

TITLES AND FACILITATORS FOR 2023-2024

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Facilitator</u> | <u>Title</u> |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| <u>2023</u> | | |
| July 10 | Phil Wood | The Midnight Library – Matt Hayes |
| August 14 | Denise Julian | An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth - Chris Hadfield |
| September 11 | Rob Pond | The Book Thief – Markus Zusak |
| October 16 | Jim Sweetman | A World of Curiosities – Louise Penny |
| November 13 | Michael Nash | War: How Conflict Shaped Us – Margaret MacMillan |
| December 11 | Helen Thomas | Ducks (a graphic novel) – Kate Beaton |
| 2024 | | |
| January 8 | Art & Marg Heidebrecht | The Music Shop – Rachel Joyce |
| February 12 | Norma Young | Lessons in Chemistry – Bonnie Garmus |
| March 11 | Dorothy Bartalos | Finding Edward – Sheila Murray |
| April 8 | Book Selection for 2024-2025 | |
| May 13 | Dave Allatt | The Sleeping Car Porter – Suzette Mayr |
| June 10 | | |

NOTES:

- ✓ We will continue to meet on the second Monday of every month except October, when we will meet on the third Monday. In June through September we can choose to meet inside or outside, afternoon or evening. If necessary at any time, we will meet via ZOOM.
- ✓ Our September/23 and January/24 titles are available in a kit from HPL and reservation will be attempted. We will each be responsible for getting our own copy of all other books.
- ✓ 2023 – 2024 will be our 18th year of reading together!

(July 11, 2023)

Book Descriptions – Summer 2023

In July, *“The Midnight Library”* by Matt Haig

Between life and death there is a library, and within that library, the shelves go on forever. Every book provides a chance to try another life you could have lived. To see how things would be if you had made other choices . . . Would you have done anything different, if you had the chance to undo your regrets? A novel about all the choices that go into a life well lived.

Somewhere out beyond the edge of the universe there is a library that contains an infinite number of books, each one the story of another reality. One tells the story of your life as it is, along with another book for the other life you could have lived if you had made a different choice at any point in your life. While we all wonder how our lives might have been, what if you had the chance to go to the library and see for yourself? Would any of these other lives truly be better?

Nora Seed finds herself faced with this decision. Faced with the possibility of changing her life for a new one, following a different career, undoing old breakups, realizing her dreams of becoming a glaciologist; she must search within herself as she travels through the Midnight Library to decide what is truly fulfilling in life, and what makes it worth living in the first place.

In August, *“An Astronaut’s Guide to Life on Earth”* by Chris Hadfield

Colonel Chris Hadfield has spent decades training as an astronaut and has logged nearly 4000 hours in space. During this time he has broken into a Space Station with a Swiss army knife, disposed of a live snake while piloting a plane, and been temporarily blinded while clinging to the exterior of an orbiting spacecraft. The secret to Col. Hadfield's success-and survival-is an unconventional philosophy he learned at NASA: prepare for the worst-*and enjoy every moment of it*.

In *An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth*, Col. Hadfield takes readers deep into his years of training and space exploration to show how to make the impossible possible. Through eye-opening, entertaining stories filled with the adrenaline of launch, the mesmerizing wonder of spacewalks, and the measured, calm responses mandated by crises, he explains how conventional wisdom can get in the way of achievement-and happiness. His own extraordinary education in space has taught him some counterintuitive lessons: don't visualize success, do care what others think, and always sweat the small stuff.

You might never be able to build a robot, pilot a spacecraft, make a music video or perform basic surgery in zero gravity like Col. Hadfield. But his vivid and refreshing insights will teach you how to *think* like an astronaut, and will change, completely, the way you view life on Earth-especially your own.

Book Descriptions – Fall 2023

In September, *“The Book Thief”* by Markus Zusak

It is 1939. Nazi Germany. The country is holding its breath. Death has never been busier, and will be busier still.

By her brother's graveside, Liesel's life is changed when she picks up a single object, partially hidden in

the snow. It is *The Gravedigger's Handbook*, left behind there by accident, and it is her first act of book thievery. So begins a love affair with books and words, as Liesel, with the help of her accordion-playing foster father, learns to read. Soon she is stealing books from Nazi book-burnings, the mayor's wife's library, wherever there are books to be found.

But these are dangerous times. When Liesel's foster family hides a Jew in their basement, Liesel's world is both opened up, and closed down.

In superbly crafted writing that burns with intensity, award-winning author Markus Zusak has given us one of the most enduring stories of our time.

(Note: this title was not published as YA fiction)

In October, *"A World of Curiosities"* by Louise Penny

It's spring and *Three Pines* is reemerging after the harsh winter. But not everything buried should come alive again. Not everything lying dormant should reemerge.

But something has.

As the villagers prepare for a special celebration, Armand Gamache and Jean-Guy Beauvoir find themselves increasingly worried. A young man and woman have reappeared in the *Sûreté du Québec* investigators' lives after many years. The two were young children when their troubled mother was murdered, leaving them damaged, shattered. Now they've arrived in the village of *Three Pines*.

But to what end?

Gamache and Beauvoir's memories of that tragic case, the one that first brought them together, come rushing back. Did their mother's murder hurt these children beyond repair? Have those terrible wounds, buried for decades, festered, and are they now about to erupt?

As Chief Inspector Gamache works to uncover answers, his alarm grows when a letter written by a long-dead stonemason is discovered. In it, the man describes his terror when bricking up an attic room somewhere in the village. Every word of the 160-year-old letter is filled with dread. When the room is found, the villagers decide to open it up.

As the bricks are removed, Gamache, Beauvoir, and the villagers discover a world of curiosities. But the head of homicide soon realizes there's more in that room than meets the eye. There are puzzles within puzzles, and hidden messages warning of mayhem and revenge.

In unsealing that room, an old enemy is released into their world. Into their lives. And into the very heart of Armand Gamache's home.

In November, *"War: How Conflict Shaped Us"* by Margaret MacMillan

Is peace an aberration? The bestselling author of *Paris 1919* offers a provocative view of war as an essential component of humanity.

The instinct to fight may be innate in human nature, but war—organized violence—comes with organized society. War has shaped humanity's history, its social and political institutions, its values and ideas. Our very language, our public spaces, our private memories, and some of our greatest cultural treasures reflect the glory and the misery of war. War is an uncomfortable and challenging subject not least because it brings out both the vilest and the noblest aspects of humanity.

Margaret MacMillan looks at the ways in which war has influenced human society and how, in turn, changes in political organization, technology, or ideologies have affected how and why we fight. *War: How Conflict Shaped Us* explores such much-debated and controversial questions as: When did war first start? Does human nature doom us to fight one another? Why has war been described as the most organized of all human activities? Why are warriors almost always men? Is war ever within our control?

Drawing on lessons from wars throughout the past, from classical history to the present day, MacMillan reveals the many faces of war—the way it has determined our past, our future, our views of the world, and our very conception of ourselves.

In December, “Ducks” by Kate Beaton

Celebrated cartoonist Kate Beaton vividly presents the untold story of Canada.

Before there was Kate Beaton, *New York Times* bestselling cartoonist of *Hark A Vagrant* fame, there was Katie Beaton of the Cape Breton Beatons, specifically Mabou, a tight-knit seaside community where the lobster is as abundant as beaches, fiddles, and Gaelic folk songs. After university, Beaton heads out west to take advantage of Alberta's oil rush, part of the long tradition of East Coasters who seek gainful employment elsewhere when they can't find it in the homeland they love so much. With the singular goal of paying off her student loans, what the journey will actually cost Beaton will be far more than she anticipates.

Arriving in Fort McMurray, Beaton finds work in the lucrative camps owned and operated by the world's largest oil companies. Being one of the few women among thousands of men, the culture shock is palpable. It does not hit home until she moves to a spartan, isolated worksite for higher pay. She encounters the harsh reality of life in the oil sands where trauma is an everyday occurrence yet never discussed. Her wounds may never heal.

Beaton's natural cartooning prowess is on full display as she draws colossal machinery and mammoth vehicles set against a sublime Albertan backdrop of wildlife, Northern Lights, and Rocky Mountains. Her first full-length graphic narrative, *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands* is an untold story of Canada: a country that prides itself on its egalitarian ethos and natural beauty while simultaneously exploiting both the riches of its land and the humanity of its people.

In January 2024, “The Music Shop” by Rachel Joyce

From the author of the world-wide bestseller, *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry*, a new novel about learning how to listen and how to feel; and about second chances and choosing to be brave despite the odds. Because in the end, music can save us all ...

It's 1988 and Frank owns a music shop. It is jam-packed with records of every speed, size and genre. Classical, jazz, punk – as long as it's vinyl he sells it. Day after day Frank finds his customers the music they need. Then into his life walks Ilse Brauchmann.

Ilse asks Frank to teach her about music. His instinct is to turn and run. And yet he is drawn to this strangely still, mysterious woman with her pea-green coat and her eyes as black as vinyl. But Ilse is not what she seems. And Frank has old wounds that threaten to re-open and a past he will never leave behind ...

In February, “Lessons in Chemistry” by *Bonnie Garmus*

Chemist Elizabeth Zott is not your average woman. In fact, Elizabeth Zott would be the first to point out that there is no such thing as an average woman. But it's the early 1960s and her all-male team at Hastings Research Institute takes a very unscientific view of equality. Except for one: Calvin Evans; the lonely, brilliant, Nobel-prize nominated grudge-holder who falls in love with—of all things—her mind. True chemistry results.

But like science, life is unpredictable. Which is why a few years later Elizabeth Zott finds herself not only a single mother, but the reluctant star of America's most beloved cooking show *Supper at Six*. Elizabeth's unusual approach to cooking (“combine one tablespoon acetic acid with a pinch of sodium chloride”) proves revolutionary. But as her following grows, not everyone is happy. Because as it turns out, Elizabeth Zott isn't just teaching women to cook. She's daring them to change the status quo.

Laugh-out-loud funny, shrewdly observant, and studded with a dazzling cast of supporting characters, *Lessons in Chemistry* is as original and vibrant as its protagonist.

In March, “Finding Edward” by *Sheila Murray*

Cyril Rowntree, a mixed race Jamaican, migrates to Canada after his mother and surrogate grandfather die. Cyril arrives in Toronto and sets about earning a degree, works two jobs, and begins to navigate his way through the implications of being racialized in his new land.

A chance encounter with a panhandler named Patricia leads Cyril to a suitcase full of photographs and letters dating back to the early 1920s. Cyril is drawn into the letters and their story of a white mother's struggle to come to terms with the need to give up her mixed race baby, Edward. Abandoned by his white father as a small child, Cyril feels a compelling connection to the boy and begins to look for the rest of Edward's story.

As he searches, Cyril unearths hidden pieces of Canadian history and gradually gains the confidence to trust his own judgment.

In May, “The Sleeping Car Porter” by Suzette Mayr

The Sleeping Car Porter brings to life an important part of Black history in North America, from the perspective of a queer man living in a culture that renders him invisible in two ways. Affecting, imaginative, and visceral enough that you’ll feel the rocking of the train, *The Sleeping Car Porter* is a stunning accomplishment.

Baxter’s name isn’t George. But it’s 1929, and Baxter is lucky enough, as a Black man, to have a job as a sleeping car porter on a train that crisscrosses the country. So when the passengers call him George, he has to just smile and nod and act invisible. What he really wants is to go to dentistry school, but he’ll have to save up a lot of nickel and dime tips to get there, so he puts up with “George.”

On this particular trip out west, the passengers are more unruly than usual, especially when the train is stalled for two extra days; their secrets start to leak out and blur with the sleep-deprivation hallucinations Baxter is having. When he finds a naughty postcard of two queer men, Baxter’s memories and longings are reawakened; keeping it puts his job in peril, but he can’t part with the postcard or his thoughts of Edwin Drew, Porter Instructor.