

## Jaquith Public Library 2021 -2022 Book Group Selections

**September 27 – The Book of Lost Names** by Kristin Harmel

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**September 27 – The Book of Lost Names** by Kristin Harmel

Eva Traube Abrams, a semi-retired librarian in Florida, is shelving books one morning when her eyes lock on a photograph in a magazine lying open nearby. She freezes; it’s an image of a book she hasn’t seen in sixty-five years—a book she recognizes as *The Book of Lost Names*.

The accompanying article discusses the looting of libraries by the Nazis across Europe during World War II—an experience Eva remembers well—and the search to reunite people with the texts taken from them so long ago. The book in the photograph, an eighteenth-century religious text thought to have been taken from France in the waning days of the war, is one of the most fascinating cases. Now housed in Berlin’s Zentral- und Landesbibliothek library, it appears to contain some sort of code, but researchers don’t know where it came from—or what the code means. Only Eva holds the answer—but will she have the strength to revisit old memories and help reunite those lost during the war?

As a graduate student in 1942, Eva was forced to flee Paris after the arrest of her father, a Polish Jew. Finding refuge in a small mountain town in the Free Zone, she begins forging identity documents for Jewish children fleeing to neutral Switzerland. But erasing people comes with a price, and along with a mysterious, handsome forger named Rémy, Eva decides she must find a way to preserve the real names of the children who are too young to remember who they really are. The records they keep in *The Book of Lost Names* will become even more vital when the resistance cell they work for is betrayed and Rémy disappears.

An engaging and evocative novel reminiscent of *The Lost Girls of Paris* and *The Alice Network*, *The Book of Lost Names* is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the power of bravery and love in the face of evil.

**October 25 – Dictionary of Lost Words** by Pip Williams

In 1901, the word ‘Bondmaid’ was discovered missing from the Oxford English Dictionary. This is the story of the girl who stole it.

Esme is born into a world of words. Motherless and irrepressibly curious, she spends her childhood in the ‘Scriptorium’, a garden shed in Oxford where her father and a team of dedicated lexicographers are collecting words for the

very first Oxford English Dictionary. Esme's place is beneath the sorting table, unseen and unheard. One day a slip of paper containing the word 'bondmaid' flutters to the floor. Esme rescues the slip and stashes it in an old wooden case that belongs to her friend, Lizzie, a young servant in the big house. Esme begins to collect other words from the Scriptorium that are misplaced, discarded or have been neglected by the dictionary men. They help her make sense of the world.

Over time, Esme realizes that some words are considered more important than others, and that words and meanings relating to women's experiences often go unrecorded. While she dedicates her life to the Oxford English Dictionary, secretly, she begins to collect words for another dictionary: The Dictionary of Lost Words.

Set when the women's suffrage movement was at its height and the Great War loomed, *The Dictionary of Lost Words* reveals a lost narrative, hidden between the lines of a history written by men. It's a delightful, lyrical and deeply thought-provoking celebration of words, and the power of language to shape the world and our experience of it.

### **November 22 – Hamnet by Maggie O'Farrell**

Drawing on Maggie O'Farrell's long-term fascination with the little-known story behind Shakespeare's most enigmatic play, *HAMNET* is a luminous portrait of a marriage, at its heart the loss of a beloved child.

Warwickshire in the 1580s. Agnes is a woman as feared as she is sought after for her unusual gifts. She settles with her husband in Henley street, Stratford, and has three children: a daughter, Susanna, and then twins, Hamnet and Judith. The boy, Hamnet, dies in 1596, aged eleven. Four years or so later, the husband writes a play called Hamlet.

Award-winning author Maggie O'Farrell's new novel breathes full-blooded life into the story of a loss usually consigned to literary footnotes, and provides an unforgettable vindication of Agnes, a woman intriguingly absent from history.

### **January 24 – Dutch House by Anne Patchett**

At the end of the Second World War, Cyril Conroy combines luck and a single canny investment to begin an enormous real estate empire, propelling his family from poverty to enormous wealth. His first order of business is to buy the Dutch House, a lavish estate in the suburbs outside of Philadelphia.

Meant as a surprise for his wife, the house sets in motion the undoing of everyone he loves.

The story is told by Cyril's son Danny, as he and his older sister, the brilliantly acerbic and self-assured Maeve, are exiled from the house where they grew up by their stepmother. The two wealthy siblings are thrown back into the poverty their parents had escaped from and find that all they have to count on is one another. It is this unshakable bond between them that both saves their lives and thwarts their futures.

Set over the course of five decades, *The Dutch House* is a dark fairy tale about two smart people who cannot overcome their past. Despite every outward sign of success, Danny and Maeve are only truly comfortable when they're together. Throughout their lives, they return to the well-worn story of what they've lost with humor and rage. But when at last they're forced to

confront the people who left them behind, the relationship between an indulged brother and his ever-protective sister is finally tested.

### **February 28 – Deacon King Kong by James McBride**

In September 1969, a fumbling, cranky old church deacon known as Sportcoat shuffles into the courtyard of the Cause Houses housing project in south Brooklyn, pulls a .38 from his pocket, and in front of everybody shoots the project's drug dealer at point-blank range.

In *Deacon King Kong*, McBride brings to vivid life the people affected by the shooting: the victim, the African-American and Latinx residents who witnessed it, the white neighbors, the local cops assigned to investigate, the members of the Five Ends Baptist Church where Sportcoat was deacon, the neighborhood's Italian mobsters, and Sportcoat himself.

As the story deepens, it becomes clear that the lives of the characters--caught in the tumultuous swirl of 1960s New York--overlap in unexpected ways. When the truth does emerge, McBride shows us that not all secrets are meant to be hidden, that the best way to grow is to face change without fear, and that the seeds of love lie in hope and compassion.

### **March 28 – Leaving Coy's Hill by Katherine A. Sherbrooke**

An unforgettable story about the triumphs and travails of a woman unwilling to play by the rules, based on the remarkable life of pioneering feminist and abolitionist Lucy Stone.

Born on a farm in 1818, Lucy Stone dreamt of extraordinary things for a girl of her time, like continuing her education beyond the eighth grade and working for the abolitionist cause, and of ordinary things, such as raising a family of her own. But when she learns that the Constitution affords no rights to married women, she declares that she will never marry and dedicates her life to fighting for change.

At a time when it is considered promiscuous for women to speak in public, Lucy risks everything for the anti-slavery movement, her powerful oratory mesmerizing even her most ardent detractors as she rapidly becomes a household name. And when she begins to lecture on the "woman question," she inspires a young Susan B. Anthony to join the movement. But life as a crusader is a lonely one.

When Henry Blackwell, a dashing and forward-thinking man, proposes a marriage of equals, Lucy must reconcile her desire for love and children with her public persona and the legal perils of marriage she has long railed against. And when a wrenching controversy pits Stone and Anthony against each other, Lucy makes a decision that will impact her legacy forever.

Based on true events, *Leaving Coy's Hill* is a timeless story of women's quest for personal and professional fulfillment within society's stubborn constraints. And as an abolitionist and women's rights activist fighting for the future of a deeply divided country, Lucy Stone's quest to live a life on her own terms is as relevant as ever.

### **April 25 – Folklorn by Angela Mi Young Hur**

Elsa Park is a particle physicist at the top of her game, stationed at a neutrino observatory in the Antarctic, confident she's put enough distance

between her ambitions and the family ghosts she's run from all her life. But it isn't long before her childhood imaginary friend—an aching familiar, spectral woman in the snow—comes to claim her at last.

Years ago, Elsa's now-catatonic mother had warned her that the women of their line were doomed to repeat the narrative lives of their ancestors from Korean myth and legend. But beyond these ghosts, Elsa also faces a more earthly fate: the mental illness and generational trauma that run in her immigrant family, a sickness no less ravenous than the ancestral curse hunting her

When her mother breaks her decade-long silence and tragedy strikes, Elsa must return to her

childhood home in California. There, among family wrestling with their own demons, she unravels the secrets hidden in the handwritten pages of her mother's dark stories: of women's desire and fury; of magic suppressed, stolen, or punished; of the hunger for vengeance.

From Sparks Fellow, Tin House alumna, and Harvard graduate Angela Mi Young Hur, *Folklore* is a wondrous and necessary exploration of the myths we inherit and those we fashion for ourselves.

### **May 23 – The Other Bennett by Janice Hadlow**

Mary, the bookish ugly duckling of *Pride and Prejudice's* five Bennet sisters, emerges from the shadows and transforms into a desired woman with choices of her own.

What if Mary Bennet's life took a different path from that laid out for her in *Pride and Prejudice*? What if the frustrated intellectual of the Bennet family, the marginalized middle daughter, the plain girl who takes refuge in her books, eventually found the fulfillment enjoyed by her prettier, more confident sisters.

This is the plot of *The Other Bennet Sister*, a debut novel with exactly the affection and authority to satisfy Austen fans

Ultimately, Mary's journey is like that taken by every Austen heroine. She learns that she can only expect joy when she has accepted who she really is. She must throw off the false expectations and wrong ideas that have combined to obscure her true nature and prevented her from what makes her happy. Only when she undergoes this evolution does she have a chance at finding fulfillment; only then does she have the clarity to recognize her partner when he presents himself—and only at that moment is she genuinely worthy of love.

Mary's destiny diverges from that of her sisters. It does not involve broad acres or landed gentry. But it does include a man; and, as in all Austen novels, Mary must decide whether he is the truly the one for her.