

It's book-buying season! If you're looking for gifts or a treat for yourself, the WVU English Department has some recommendations for 2022.

Fiction

Madison Helman, PhD student recommends:

The Strange Case of the Alchemist's Daughter
by Theodora Goss

Goss's novel (and its two sequels) imagines what would happen if all the daughters of mad scientists from Victorian lit teamed up and started a girl gang. Oh, and they also encounter Sherlock Holmes and Jack the Ripper. As a Victorian literature scholar, Goss knows her stuff, so the books feel accurate to the time and their primary sources. They're also incredibly fun—I'm particularly fond of Diana Hyde, who is pure chaos. The audiobooks are excellent, if that's your speed.

Erin Brock Carlson, Faculty, recommends:

Memphis: A Novel
by Tara M. Stringfellow

I picked up Stringfellow's debut novel this summer at the library because of its vibrant cover and then couldn't put it down because of its equally vibrant storytelling. Weaving together the perspectives from three generations of a family, Stringfellow captures the precarity of life as a Black woman in the American South over the course of the 20th century. I especially loved the realism with which relationships between mothers, daughters, and sisters are represented, bound with pride, joy, complexity, and in some cases, sorrow.

Tim Sweet, Faculty, recommends:

The Reluctant Fundamentalist
by Moshin Hamid

During a chance (?) encounter one evening in Lahore, a Pakistani professor tells an American how he came to embrace the United States—and why he let go. Quietly suspenseful.

Taylor Miller, MAPWE Student, recommends

All Good People Here

by Ashley Flowers

I don't know about you all, but I love a good mystery. Even more, I love trying to figure out the answers before they are revealed (to my partner's dismay). This book promised twists and turns that even the most skilled sleuth would not be able to see coming, and it delivered! If you are looking for a book that will make your mind reel and leave you unable to put it down, this is the one.

Laura Brady, faculty, recommends

The Birchbark House

by Louise Erdrich

If you already appreciate Erdrich's lyrical prose in novels such as *Love Medicine* or *The Round House* and have been wishing for more, don't miss the start of a series that she wrote for younger readers. *The Birchbark House* is set in 1847 and follows an Ojibwa family through four seasons with a focus on eight-year-old Omakayas. Read it for yourself, or read it with a child in your life.

Rojda Idil Arslan, MA Student, recommends

If on a Winter's Night a Traveler

by Italo Calvino

"You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller*. Relax. Let the world around you fade."

From the opening line, Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* positions the reader as the main character. It is about a Reader (you!) who wanders around the chaotic realm of literature, meets the Other Reader, and together tries to uncover the mystery in the publishing industry. The Reader and the Other Reader are forced to read multiple books without ever being able to finish them, reach a conclusion or find a resolution because each and every book they encounter is corrupted and only has the first section, nothing more.

Cari Carpenter, Faculty, recommends:

The Sentence

by Louise Erdrich

Award winning, illustrious author Louise Erdrich pitches another hit in this marvelous book, inspired in part by Covid and the brutal killing of George Floyd. Complete with a bookstore and a ghost, it ends with a delightful list of the main character's "perfect" novels. I'd add this one to her list.

Lara Farina, Faculty, recommends:

The Hearing Trumpet

by Leonora Carrington

This mid-20th-century work of fiction by Mexican Surrealist writer and painter Leonora Carrington is the kookiest and most charming thing I've read in some time. The action kicks off when 92-year Marian Leatherby is given an ear trumpet by her be-wigged BFF, Carmela, and the plot gets steadily weirder as the story follows her into a questionable home for elderly women. Marian's a witty protagonist, and Carrington deals with some surprisingly prescient subjects like gender passing, health-care scams, and even climate change. Recently re-issued by NYRB Classics.

Katie Bonevento, MA student, recommends

The Sundial

by Shirley Jackson

This lesser-known Jackson novel is just as chilling, unique, and beautifully written as her more famous work. It follows the wealthy Halloran family and their various hangers-on as they react to a sudden revelation that the world is going to end. With a huge cast of dysfunctional characters, a Gothic mansion setting that seems to be a precursor to Hill House, and a hilarious pitch-black sense of humor, *The Sundial* is a true hidden gem.

Rudy Almas, Retired Faculty, recommends

Uncle Tom's Cabin

by Harriet Beecher Stow

For those who want to deny or rewrite American history, it might be time to turn to this 1852 abolitionist novel, especially for those who deny America is a racist country. Think of Jackson MS. Yes, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is melodramatic; yes, it's sentimental; yes, it's didactic, but I found the book good reading for 2022, some 170 years after it was first published.

Brent Cronin, MFA student, recommends

Butcher's Crossing

by John Williams

Before he wrote *Stoner*, Williams wrote this Western masterpiece about a buffalo hunting expedition in Kansas. Gritty frontier life is rendered beautifully with sharp and clear prose. It's a cracking adventure novel that I don't think gets the credit or readership it deserves.

Sasha Dobek, MA PWE student, recommends

The Naked and the Dead

by Norman Mailer

Mailer uses gritty, journalistic and script-like elements to explore both the horrors and the arbitrariness of war and purpose through the lives of 13 American soldiers fighting for possession of the Japanese-held, fictional island of Anopopei in the Pacific theater during WWII.

Anna Elfenbein, Faculty, recommends:

The Weight of Ink

by Rachel Kadish

Praised by Toni Morrison for her treatment of the politics of passion, Rachel Kadish braids the compelling stories of two women intellectuals together in this wonderful novel. It begins with the discovery in twenty-first century London by a contemporary woman academic of a trove of documents from the seventeenth century scribed by "Aleph" for a blind rabbi. Kadish's depiction of the internecine academic struggle to possess the documents and her gradual revelation of their import make *The Weight of Ink* a page turner. And the writing itself is so good that I have read the novel twice.

Sarah Morris, faculty, recommends:

Foote: A Mystery Novel

by Tom Bredehoft

A quirky and easy read, *Foote* imagines Morgantown and the surrounding communities as a space inhabited not just by people, but also by cryptids in disguise. Living among the human population, Big Jim, a bigfoot private investigator, solves murders while maintaining a life in two worlds, one of which must be kept secret. This book was a welcome diversion—great for a beach trip or a rainy weekend.

Doug Phillips, Faculty, recommends:

Magpie Murders

by Anthony Horowitz

A whodunit within a whodunit, *Magpie Murders* follows editor Susan Ryeland as she tries to track down the missing final chapters of her best-selling-author-client's latest mystery novel. Of course, when the author turns up dead, everyone looks suspicious. Is the only way to solve the real-life murder to solve the murder mystery her client was writing? For coming in at almost 600 pages, the novel reads fast, full of wit and dry British humor – perfect for a long weekend.

Kelly Ward, MFA student, recommends:

Every Bone a Prayer

by Ashley Blooms

A beautifully woven tale of magic, body horror, fabulism, and family, all wrapped up in a heartbreaking story about one little girl's journey of overcoming trauma in rural Appalachia. What does it mean to have a name? This debut novel is unlike anything you've ever read before. For fans of speculative fiction and dark realism.

Emily Merrick, MFA student, recommends:

Lavinia

by Ursula K. Le Guin

The classical tale of the Aeneid told from the perspective of Lavinia, Aeneas's underwritten wife. Le Guin's spellbinding prose builds an interesting metacommentary on the nature of stories, and what it's like to be aware of your own story (in this case, an epic poem) as it's still happening around you. Sorrowful, deeply poignant, and meaningful. A quote from the beginning chapters: "It's not death that allows us to understand one another, but poetry."

Olivia Wertz, PhD student, recommends:

The Vanishing Half

by Brit Bennett

This novel follows the lives of twin sisters, Stella and Desiree. The two sisters grow up together, but part ways when Stella leaves her sister in order to pass as white. Bennett is an incredible storyteller, and *The Vanishing Half* explores a number of important themes and ideas, such as race, motherhood, identity, coming of age, class, and community.

Qazi Arka Rahman, PhD student, recommends:

Babu Bangladesh!

by Numair Atif Chowdhury

This book moves forward with a captivating narrative where history seems to appear as an individual. It does an excellent job juxtaposing the surreal political landscape of Bangladesh around the time of its Liberation War in 1971. Numair manages to capture the magic and beauty of turbulent times and unlikely allies that mark the modern history of the Indian subcontinent. Just like Rushdie's brilliant *Midnight's Children*, *Babu Bangladesh!* is an engaging read for any reader with an appetite for delightful prose making a good story – that can deliver much more with some historical understanding.

Nonfiction

Catherine Gouge, Faculty, recommends: *Invisible Differences: A Story of Aspergers, Adulthood, and Living a Life in Full Color*

Story by Julie Dachez, Illustrated by Mademoiselle Caroline

The author and subject of this graphic memoir dedicates it to "people who are 'too much like this' or 'not enough like that.' You who simply by existing, transgress established norms." It's a story about one person learning to embrace her self and has some incredible moments of visual silence and some of chaos—all told with simple lines that help us understand her struggle better.

Mark Brazaitis, Faculty, recommends:

Under a White Sky: the Nature of the Future

by Elizabeth Kolbert

Think we're going to geoengineer our way out of the climate crisis? Think again! Or read this book by the Pulitzer-Prize-winning author of *The Sixth Extinction*. Human efforts to change nature to our benefit have been, at best, moderately successful. At worst, they've been darkly comic if not disastrous. Despite the often grim material, Kolbert is a wry, and even, at times, hopeful narrator.

Glenn Taylor, faculty, recommends:

Generations: A Memoir

by Lucille Clifton

Throughout the most isolated of the covid times, I went back and re-read Clifton's *Collected Poems* (BOA) and *How to Carry Water*, because these poems can act as a balm and a pinhole of light to chase. But her prose is so very powerful too, as 1976's *Generations* revealed. And if you've had a copy of *Good Woman*, you know that *Generations* is included in the back as bonus material. But here it is for the first

time (presumably since the 1970s) on its own, from nyrb Classics. It is a slim volume of pure writing and true storytelling of the most seasoned variety. These are conjured and channeled voices from Clifton's undead past, and as Tracy K. Smith writes in the introduction, "Once named, these kin arrive not singly but en masse, brought to life through the rhythm and inflections of voices." We need only to listen.

Michael Vozniak, PhD student (ABD), recommends:

Another Appalachia: Coming up Queer and Indian in a Mountain Place

by Neema Avashia

Born and raised in Cross Lanes, West Virginia, to immigrant parents, Neema Avashia's 2022 collection of personal essays offers a refreshing perspective on life in West Virginia and Appalachia: one that *doesn't* center whiteness, maleness, conservatism, heterosexuality, and Christianity (*cough cough jd vance cough*). Avashia's stories are simultaneously humorous, heartbreaking, frank, engaging, and welcoming. If you're looking for a book that shatters the traditional narrative about who "counts" as Appalachian, then you'll love this one.

Kirk Hazen, faculty, recommends:

Like, Literally, Dude

by Valerie Fridland

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/671558/like-literally-dude-by-valerie-fridland/>

For anyone who has ever wondered why their kids call everyone 'dude,' why it's so hard to stop saying 'literally' literally all the time and why 'like' is everywhere while love is still so hard to find, this is the book for you. In *Like, Literally, Dude*, linguist Valerie Fridland shows how we can re-imagine these forms as exciting new linguistic frontiers rather than our culture's impending demise. With delightful irreverence and expertise built over two decades of research, Fridland weaves together history, psychology, science, and laugh-out-loud anecdotes to explain why we speak the way we do today, and how that impacts what our kids may be saying tomorrow.

Renee Nicholson, MFA Alumna and Humanities Center Director, recommends:

Notes from the Road

by Mike Ingram

While America has its love affair with the idea of an epic road trip, Mike Ingram's cross-continent trek brings him to a critical reflection point, weeping in Joshua Tree National Park. This book-length, sectioned essay refuses to fall into the easy tropes of the quests narratives as it reveals personal vulnerability alongside how the country itself both falls into a capitalism-inspired ubiquity and also retains places of pure particularity.

Jennifer Sano-Franchini, faculty, recommends:

Crying in H-Mart: A Memoir

by Michelle Zauner

A moving story about the complex relationships between identity, food, mourning, and loss. Also known as musical artist Japanese Breakfast, Michelle Zauner reflects on her experience of grief surrounding her Korean immigrant mother's cancer diagnosis and eventual passing as it would impact her understanding of self and as she navigated the downs and ups of her career in music. A good read for when you need an ugly cry.

Mary Ann Samyn, faculty, recommends:

At Home

by Bill Bryson

If you enjoy fascinating (and sometimes horrifying) facts, then this book is for you. I listened to the audiobook, read by Bryson himself, and walked many a mile while learning countless things I did not know about architecture and gardens, medicine and clothing and all forms of discomfort, taking baths and not taking baths, what people ate in yesteryear and the sometimes awful jobs they had, childhood and why it has been mostly pretty rotten, and famous people who almost always have strange backstories. I've often said that given the chance to choose another era in which to live, I'd choose the Victorian period. Now I'm not so sure.

Brian Ballentine, faculty, recommends:

Shopping for Porcupine: A Life in Arctic Alaska

by Seth Kantner

Kantner's essays and photos depict his life growing up in a sod igloo where his "memory started under the snow...and it coalesced around poorly lit, scary, and exotic events." His was a life where almost every tool or supply needed to be fabricated from what could be found on the land or harvested from an animal. Before snowmobiles, sled dogs were the only option for transportation and his clothes were seal skins and caribou hides. Of course, his family survived thanks to the generosity of the Iñupiaq and his education on how to be in the arctic makes for great stories.