offers. This World War II reading series bypasses the more familiar territories of the war—the European theater of operations, the Holocaust, and the use of atomic weaponry on Japan—by selecting later books that address less-familiar aspects of this world-wide conflict. In accounts of the war in the Philippines, secret American military activity in Alaska and the Aleutians, and aspects of the home front, the books in this series serve to illuminate the full range of horror and hope that sprung from World War II.**

***The Cloud Atlas*** **by Liam Callanan (2004) DB**
A priest, at the deathbed of an Alaskan shaman, recalls the events that brought them together, including stories of love, magic, spirituality, and the secret history of Japanese balloon warfare. A cloud atlas, the shaman says, "would not be a map of where things are now," but "where they will be." Callanan's novel is a "cloud atlas" in reverse: telling us where we are by looking at where we have been.

***The Gardens of Kyoto*** **by Kate Walbert (2001) BR, DB**
Ellen inherits a book, The Gardens of Kyoto, when her cousin is killed. Vignettes describing the famed Zen gardens and a professor's struggle to keep Kyoto off the list of American atomic bomb targets intersected by Ellen's elusive unfolding of her family's secrets.

***Once Upon a Town*** **by Bob Greene (2002) DB, BR**
This is a journalistic account of the citizenry of North Platt, Nebraska, who found a unique way to express their patriotism: by giving the troops a final home-cooked meal before they headed off to war. The meals led to much more—lasting friendships, love, and a solidarity among the citizens of the city.

***When the Elephants Dance*** **by Tess Uriza Holthe (2002) BR**
Taking its title from a traditional adage "When the elephants dance, the chickens must be careful," this novel focuses on the Filipino people, caught in the Japanese and American crossfire, in the war's waning days. A hiding family spends its time telling tales of magic, ghosts, and legends, affirming their Filipino identity. Outside, we see the war through the eyes of a teenage boy, his older sister, and a partisan fleeing the Japanese.

Contact the following discussion leaders to lead a TALK book discussion in this series:

**Deborah Peterson, Erin Pouppirt, Marilyn Klaus, Anne Hawkins, Annette Billings, Sara Tucker, Dan Eells, Jane Holwerda, Kevin Rabas, Thomas Prasch, Miranda Ericsson, Nic Shump**

HUMANITIES KANSAS

# DISCUSSION LEADER DIRECTORY

**Use this directory to contact discussion leaders for your TALK programs. You may schedule up to three scholars per book series.**

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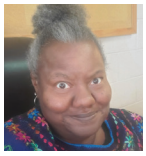

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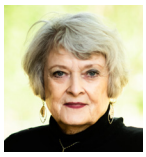

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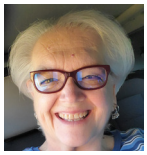

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