

The Books List Top Picks for Book Club & Beyond

BY KRISTYN KUSEK LEWIS



Inspiring Memoir

Ever been in the midst of an ordinary day and wondered what it might be like to reinvent yourself? When **Nikki Vargas** was 26, newly engaged, and working in advertising, she realized her life wasn't what she wanted. So she bought a plane ticket to Colombia. And then another one to Vietnam. And then another, and another. In her globe-trotting *Call You When I Land*, she takes you along on her adventures as she meets love interests, learns tough truths about herself, and ultimately finds her purpose as a travel writer.

Dazzling Short Stories

Louise Kennedy's *The End of the World Is a Cul de Sac* is set in her native Ireland, where, in each story, a woman faces an unimaginable challenge. One is suspicious of her husband's relationship with a teenager; another has been abandoned in an unfinished housing development that may be haunted; another is touring the country with her mother-in-law to spread her husband's ashes. Brace for a tense and provocative examination of women's lives, and how perseverance can push you through the direst circumstances.

A Different Kind of War Story

It's 1945, and Japan has invaded British-colonized Malaya (now Malaysia). Cecily is distraught over the fate of her three children, in part because her own actions may have put them in danger. Ten years earlier, bored with her life as a housewife, she met a general and became a spy for the Japanese forces who are now assaulting her community. Inspired by the author's grandmother's stories, *The Storm We Made* by **Vanessa Chan** is a gripping novel that tackles the personal impact of war.

The Un-Hallmark Movie

In *Welcome Home, Stranger* by **Kate Christensen**, Rachel is an environmental journalist in D.C. Middle-aged, divorced, and childless, she has no desire to go home to Maine to be reminded that her family doesn't quite know how to handle her independence. But in the aftermath of her mother's death, she's forced to return, and her past—and all the people in it—can no longer be ignored. This snarky, vulnerable, complicated main character feels so real, you'll swear you actually know her.

Family Drama

Flores and Miss Paula by **Melissa Rivero** features 30-something Flores and her Peruvian immigrant mother, Paula, who mourn the recent death of Martín, their father and husband, every day. Without his mediating influence, the Brooklyn, New York, apartment they share is center stage for arguments about how each thinks the other should live. Then they find out they have to move, and potentially leave the neighborhood they've loved for decades, and their relationship evolves as they finally learn to understand each other.

Twisty Suspense

In *The Other Mothers* by **Katherine Faulkner**, Tash feels like an outcast in her posh London neighborhood, where she and her husband barely make the rent on their dingy basement apartment. With her son in a new playgroup, she has time to rev up her freelance journalism career, and she thinks she has a local story with big-break potential: the unexplained death of a young nanny. But when the fancy moms in the playgroup start inviting her to coffees and cocktails, she grows to suspect them of hiding a sinister connection to the case.

Riveting Escape

Part murder mystery, part historical fiction, **Ariel Lawhon's** *The Frozen River* takes place in New England in 1789. Martha, a midwife and healer, examines a local man's body after it's found frozen in ice. She knows he's one of two men accused of rape and is certain the events are related—so she turns to her treasured diary, with its careful record of daily events, to help her pursue justice. Based loosely on a real-life midwife from the 18th century, this novel has a gothic, wintry feel that makes it an ideal fireside read.

Feel-Good Fiction

Eugene "Geno" Miles is an elderly resident of an assisted living facility. His new nursing assistant, Angel, wouldn't call him the average patient: He's moody *and* he insists his life began in medieval Spain, where he lost the only love he's ever known. He claims he's spent the past 1,000 years looking for her. As the two spend time together, Angel wonders whether Geno's stories about his past lives might contain some truth. *Again and Again* by **Jonathan Evison** delivers a heartfelt message about loyalty in a wildly inventive package.

PROP STYLING BY MARINA BEVILACQUA