



**TALK**

Talk About Literature In Kansas  
Book Discussions

*Explore History*

*Exchange Ideas*

*Build Community*

**Updated January 2017**



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Book Discussions

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**TALK**  
Talk About Literature In Kansas  
Book Discussions

## WELCOME to

Talk About Literature in Kansas (TALK),  
a program for every Kansan who loves to read and discuss good books.

Each **TALK** series is built around an entertaining and thought-provoking topic of interest to adult readers. The books in each series are selected for reader appeal, literary quality, and relevance to the series theme. A list of series and books is available in the TALK catalog.

**TALK** provides exciting programs from the Kansas Humanities Council. The local sponsor – a library, senior center, historical society, or other nonprofit group – selects the series to present to the community. KHC helps by providing multiple sets of books, discussion leaders, and special publicity materials to the sponsoring group.

### *Questions? Contact*

Leslie Von Holten  
KHC Director of Programs  
785/357-0359 or [leslie@kansashumanities.org](mailto:leslie@kansashumanities.org)

## The TALK Model

**A TALK reading discussion group meets at regular intervals** – usually once per month. A series includes up to three scholar-facilitated discussions, depending on the local sponsor's preference.

**Before each meeting, the discussion group participants check out and read the book to be discussed.** Each meeting opens with informal comments by a KHC discussion leader, who may provide background information about the author and the book, and raise questions for discussion. The questions provide a point of departure for open discussion among the participants. Program time is 60 to 90 minutes – or longer when the discussion is particularly lively!

*Please note: TALK programs are intended for adult, out-of-school audiences.*

# TALK Series – The 1930s

We have all seen the pictures: long lines of heavy-jacketed people waiting for handouts in breadlines, or crowding counters hoping for a job; the careworn visage of the Okie mother with her hungry children huddled around her; the milling crowds in front of closed-down banks; the ramshackle shacks of the Hoovervilles that sprouted in American cities; the dustbowl cloud descending on the Plains town; stark images of the hungry, the unemployed, the neglected.

For American history, the 1930s was a pivotal, critical era. In the early years of the decade, a range of fundamental challenges confronted the nation: the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, Prohibition, and radicalized politics on undermined the security of democratic institutions. Overseas, the path toward war was growing increasingly clear.

And yet the later years of the decade are equally remarkable for the ways America mapped a route out of the crisis. After Franklin Delano Roosevelt's victory in the presidential election of 1932, he responded to the economic meltdown by initiating the New Deal, featuring both the creation of a system to ease the problems of those most hurt by the depression (the unemployed, the retired, and the poor) and direct government intervention to re-energize a damaged economy, ranging from reopening banks and reorganizing agriculture to government job creation to stimulate the economy.

The thirties were also a period of remarkable artistic efflorescence across the full spectrum of arts. In Hollywood, the decade featured a new growth of film genres within the studio system. The classic Hollywood musical, the screwball comedy, the gangster film, major studio horror movies (*Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *Wolf Man*), and animated films (including Walt Disney's first work) all got their start in the decade. The decade saw the rise of regionalist painters like Grant Wood, John Steuart Curry, and Thomas Hart Benton and photographers Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, and Walker Evans. Musical forms, especially those rooted in the fusion of African-American music with mainstream culture – the blues, jazz, swing – continued to develop. And the literary output of the decade ranged from the novels of John Steinbeck, to new African-American voices like Richard Wright, to the invention of the hard-boiled detective.



## ***All the King's Men***

**by Robert Penn Warren (1946)**

Warren was a novelist, but he thought of his work as a sort of history as well. "And what we students of history always learn is that the human being is a very complicated contraption and that they are not good or bad but are good and bad and the good comes out of the bad and the bad out of the good, and the devil take the hindmost." The devil in question here is Huey Long, the notorious Louisiana governor who provided Warren a model for Willie Stark. 148 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Foulke (Ottawa), Klaus (Lenexa), Lewis (Lindsborg), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City).

## ***The Day of the Locust***

**by Nathanael West (1939)**

"It is hard to laugh at the need for beauty and romance, no matter how tasteless, even horrible, the results of that need are. But it is easy to sigh," declares Tod, the narrator of this Hollywood satire. Tod is a painter, but his work is background and costumes; aspiration rather than achievement defines him. His painting, *The Burning of Los Angeles*, foreshadows the novel's violent climax. 126 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Carlson (Pittsburg), Hacker (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Reeves (Prairie Village), Stanley (McPherson), Stewart (Junction City).

## ***Mules and Men***

**by Zora Neale Hurston (1935)**

Hurston recalled in her introduction: "I was glad when somebody told me, 'You may go and collect Negro folklore.'" And the resulting book established the territory she would continue to explore in both fiction and non-fictional forms, the shaping of African-American identity in the contexts of both the experience of the South and the Great Migration to the cities of the north. 246 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Hill (Lawrence), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***The Worst Hard Time***

**by Timothy Egan (2006)**

Egan describes the first of the new storms that would come to define the Dust Bowl: "Wasn't a sandstorm.... And it wasn't a hailstorm, thou it certainly brought with it a dark, threatening sky.... It rolled, like a mobile hill of crud, and it was black." Egan provides a masterful overview of the dust storms and their consequences for agriculture and people on the Great Plains. 312 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Craven (Hays), Foulke (Ottawa), Goossen (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka).

# TALK Series – African-American Perspectives

What does it mean to be black in twentieth-century America? According to Cornel West, it means “being part of a rich culture and community.” But what is this culture and community, what are its values, its difficulties, its struggles? The six writers represented here help us answer these complex questions.

One way of looking at the titles chosen for this series is by focusing on the variety of experiences represented. Here we read about people who dwell in both rural and urban environments, who are both poor and moderately wealthy, who try to understand themselves as distinctly female or male, and whose life experiences span all the years of the twentieth century. In spite of these differences related to identity, however, there is a common thread: these are all African-American perspectives, and, as one of the chosen titles states, race matters.

Another way of viewing this series is through the common themes that run through these works. The African-American search for identity is one such theme; another, related to identity, is the deeply-felt need to understand the past. Questions related to both identity and history bring up a third question – the question of how to understand the relationship between white and black America. Sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly, each author here has something to say in answer to that question as well.



## ***The Autobiography of Malcolm X***

Malcolm X boldly articulated the struggles, the anger, and the beliefs of African Americans in the 1960s. His powerful autobiography, written in collaboration with Roots author Alex Haley, is a modern classic. 527 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Tidwell (Lawrence).

## ***The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin**

At once a powerful evocation of Baldwin’s early life in Harlem and a disturbing examination of racial injustice, this book galvanized our nation in the early days of the Civil Rights movement. 106 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Hill (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Stewart (Junction City), Tidwell (Lawrence).

## ***I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou**

Renowned poet Angelou confronts her rural childhood in the 1930s with wonder, humor, and dignity in this moving autobiography. 246 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Birney (Admire), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Lewis (Lindsborg), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Tidwell (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

Middle-aged widow Avey Marshall leaves her luxurious cruise ship and her two staid women friends to enter a dreamlike world of dance and ritual among the natives of a tiny Caribbean island. 256 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Birney (Admire), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Tidwell (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Race Matters* by Cornel West**

A philosopher, theologian, and activist, West addresses issues ranging from affirmative action to despair, from black leadership to the legacy of Malcolm X – and helps begin the healing of our divided nation. 105 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Goossen (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Krisuk (Dodge City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Tidwell (Lawrence).

## ***Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston**

First treated as a “mule” and then as another man’s “queen,” Janie Crawford finds only disappointment in marriage until she meets a younger man who treats her as a companion and an equal. 195 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Birney (Admire), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Hill (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Krisuk (Dodge City), Lewis (Lindsborg), Low (Lawrence), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Rieke (Leavenworth), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Tidwell (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Praisesong for the Widow* by Paule Marshall**

# TALK Series – African Experiences of Migration

The United States celebrates the fact that we are a nation of immigrants. But what do we know about the experiences of recent African migrants who have come to call the United States home? A growing number of these immigrants have settled into Kansas communities over the past several decades. The books in this series explore some of the fault lines between being African and being American, particularly for the young characters who come of age in these stories.

These works address newcomers' difficulties in adjusting to American life after enduring traumatic experiences in their home countries. People arrive here from Africa as from other countries—seeking escape from social conflict, pursuing educational opportunities, hoping for a better quality of life—and 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.

These stories 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 of immigration illuminate what it means to be American, in a place where nearly all of us have come from somewhere else, and forged a society that is known for its diversity.



## ***Open City: A Novel*** by Teju Cole

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.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander, Caminero-Santangelo, Chavez, Etzel, Ghazali, Goossen, Hawkins, Hope, Kolich, Low, MacGonagle, Peterson, Prasch, Rabas, Reeves, Sanchez, Wiechert

## ***Brooklyn Heights*** by Miral al-Tahawy

The story of Hind and her 8-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.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander, Caminero-Santangelo, Chavez, Etzel, Ghazali, Goossen, Hawkins, Hope, Low, MacGonagle, Mirriam-Goldberg, Peterson, Prasch, Rabas, Reeves, Sanchez, Stanley, Wiechert

## ***The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*** by Dinaw Mengestu

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.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander, Caminero-

Santangelo, Chavez, Etzel, Ghazali, Goossen, Hawkins, Hope, Kolich, Low, MacGonagle, Peterson, Prasch, Rabas, Reeves, Sanchez, Wiechert

## ***A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*** by Ishmael Beah

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.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander, Caminero-Santangelo, Chavez, Etzel, Ghazali, Goossen, Hawkins, Hope, Kolich, Low, MacGonagle, Peterson, Prasch, Rabas, Reeves, Sanchez, Stanley, Wiechert

## ***What Is the What*** by Dave Eggers

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.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander, Caminero-Santangelo, Chavez, Etzel, Ghazali, Goossen, Hawkins, Hope, Low, MacGonagle, Peterson, Prasch, Rabas, Reeves, Sanchez, Wiechert

# TALK Series – Award Winners

The film industry has the Oscars, the Golden Globes and the Independent Spirit Awards to honor artistic achievement. The literary world, though, has the Pulitzer Prizes, the National Book Award, the PEN/Faulkner Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award to highlight the year's best works of fiction. Just as the movie awards may seem to favor smaller, more finely crafted movies over the megaplex-blockbusters, the best-known book awards tend to shine a spotlight on well-wrought literary works rather than formulaic best-sellers.

A novel or collection of stories that wins a major national book award can often be among the most widely read literary works of its day. Sometimes such a selection can be career-making, as in the case of Harper Lee's 1961 Pulitzer Prize for her first and only novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In other cases, the award may seem to be more of a career validation. For example, William Faulkner – one of America's greatest writers – won two Pulitzer Prizes. They were awarded for *A Fable* in 1955, and for *The Reivers* in 1963. These, however, have turned out to be two of the least-read or recognized books of Faulkner's prestigious body of work.

The pervasiveness of the Internet, television, and movies, and the advent of the labyrinth-like commercial chain bookstores can make choosing a book out of the thousands published each year seem like a daunting task. By upholding a standard of literary excellence, the awards can help ensure that the most significant books will find an audience, both in the moment and for years to come.



## **Charming Billy** by Alice McDermott

Billy Lynch's loved ones gathered at a Bronx bar to eulogize a great romantic. Their voices form Billy's tragic story, becoming a gentle homage to the lives in their community fractured by grief, shattered by secrets, and sustained by the dream of love. 243 pp.

— National Book Award Winner (1998)

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Lubert (Kansas City), Prasch (Topeka), Rieke (Leavenworth).

## **Cold Mountain** by Charles Frazier

This novel tells an interwoven epic love story between Inman, a Confederate soldier, and the woman he loves, Ada. Frazier writes a gripping story of human connection during a defining ideological crossroads of American history. 449 pp.

— National Book Award Winner (1997)

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Shump (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## **Gilead** by Marilynne Robinson

*Gilead* is written as a letter from the aging John Ames to his young son. It chronicles the lives of three generations of Ames men who took different approaches to the same moral questions. 247 pp.

— Winner of the Pulitzer Prize (2005)

— Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award (2004)

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Reeves (Prairie Village), Shump (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## **Motherless Brooklyn** by Jonathan Lethem

Lionel Essrog narrates this literary detective novel, centering on the death of mobster Frank Minna. Lionel must comb the cityscape for answers, while negotiating the uncontrollable verbal acrobatics of his Tourette's Syndrome in this amusing novel. 311 pp.

— Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award (1999)

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka).

# TALK Series – Before the Civil War

Kansas was opened as a territory in 1854, allowing for the first time legal settlement by non-Native Americans within its borders. Between 1854-1861, people with opposing views from across the United State clashed within the territory, fighting about the fate of the state. The decision was monumental.

Would Kansas allow slavery within its borders? Or, would it join the United States as a free state? Two competing visions of America's future were to be determined on the Kansas frontier. However, the Kansas Territory was already home to many Native Americans. How would settlement impact the existing Native American way-of-life?



## ***The All-True Travels and Adventures of Lidie Newton***

by Jane Smiley

Set mostly in the Kansas Territory shortly before the Civil War, narrator Lydia "Lidie" Harkness recounts her adventures while disguised as a boy, reporting for a proslavery newspaper, and helping a woman escape a plantation. 452 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Lewis (Lindsborg), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Rieke (Leavenworth), Stewart (Junction City), Waters (Dodge City).

## ***The Englishman in Kansas***

by T. H. Gladstone

With reporter-like details, Englishman and abolitionist T. H. Gladstone paints vivid pictures of "border ruffians," frontier life, and the violence of slavery, giving the background to "Bleeding Kansas" and the contested elections that decided if Kansas would be free or slave. 328 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Lewis (Lindsborg), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Prasch (Topeka), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***John Brown: The Legend Revisited***

by Merrill D. Peterson

Peterson gives us Brown in his day, yet shows how the abolitionist's image, celebrated in art, literature, and journalism, has shed the infamy conferred by "Bleeding Kansas," becoming a symbol of American idealism to activists along the political spectrum. 172 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Carlson (Pittsburg), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Foulke (Ottawa), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***Uncle Tom's Cabin***

by Harriet Beecher Stowe

A novel of Antebellum South, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was revolutionary for its passionate indictment of slavery, its presentation of Tom, the first black hero in American fiction, and its heartrending description of the tragic breakup of black families. 446 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Brown (Salina), Carlson (Pittsburg), Goossen (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Krisuk (Dodge City), Lewis (Lindsborg), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Reeves (Prairie Village), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Waters (Dodge City).

## ***Waterlily***

by Ella Cara Deloria

Written in the 1940s by Deloria, Sioux Indian and ethnologist, and now published for the first time, this novel presents an authoritative account of Sioux beliefs, social conventions and ceremonies through the life of a young girl named Waterlily. 227 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Reeves (Prairie Village), Rieke (Leavenworth), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – The Best of the West

The western novel has enjoyed immense popularity in America ever since the “dime novels” with their western heroes appeared in the 1850s. Here are five classic stories, both old and new, that explore the icons of the Old West: the pioneer farmer, the hardy immigrant, the cowboy/cowgirl, the prostitute, the vigilante, and the man of justice. Each novel celebrates the West in its mythic proportions and at the same time touches upon the tension between triumph and tragedy, dreams and failures, which makes the western drama perennially compelling for American readers.



## ***Buffalo Girls***

**by Larry McMurtry**

McMurtry returns to the Montana scene of Lonesome Dove as Buffalo Bill Cody convinces Calamity Jane and a handful of the West’s aging legends to tour with his Wild West Show. 345 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Oakley), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Craven (Hays), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Low (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Stewart (Junction City), Thierer (Admire).

## ***Dancing at the Rascal Fair***

**by Ivan Doig**

This saga of Scottish immigrants seeking ranch land in the Rocky Mountains is also the story of Angus McCaskill’s bittersweet quest to win the heart of Anna Ramsay. 400 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Foulke (Ottawa), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Stewart (Junction City).

## ***O Pioneers!***

**by Willa Cather**

Alexandra Bergson’s dying father leaves their struggling Nebraska homestead to her, not her brothers. With her iron will and intelligence, she survives personal tragedy and tames wild land that she loves. 122 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Brown (Salina), Carlson (Pittsburg), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Foulke (Ottawa), Goossen (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Hill (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Rieke (Leavenworth), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka), Waters (Dodge City), Weso (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***The Ox-Bow Incident***

**by Walter Van Tilburg Clark**

This classic story of vigilante justice unfolds in Nevada in 1885, when a cattle theft and a murder drive angry men to take the law into their own hands.

217 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Stewart (Junction City), Thierer (Admire), Weso (Lawrence).

## ***Shane***

**by Jack Schaefer**

Shane is the classic loner of the Old West who gives up his gun to befriend a young boy and his family – only to discover that he can’t escape his gunfighter’s destiny. 119 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Foulke (Ottawa), Keller (Emporia), Kolich (Leavenworth), Rabas (Emporia), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Stewart (Junction City), Thierer (Admire), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – Between Fences

Fences can either keep us out, or in. “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. There must be some kind of enclosure for there to be a need for “pearly gates.”

Throughout history, fences have defined human accomplishments and claims. Building fences is one of the defining acts of civilization, establishing the boundaries between civilization and barbarism. The fencing off of property with barbed wire transformed the economies and the ecologies of the Great Plains in the nineteenth century. The most familiar single episode in the classic American tale of boyhood, *Tom Sawyer*, is the whitewashing of a fence. The white picket fence has become the symbol of postwar American suburbia.



## ***Farewell to Manzanar***

**by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston (1973)**

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 re-entry into American life and her return to Manzanar in 1972. 203 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Foulke (Ottawa), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Lewis (Lindsborg), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Sanchez (Wichita), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Fences***

**by August Wilson (1985)**

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. 101 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Keller (Emporia), Klaus (Lenexa), Lewis (Lindsborg), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Sanchez (Wichita), Tidwell (Lawrence).

## ***The Tortilla Curtain***

**by T. C. Boyle (1995)**

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. As the United States builds hundreds of miles of fence along the Mexican border, his novel has never been timelier. 355 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Sanchez (Wichita), Shump (Lawrence).

## ***The Wire-Cutters***

**by Mollie E. Moore Davis (1899)**

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. 373 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Sanchez (Wichita).

# TALK Series – British Classics

Americans owe their long-standing love affair with the novel to the British writers who defined the genre in the 19th century. In this series, five great British novelists introduce us to heroines and heroes who are young, romantic, headstrong and – in a world steeped in convention and class distinctions – a bit rebellious. It's a leisurely world of country villages, gentlemen farmers, and rural virtue – but one in which ladies aren't always content to ride sidesaddle and the downtrodden aren't always resigned to their lot in life.

In the longing for social acceptance and individual freedom, for marriage and independence, for tradition and personal happiness, these books explore themes as universal today as they were 150 years ago. At the same time, they are light years removed from the fast pace of modern society. These are books to savor, enchanted worlds to visit, enjoy, and return to again and again.



## **Emma**

by Jane Austen

Beautiful, accomplished Emma, the heroine of this nineteenth-century comedy of manners, has only one fault: her love of matchmaking. But she finds out the hard way that people don't fall in love according to plan. 446 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rieke (Leavenworth), Stanley (McPherson), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## **Far from the Madding Crowd**

by Thomas Hardy

Gabriel Oak watches Bathsheba, the impulsive young mistress of Weatherby Farm, enter into an unhappy marriage – as unaware as she that fate will finally bring them together. 374 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Krisuk (Dodge City), Lewis (Lindsborg), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Reeves (Prairie Village), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City).

## **Great Expectations**

by Charles Dickens

Orphaned Pip cultivates the rich Mrs. Havisham and beautiful Estella, and dreams that some day he'll become a gentleman. An escaped convict threatens to shatter his dreams – or are his adventures just beginning? 525 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Carlson (Pittsburg), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa),

Kolich (Leavenworth), Krisuk (Dodge City), Lewis (Lindsborg), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Stanley (McPherson), Stewart (Junction City).

## **Jane Eyre**

by Charlotte Brontë

Plain, penniless Jane Eyre finds unexpected happiness as the governess at the mansion of Thornfield – but the mansion's secrets threaten to destroy both Jane and her beloved Mr. Rochester. 485 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Krisuk (Dodge City), Lewis (Lindsborg), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Rieke (Leavenworth), Stewart (Junction City), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## **The Mill on the Floss**

by George Eliot

Maggie is finally poised to escape her painful past and to enter into the intoxicating world of higher society, despite the warnings of her more cautious brother. 547 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Krisuk (Dodge City), Lewis (Lindsborg), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rieke (Leavenworth), Stanley (McPherson), Stewart (Junction City).

# TALK Series – Childhood Classics

Remember curling up in a chair with *Charlotte's Web*, or climbing onto the lap of a favorite aunt to hear *The Jungle Book*? Such books entertained and educated us as children, teaching us about human nature, friendship, and adventure. Today, the childhood classics have just as much, if not more, to say to us as adults. All the books in this series, by authors from Great Britain and the United States, speak of courage and faith, of insurmountable obstacles, character, and the power of love. They reveal our society's most cherished visions of family life, and celebrate the power of the imagination to pass values and traditions on to the next generation.



## ***Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*** by Roald Dahl

The gates of Mr. Willy Wonka's famous chocolate factory are opening at last, and only five children will be allowed inside: the good-hearted Charlie and a pack of spoiled, destructive brats. 162 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Oakley), Carlson (Pittsburg), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Rabas (Emporia), Shump (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***Charlotte's Web*** by E. B. White

The gentle story of Wilbur the pig and his loyal spider friend, Charlotte, unfolds amidst the nostalgia of the barnyard, the changing seasons, and the pains and rewards of growing up. 184 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Brown-Kuchera (Oakley), Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Rabas (Emporia), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Waters (Dodge City), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***The Jungle Book*** by Rudyard Kipling

Orphan Mowgli, raised by wolves, learns the lore and law of the jungle from wise Bagheera the panther and Baloo the bear in this magical tale set in colonial India. 169 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Stewart (Junction City), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*** by C. S. Lewis

Four brothers and sisters discover a magical land inside the wardrobe – and must find the faith, imagination, and courage to help Aslan the Lion free Narnia from the White Witch. 189 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Brown-

Kuchera (Oakley), Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***A Little Princess*** by Frances Hodgson Burnett

Ten-year-old Sara Crewe had everything – fancy clothes, dolls, her own maid – until tragic misfortune leaves her penniless but still rich in friendship and imagination. 242 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*** by Mildred Taylor

Raised in Depression-era Mississippi, Cassie Logan learns strength and independence from her black farm family – but now she must confront the harsh realities of racial hatred and the threat of the night riders. 210 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Carlson (Pittsburg), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Hill (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka), Waters (Dodge City).

## ***The Wind in the Willows*** by Kenneth Grahame

The mischievous Toad, Mole, Rat, and wise Badger enjoy wild adventures and much laughter in their quest to find the secret of the wind. Their fantasy world blends childhood innocence with gentle social satire for adults. 244 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – The Civil War

In a range of ways, the American Civil War was an unprecedented conflict. Its battles were fought across the full width of the country, from the east coast to Missouri and Kansas. With over 620,000 military deaths, it remains the bloodiest war in American history. In terms of costs for civilian populations, too, the Civil War was the costliest in our history. Estimates are difficult to establish with any certainty, but historians suggest twice as many civilian deaths were likely.

By war's end, the issue of slavery at least would be resolved; if Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation technically only freed slaves in states that had seceded, it nevertheless effectively marked the end of the institution. But the real meaning of that emancipation would take the nation decades to sort out. It would be a full ninety years after the conflict ended that *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* would finally officially decree the end of school segregation, and decades more before that decision was implemented. But the war left deep scars, and its legacy remains unresolved. Contemporary disputes – over the display of Confederate flags and monuments to Confederate warriors, 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.

After celebrating the Civil War's sesquicentennial in 2011, the reasons to continue exploring are clear: because no political dispute came closer to destroying the United States; because the defining issues of race and inclusion began to be settled then; because the South will never forget, and never let Yankees forget that they will never forget; because it all started in Kansas, where the Bloody Kansas conflict, from 1854-58, provided a preview of both the issues and the methods of the coming conflict.



## ***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, the slow destruction of her way of life. 426 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Poupirt (Overland Park), Prasch (Topeka), Thierer (Admire), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***March***

**by Geraldine Brooks (2005)**

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 theatre of war. 280 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Reeves (Prairie Village), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***The March***

**by E. L. Doctorow (2005)**

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. 363 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Craven (Hays), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Reeves (Prairie Village).

## ***The Red Badge of Courage***

**by Stephen Crane (1895/2004)**

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. 146 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Carlson (Pittsburg), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Krisuk (Dodge City), Lubert (Kansas City), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Thierer (Admire), Tidwell (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – Coming of Age in Rural America

If America today is largely a country of city-dwellers, there's no doubt that our nation came of age on the family farm. The stories of growing up that comprise this series are interwoven with the story of American agriculture as it evolved from the self-sufficient homesteads of the 19th century to the large mechanized farms of today. But while farming and its place in American society may be changing, the young heroes and heroines in these books discover that their identity remains inseparably tied to family, land, and neighbors. They learn early about hard work, uncertainty, and loss; they relish the ability to tame a colt, drive a tractor, and enjoy the freedom of the outdoors. These books will introduce readers to a varied portrait of youth in rural America: at times nostalgic, at times painful, but full of wisdom and grace.



## ***Farmer Boy***

**by Laura Ingalls Wilder**

While Laura Ingalls grew up in the little house on the prairie, Almanzo Wilder was living on a big farm in New York state. With chores from dawn to dinner, but plenty of time for fun, Almanzo's childhood is a celebration of the self-sufficient family farm. 372 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Oakley), Etzel (Topeka), Foulke (Ottawa), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Quantic (Derby), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Stewart (Junction City), Thierer (Admire), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Good Land***

**by Bruce Bair**

Bruce Bair was nine years old when his father put him to work on the family farm near Goodland, Kansas. This unsentimental chronicle of forty years in the life of one family on a mechanized farm is also the story of the evolution of American agriculture. 189 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Foulke (Ottawa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Quantic (Derby), Stewart (Junction City).

## ***Nathan Coulter***

**by Wendell Berry**

Nathan Coulter's youth is shaped by the tiny farming community of Port William, Kentucky, where generations of his family are rooted to the land. Grandparents, uncles, neighbors and the beauty and cruelty of nature itself all teach him how to live. 180 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Etzel (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prash (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Stewart (Junction City).

## ***Under the Feet of Jesus***

**by Helena Maria Viramontes**

At the center of this powerful tale of migrant farm life is Estrella, a girl about to cross the perilous border to womanhood. Deeply aware of her family's poverty and marginalization, she learns to fight back and to help the young Mexican farm worker she loves. 180 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City).

## ***Winter Wheat***

**by Mildred Walker**

Eighteen-year-old Ellen Webb goes off to college – and falls in love. When she comes home for the summer to her beloved Montana wheat farm, she sees everything, including her parents, with new and critical eyes. 306 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Etzel (Topeka), Foulke (Ottawa), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Quantic (Derby), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka).

# TALK Series – 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

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. 229 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Birney (Admire), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***Mama Day***

by Gloria Naylor

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. 311 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Birney (Admire), Kolich (Leavenworth), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Stanley (McPherson), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***Cannery Row***

by John Steinbeck

Steinbeck creates a tough yet charming portrait of lonely men on the margins of society, dependent on one another for both physical and emotional survival in coastal California. 185 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Prasch (Topeka), Reeves (Prairie Village), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Sanchez (Wichita), Stewart (Junction City), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe***

by Fannie Flagg

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. 395 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Reeves (Prairie Village), Rieke (Leavenworth), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***The Milagro Beanfield War***

by John Nichols

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. 456 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Sanchez (Wichita), Shump (Lawrence), Waters (Dodge City).

## ***Snow Falling on Cedars***

by David Guterson

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. 460 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Low (Lawrence), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Rabas (Emporia), Rieke (Leavenworth), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Waters (Dodge City), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – Contemporary Immigration

It's become a truism that America is a nation of immigrants. But that simple phrase disguises a complex interaction of push-pull forces that has brought a shifting range of immigrants to American shores over time. Forces pushing immigration – like wars, persecution, or economic hardship – have changed location, moving away from continental Europe after the mid-20th century. From World War II and the Holocaust forward to campaigns of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans and genocide in Rwanda or Sudan, disasters always produce new waves of immigrants looking for refuge. If the principal attractions of America, economic opportunity and promises of freedom, have remained generally constant, the specifics have certainly changed, reflecting the economies and social structures of the nation.

Each new wave of immigration brings new traditions, new foodways, new styles, new artistic traditions, and new histories into the complex mosaic of American life. Use of salsa, it has been widely reported, now outpaces consumption of ketchup; Latin American telenovelas have inspired American network television shows; mosques are among the fastest growing religious communities in America; and West Indian musical styles like reggae and ska have hugely influenced American popular musical styles. Changes in recent years to immigration patterns have even fomented new stereotypes, like the Indian hotelier or the Korean convenience store owner (which, like earlier ethnic stereotypes, the Chinese laundryman or the Italian gangster, are rooted in partial truths about immigrant labor). New immigration has deeply enriched the range of American literature, as the works in this series show.



## **Breath, Eyes, Memory**

**by Edwidge Danticat (1994)**

Sophie makes the difficult transition from rural Haiti to an impoverished New York. Sexual trauma is a central motif for the book, through Sophie's past, as she comes of age, and through the difficult path toward familial reconciliation. "I come from a place where breath, eyes, and memory are one," Sophie declares, as she comes to terms with that dark heritage. 236 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hill (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Reeves (Prairie Village), Sanchez (Wichita).

## **Caramelo**

**by Sandra Cisneros (2002)**

Beginning with family trips from Chicago to Mexico in the 1960s, circling back to stories from the Mexican Civil War, Cisneros weaves a dense tapestry of family, identity, and immigration in a fancifully postmodern style incorporating footnotes and characters who argue with the narrator. It's rich, sweet storytelling. 434 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Carlson (Pittsburg), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Prasch (Topeka), Sanchez (Wichita), Shump (Lawrence), Stanley (McPherson).

**by Lorraine Adams (2004)**

Aziz, the Algerian protagonist of Adams's novel, arrives in America without money or even English. In the context of a post-9/11 world, different forms of illegality shade into each other as Aziz finds himself caught in the web of an anti-terrorism investigation. 292 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Prasch (Topeka), Rieke (Leavenworth), Sanchez (Wichita).

## **Typical American**

**by Gish Jen (1992)**

Chinese immigrants Yifeng, Theresa, and Helen find themselves trapped in America by the triumph of the Communist Revolution back home. Jen follows the intertwined course of the three Chinese-Americans-despite-themselves with a light touch, employing a narrative voice strong on both empathy and humor. 296 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Sanchez (Wichita), Shump (Lawrence).

## **Harbor**

# TALK Series – Encountering Asia

Today, perhaps more than ever, it is important that we not take Kipling's maxim at face value. Instead, it is imperative that we find ways to build bridges of understanding between East and West. Still, it is true that tradition and experience can produce meaningful differences between peoples and cultures. Two thousand years of Confucian beliefs saturated the political and ethical foundations of China in ways that are still apparent today. Japanese gender roles continue to differ significantly from those in the West. Events such as the Japanese nation's defeat in World War II are part of a very real, modern Japanese experience, as are the decline of rural life and the trauma of the Cultural Revolution in Communist China.

All four **Encountering Asia** authors provide ways to learn more about Asian tradition and experience. Each, in one way or another, bridges the worlds of Asia and the West. Two are Westerners who successfully immersed themselves in Asian history and culture: Arthur Golden, for 20th century Japan, and Robert Van Gulik, for Confucian China. The other two are native-born Asians who eventually made their lives and careers in the West. Ha Jin was raised in Maoist China and now lives and teaches in the U.S. Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Japan, but during his youth moved with his family to England, where he still resides. These authors have produced four very different works, all sharing their authors' special ability to present their subjects effectively to Western audiences.



## ***An Artist of the Floating World*** by Kazuo Ishiguro

This novel brings the world of mid-20th century Japan to life. The story follows an artist, Masuji Ono, through his early years in the pre-war teahouse culture, his growing support of wartime militarism, and finally his postwar confrontations with that legacy and its consequences for his family. 206 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Shump (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***The Chinese Gold Murders*** by Robert Van Gulik

Through his main character, Judge Dee, Van Gulik introduces readers to an idealized, yet accurate world of traditional Confucian Chinese government. His style is that of Golden Age mysteries, with upright heroes and jigsaw puzzle plots, but also memorable characters, fascinating details and important subject matter. 196 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***Memoirs of a Geisha*** by Arthur Golden

Golden brings alive the often-misunderstood world of what was perhaps the only important career opportunity for traditional Japanese women: mastering the very formal and demanding art of entertaining men. 428 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Waiting*** by Ha Jin

Jin provides a moving, but disturbing view of Cultural Revolution-era China and human frailties. Lin Kong, a doctor whose duties separate him from his arranged-marriage wife, falls in love with Manna. Lin's wife won't agree to divorce. Thus he is "waiting" the 18 years before he can divorce without her consent. 308 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Shump (Lawrence), Stanley (McPherson).

# TALK Series – Entangled World

Spread out on the table, a map of the world is straightforward: lines separate nations, and the boundaries seem firm and solid. Nothing, however, is that clear on the ground. Boundaries are contested and populations are mixed. Globalization, typically considered in economic terms, creates entangled connections among countries and peoples. As a result, whole new languages like Swahili and Creole spring from cultures in collision where new multicultural identities give rise to new literary characters and plots.

Although cultural exchanges of this sort are as old as human history—remember Homer’s Odysseus, Shakespeare’s Othello, and Joseph Conrad’s Marlow—patterns of globalization have accelerated dramatically over the past century. We have witnessed new forms of trade and exchange of ideas, and, in a less benign sort of globalization, wars and genocides, which have sparked massive dislocations of peoples and the repeated remapping of the world. To all this, literature has responded, producing in recent decades a range of works that investigate the complex interactions of people and cultures in our increasingly entangled world.



## ***Bel Canto***

**by Anne Patchett (2001)**

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. 352 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Reeves (Prairie Village), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Waters (Dodge City).

## ***People of the Book***

**by Geraldine Brooks (2007)**

Book restorer Hannah Heath’s project, the 500-year-old illuminated Sarajevo Haggadah 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. 372 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Low (Lawrence), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao***

**by Junot Diaz (2007)**

When pudgy, comics-addicted, Dominican-American geek Oscar Wao returns to his mother’s homeland in search of redress for the injustices by the Trujillo regime, it leads him to the title-promised doom. But no simple summary can quite prepare readers for the wild ride Yuniior, Oscar’s college roommate, provides in his swooping narration of this adventure that veers from high camp to Spanglish street talk to heavy dormroom philosophizing complete with footnotes. 339 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Richter (NW Oklahoma).

## ***Anil’s Ghost***

**by Michael Ondaatje (2000)**

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. 307 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Richter (NW Oklahoma).

# TALK Series – 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.

None of this is new: the literature of the ages tells us as much. But the scale of migrations has massively increased over the course of the past century. Think of the waves of immigrants prompted by revolutions in Cuba, or genocides in Sudan, or the closing of the Iron Curtain. Think of immigrants seeking job opportunities around the world in recent decades: South Asians and West Indians in postwar Britain, Africans and Middle Easterners in contemporary Europe, Phillipinos everywhere.

For America, this nation of immigrants, none of this is unfamiliar territory. From the Puritan pilgrims forward, American history can be written in terms of sequential waves of immigrations. In America’s Chinatowns and Little Italys and barrios, in all its assorted ethnic enclaves, the terms of the exile’s place are continuously negotiated. None of which means we have quite figured it all out, as contemporary disputes show. The Exile’s Place highlights the complex negotiations and contested territories of the exile, seeking that elusive balance between the homeland lost and the homeland won.



## ***The Lazarus Project*** by Aleksandar Hemon (2008)

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 twentieth century. 304 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Reeves (Prairie Village).

## ***The Namesake*** by Jhumpa Lahiri (2003)

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. 291 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hope (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Stanley (McPherson).

## ***Things I’ve Been Silent About*** by Azar Nafisi (2008)

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. 368 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Reeves (Prairie Village).

## ***Brick Lane*** by Monica Ali (2003)

Nazneen is an eighteen-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 eighteenth century onward. 432 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Reeves (Prairie Village).

# TALK Series – Faith in Fiction: Christianity

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 realm of faith. They have also inspired writers in America and around the world to create novels which will challenge and delight readers of all religious and spiritual persuasions.

There are two versions of this series, one encompassing literature about faith within a Christian context, and the other exploring and contrasting five of the major world faiths. In both 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.



## ***Bless Me, Ultima***

**by Rudolfo Anaya**

When Ultima, a traditional healer, comes to live with young Antonio's family in New Mexico, his strong Catholic faith is tested by his discovery of pagan traditions at once benign and powerful. 262 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Lubert (Kansas City), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Shump (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka).

**by James Baldwin**

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. 221 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Brown (Salina), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hill (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rieke (Leavenworth), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Tidwell (Lawrence).

## ***The End of the Affair***

**by Graham Greene**

Two years after his friend's wife Sarah unexpectedly ended their love affair, Maurice Bendrix is determined to find out who stole her affections – a quest that leads him on the unexpected road to faith. 192 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Prasch (Topeka), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka), Waters (Dodge City), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***A Prayer for Owen Meany***

**by John Irving**

Young Owen Meany, the hero of Irving's comic bestseller, is barely five feet tall, brilliant, unconventional, and convinced that he is God's instrument in the world; he is. 617 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Rieke (Leavenworth), Shump (Lawrence), Waters (Dodge City).

## ***I Hear the Reaper's Song***

**by Sara Stambaugh**

A small, close-knit Mennonite community in Pennsylvania suffers a tragedy that forces its members to weigh their religious traditions against the winds of change. 217 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth).

## ***Go Tell It on the Mountain***

# TALK Series – 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 realm of faith. They have also inspired writers in America and around the world to create novels which will challenge and delight readers of all religious and spiritual persuasions.

There are two versions of this series, one encompassing literature about faith within a Christian context, and the other exploring and contrasting five of the major world faiths. In both 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)

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. 116 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Sanchez (Wichita), Stanley (McPherson), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Nectar in a Sieve***

by Kamala Markandaya (Hinduism)

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. 189 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hope (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Stanley (McPherson), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Go Tell It on the Mountain*** by James Baldwin (Christianity)

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. 221 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Brown (Salina), Carlson (Pittsburg), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hill (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rieke (Leavenworth), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Tidwell (Lawrence).

## ***The Romance Reader***

by Pearl Abraham (Judaism)

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. 296 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Rieke (Leavenworth), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Harp of Burma***

by Michio Takeyama (Buddhism)

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. 132 pp. *Upon request, The Burmese Harp. video.*

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – Food for Thought

Food is important. Farmers have known since the earliest days of agriculture that without the food they raise, humankind would be in a fix. Cooking and serving food has always been important emotionally. Old and new generations learn family recipes and share family traditions; larger communities come together at community 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. In order to survive, today's family farmers face pressure to grow new crops, in new ways, for new markets. But this can run counter to the very reasons many continue to farm: their love of existing foods and traditional farming family relationships. New generations of families also struggle with changes to family tradition. New generations want to find their own ways of doing things. Some amend their inherited traditions, and some reclaim them. Community meeting places aren't always happy, affirming places. Quite often, they can reflect the worst of communities in turmoil and individuals in conflict.

**Food For Thought's** four skilled writers have created books shaped by both the power and the conflicts surrounding food. Two are non-fiction accounts of their writers' own experiences: one describes a farmer's struggle to grow really good-tasting food (*Epitaph for a Peach*). The other is a story about the decision to return to traditional Jewish kosher cooking traditions (*Miriam's Kitchen*). The other two books are fiction. Both take place in cafe settings, but these cafes are very different. In one, a son struggles to construct his own path within the world of his two strong, loving parents' different food traditions (*Secrets of the Tsil Café*). *Empire Falls* reveals the world of a decaying New England mill town, populated by struggling characters whose lives come dangerously close to spinning out of control.



## **Empire Falls**

by Richard Russo

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." 473 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Shump (Lawrence), Waters (Dodge City), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## **Epitaph for a Peach**

by David Mas Masumoto

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. 233 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Tucker (Topeka).

## **Miriam's Kitchen**

by Elizabeth Ehrlich

Ehrlich 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. Ehrlich writes gently and with humor, taking time

to talk about the small details of how things are done to "keep kosher." 361 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Carlson (Pittsburg), Chávez (Kansas City), Foulke (Ottawa), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Low (Lawrence), Miriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## **Secrets of the Tsil Café**

by Thomas Fox Averill

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. 300 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Shump (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka), Waters (Dodge City).

# TALK Series – 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 Indian to the Dust Bowl refugee. It has also produced some of our best American writers and inspired a rich and varied literary tradition. In this series, readers will explore the Great Plains spirit as embodied in the pioneer Kansas of Laura Ingalls Wilder and the pioneer Nebraska of Willa Cather.

The stark Dust Bowl years come to life in Lois Hudson's fictional tale of a North Dakota farm family. Moving into the present, writers Ian Frazier and Roger Welsch explore the historical and mythical legacies of the Plains – especially those of the Plains Indians – and how they continue to shape perceptions of this region of America.



## ***The Bones of Plenty***

**by Lois Hudson**

Proud, independent Dakota wheat farmer George Armstrong Custer and his hard-working wife Rachel must battle both the land and their landlord during the depression years of 1933-34. 435 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Keller (Emporia), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Quantic (Derby), Stewart (Junction City).

## ***Great Plains***

**by Ian Frazier**

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. 214 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Foulke (Ottawa), Hoy (Emporia), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Quantic (Derby), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Shump (Lawrence), Stanley (McPherson), Stewart (Junction City).

## ***Little House on the Prairie***

**by Laura Ingalls Wilder**

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. 335 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Brown-Kuchera (Oakley), Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Stewart (Junction City), Thierer (Admire), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***O Pioneers!***

**by Willa Cather**

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. 173 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Brown (Salina), Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Carlson (Pittsburg), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Foulke (Ottawa), Goossen (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Hill (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Rieke (Leavenworth), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka), Waters (Dodge City), Weso (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Touching the Fire: Buffalo Dancers, the Sky Bundle, and Other Tales***

**by Roger Welsch**

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. 270 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Lewis (Lindsborg), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prash (Topeka), Reeves (Prairie Village), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Stanley (McPherson), Stewart (Junction City), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – 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.

If coming of age is broadly universal, it is also always deeply particular and personal. Place, time, and condition always infuse the ways in which individual people come to adulthood, and the genre reflects this. Coming of age in Afghanistan in the 1970s is a different experience from coming of age in the American South in the 1950s. Coming of age as a woman is different than coming of age as a man. Disabilities, like autism, change the experience as well. The books in this series reflect this range of experience.



## ***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time***

**by Mark Haddon (2003)**

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. 221 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Prasch (Topeka), Shump (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***The Kite Runner***

**by Khaled Hosseini (2003)**

Amir recalls his childhood in Afghanistan, prior to the Soviet invasion and the rise of the Taliban. His memories focus on his relation 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. 371 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Oakley), Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Waters (Dodge City), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***My Last Days as Roy Rogers***

**by Pat Cunningham Devoto (1999)**

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. 358 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***The Secret Life of Bees***

**by Sue Monk Kidd (2002)**

Fleeing from the law, fourteen-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. 302 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Shump (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – 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. The role of race in American coming-of-age tales, for instance, especially underlines this point. Just as James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, and Richard Wright used the genre as a prism to examine relations between blacks and whites in America, authors of various races and ethnicities have similarly used the coming-of-age framework as a way to constellate their own position in American society.

Other social dynamics also have been examined. Holden Caulfield, for example, challenges conformity, adolescent sexuality, and the oppression of social expectations. The coming-of-age genre thus 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)

"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. 224 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Lubert (Kansas City), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Richter (NW Oklahoma).

## ***Tender at the Bone: Growing Up at the Table*** by Ruth Reichl (1998)

"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. 320 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Richter (NW Oklahoma).

## ***Sag Harbor*** by Colson Whitehead (2009)

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. 352 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Reeves (Prairie Village), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Tidwell (Lawrence).

## ***The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian***

### by Sherman Alexie (2007)

"But we reservation Indians don't get to realize our dreams. We don't get those chances. Or choices. We're just poor. That's all we are." Junior hopes to break the pattern by going to school away from the reservation, but he is treated like a traitor at home and an outsider at school. Although still a teenager, his dilemmas are fully adult: endemic poverty, alcoholism on the reservation, and the difficulty of trying to advance yourself without betraying those you leave behind. 288 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Waters (Dodge City), Weso (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series –

## Hispanic Heritage: Mothers, Sisters, and Daughters

Hispanics are one of the most rapidly growing ethnic groups in America, with a rich and diverse culture rooted in Mexico, the Caribbean, and South America. In this series, readers will discover four writers 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.

From the magical humor of *Esperanza's Box of Saints* to the spare prose of *The House on Mango Street*, readers will enjoy the unique styles, voices, and visions of talented young writers who are creating the classics of the future. And they will identify with the foibles, joys, sorrows, and abiding affection of families whose stories will resonate with Hispanics and non-Hispanics alike.



### ***Brand New Memory***

by **Elias Miguel Muñoz**

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. 232 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Prasch (Topeka), Sanchez (Wichita), Shump (Lawrence), Stanley (McPherson).

### ***Esperanza's Box of Saints***

by **María Amparo Escandón**

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. 254 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Prasch (Topeka), Sanchez (Wichita), Shump (Lawrence).

### ***The House on Mango Street***

by **Sandra Cisneros**

This classic story of a young Mexican American girl growing up in the Latino section of Chicago is sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes deeply joyous. 110 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Carlson (Pittsburg), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Klaus (Lenexa), Lewis (Lindsborg), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Sanchez (Wichita), Shump (Lawrence).

### ***In the Time of the Butterflies***

by **Julia Alvarez**

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. 324 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Sanchez (Wichita), Stanley (McPherson), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – The Immigrant Experience

The United States is truly a nation of immigrants; with the exception of American Indians, each of us has ancestors who came to this continent in the not-so-distant past. On the one hand, this common tie helps to define the American experience, and yet at the same time the experience varied widely among different national and ethnic groups.

This series examines what it means to come to this country, what challenges and choices faced immigrants, and how men, women, and children responded to the process of beginning over in a strange land. The four stories feature Czech pioneers from Bohemia, Chinese laborers in California, Russian and Polish Jews in New York City, and a Mexican-American's painful journey to success.



## **China Men**

by Maxine Hong Kingston

Woven from memory, myth, and fact, this novel is a journey into the hearts and minds of Chinese men in America as they built the railroads, worked on the Hawaiian plantations, and endured in a strange new land. 308 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Foulke (Ottawa), Hastings (Shawnee), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## **Hunger of Memory**

by Richard Rodriguez

Mexican American Rodriguez started school in California with just 50 words of English and went on to a university education. Along the way he learns about the alienation from family, past, and culture that is the price of success in America. 195 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Sanchez (Wichita), Shump (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka).

## **My Antonia**

by Willa Cather

Antonia Shimerda's Bohemian family homesteads on the wide Nebraska plains, where she discovers the glory of the land, the tragedy of loss and disappointed dreams, and ultimately a triumph of the spirit. 238 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Brown-Kuchera (Oakley), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Foulke (Ottawa), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hastings (Shawnee), Keller (Emporia), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Low (Lawrence), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Rieke (Leavenworth), Sanchez (Wichita), Stewart (Junction City), Waters (Dodge City), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## **A Walker in the City**

by Alfred Kazin

The son of Jewish immigrants, Kazin's boyhood is filled with the sights and sounds of his Polish neighborhood in east Brooklyn, and with his own awakening to the ecstasy of the senses, the power of language, and the meaning of life. 176 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Etzel (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Shump (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka).

# TALK Series – Kansas at 150

Outsiders may know us mostly as that place where Dorothy and Toto lived before the tornado swept them away, but Kansans know better. More than just the geographic center of the nation, Kansas provided a stage for many of the most dramatic episodes of American history.

Its buffalo-rich plains were homeland to a range of indigenous peoples before white contact transformed its population. Kansas was birthed as a state in the violent conflict between anti-slavery and pro-slavery forces. In the latter half of the 19th century, Kansas was opened up for the experience of the Old West, with buffalo hunters, Indian wars, cowboys, and gunslingers. Meanwhile, new groups of people, ranging from Exodusters escaping black oppression in the South to Mennonites looking for religious freedom and farmlands from Mexicans working the rails to Italians working the mines, transformed the state's population.

As a new century dawned, Kansas remained at the center of main currents in American history including temperance and Carrie Nation; progressivism, populism, and socialism; religious movements from the Social Gospel to Pentecostalism; Karl Menninger and psychiatric treatment in America; the Kansas oil boom and Sinclair Oil in Independence; Amelia Earhart and the new aerospace industry in Wichita; the Dust Bowl in the 1930s; *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* in 1954.

A decade into another new century, Kansas continues to face challenges and opportunities: seeking to create new sources of economic growth in biotechnology and sustainable energy resources while preserving the last of the tall-grass prairie and struggling to maintain its small towns and agrarian base; and continuing to contribute new art, film, and literature. Following the state's sesquicentennial, commemorating 150 years of Kansas, is an apt time to take stock of where we have been, and where we are going.



## ***It Happened in Kansas*** by Sarah Smarsh

Sarah Smarsh provides an encapsulation of significant events and figures in Kansas's history in this work. Her selection is always interesting, including towering figures like John Brown and unusual ones like the Bloody Benders and John Brinkley, the goat-gland doctor, and she delivers her history lessons with warmth and humor. 148 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Poupirt (Overland Park), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Tucker (Topeka), Weso (Lawrence).

## ***Kansas Poems of William Stafford*** edited by Denise Low

William Stafford may have been named Oregon's poet laureate, but he was a Kansas boy at heart – born in Hutchinson – and his youth in Kansas deeply inflected his poetry. "Mine was a Midwest home – you can keep your world," he proclaimed in the poem "One Home." Stafford's poetry is rooted in a sense of place, and the work in this collection shows how Kansas as a place continued to inform his thought and verse. 210 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Rieke (Leavenworth), Shump (Lawrence), Stanley (McPherson), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Now Let Me Fly*** by Marcia Cebulka

Topeka playwright Marcia Cebulka's play provides a thorough treatment of the epochal case that ended school segregation in America. Framed as a crisis of conscience for lawyer Thurgood Marshall on the eve of the Supreme Court's hearing of the case and a debate with the ghost of his mentor Charles Houston, the play treats all five cases brought together in the Supreme Court decision and examines the grassroots activism that propelled the court actions. 65 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka).

## ***Ordinary Genius*** by Thomas Fox Averill

Readers familiar with KHC's other TALK programs may know Topekan Tom Averill's novels, *Secrets of the Tsil Café* and *The Slow Air of Ewan MacPherson*. But the short-story form has long been one of Averill's greatest strength, and this showcases his deep engagement with Kansas land, people, and history. 148 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Rabas (Emporia), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – Kansas Literary Heritage

Literature plays a role in creating and reinforcing regional images and stereotypes. The less-than-flattering image of Kansas in the national imagination has often been shaped by writers – and movie-makers – from outside the state.

In this series, readers discover the works of Kansas authors whose knowledge of the state comes from first-hand experience. They tell the story of the Indian nations that first occupied the plains, the hardships of homesteading, coming of age in a small town, and cattle ranching in a modern, urban society. We discover the qualities that shape the Kansas character: hard work, humor, love of the land, small town pride (and sometimes prejudice), independence, cooperation, tenacity, and faith.



## ***The Last Cattle Drive***

**by Robert Day**

Spangler Star Tukle, a cantankerous rancher, and his no-nonsense wife Opal defy the truckers and drive their cattle to market on a hilarious journey from western Kansas to the Kansas City stockyards. 222 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Foulke (Ottawa), Hawkins (Topeka), Hoy (Emporia), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Quantic (Derby), Rabas (Emporia), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Shump (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka), Weso (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***The Learning Tree***

**by Gordon Parks**

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 twenties. 240 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Birney (Admire), Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Low (Lawrence), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Rabas (Emporia), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Tidwell (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Picnic***

**by William Inge**

The arrival of a handsome vagabond in a small Kansas town has an electrifying effect on the women including restless and beautiful Madge Owens, her tomboy sister Millie, and the spinster schoolteacher. 75 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hastings (Shawnee),

Hawkins (Topeka), Keller (Emporia), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Low (Lawrence), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Shump (Lawrence), Waters (Dodge City).

## ***Sod and Stubble***

**by John Ise**

Henry and Rosie are a young German couple who homestead in central Kansas in 1873. Based on Ise's mother's recollections, this is a story of patient heroism and hope, of the perils and rewards of life on the prairies. 377 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Etzel (Topeka), Foulke (Ottawa), Hawkins (Topeka), Hoy (Emporia), Peterson (Lawrence), Quantic (Derby), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Stewart (Junction City), Thierer (Admire), Tucker (Topeka), Weso (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Trail of the Spanish Bit***

**by Don Coldsmith**

The young Spaniard Juan Garcia rides into sixteenth-century Kansas as an arrogant conquistador, until the native prairie people show him a new way of life and receive in return the gift of the Spanish Bit. 214 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Stewart (Junction City), Thierer (Admire), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – Literature with Kansas Connections

Even if it isn't always 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. We often hear that those were the days when the open frontier offered all men (and some women) real opportunities, when families worked together and children grew up knowing the true values of work and community. There's less agreement about what it's meant to live in 20th century Kansas.

Each book in this series offers a different window through which to look at modern-day Kansas. Kansans are proud of their anti-slavery history – these authors help raise the question of just how well the state enacted its implied commitment to equality. Equally important is the “frontier myth.” The books examine how life in Kansas has changed since the “Wild West outpost” days. Urbanization, rural decline, and social changes in the roles of women and the races have fundamentally changed what it means to be a Kansan. Growing up in 20th century, small-town Kansas is far different from the same experience in 19th century, small-town Kansas. The desire to cling to tradition is set at odds with the changing technological and social landscape.

Langston Hughes focused on eastern Kansas in the pre-Civil Rights, but post-Civil War era. Bob Dole writes about his experiences in World War II-era western Kansas. Laura Moriarty and Tom Averill have written recent novels about fictional late-20th century towns that deal with young people coming of age. You may find it interesting to compare each kind of experience with the others. These Kansas authors bring questions involving gender, ethnicity, time and perspective together in their work. Each author's picture of a highly individualized Kansas experience brings readers to an understanding of our common experiences as Kansans.



## ***The Center of Everything*** by Laura Moriarty

Evelyn Bucknow, a ten 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. 291 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Shump (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***Not Without Laughter*** by Langston Hughes

Set in the fictional Kansas town of Stanton – purportedly based on Hughes 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. 299 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Etzel (Topeka), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Rabas (Emporia), Tidwell (Lawrence), Weso (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***One Soldier's Story*** by Bob Dole

Long before he was a United States senator, Bob Dole was first a boy growing up in Russell, Kansas. Although *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. 287 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Hope (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Quantic (Derby), Rabas (Emporia).

## ***The Slow Air of Ewan MacPherson*** by Thomas Fox Averill

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. 261 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Richter (NW Oklahoma).

# TALK Series – Living with the Land

Nature has often been viewed as an enemy to be tamed, conquered, or endured. But modern times have seen the advent of an increasingly overpowering technology. Faced with accelerated loss of the natural world, increasing numbers of people have begun to recognize the natural world's value, and worry about how best to keep its ways – and the livelihoods and cultures that have specifically adapted to exploit a certain kind of environment – from being lost.

It all depends on exactly what is meant by nature. The equation becomes more complicated when other factors are included, such as which traditional ways should be preserved, by whom, and for whose benefit. It's easy to view those living closest to the land as lovable, childlike people needing to be defended, and planned for, by wiser (if more corrupt) outsiders. One might ask whether any such attitudes are visible in the 1930s writings of either Isak Dinesen, writing about her experiences in Kenya, or Pearl Buck, writing about late 19th and early 20th century China. From our early 21st-century vantage point, it's easy to criticize the tone and tenor of these writers. But their words bring those worlds to life, even as outsiders witness to a time and place when most people still had no choice but to live in close accord with nature's rhythms.

By contrast, Barbara Kingsolver and John Casey are contemporary authors writing about their own time and culture. Both create worlds in which individuals must struggle to find ways to hang onto older ways of connecting with nature. Taken to an extreme, individual determination can be selfish and destructive. A good question for readers to ask themselves is which characters seem more or less admirable, why. And finally, all should ask themselves what the place of nature can or should be, when the world is becoming increasingly complex and “unnatural.”



## **The Good Earth**

by Pearl S. Buck

Wang Lung, a poor peasant who “makes good” by caring about and acquiring land, has unfailing help from his wife, but values her only for her labor and sons she supplies. Sons, brought up in an industrializing China, stray from their father's commitment to the land and to older values. 385 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hastings (Shawnee), Hope (Lawrence), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Rabas (Emporia), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## **Out of Africa**

by Isak Dinesen

Set at the end of colonial Africa, Dinesen's memoir idealized the African land and those living in harmony with it, as compared with what she saw as the failings of the industrialized West. The beauty of Africa and its animals, along with the relatively undisturbed life of its people, are all lovingly described. 462 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Lewis (Lindsborg), Low (Lawrence), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prash (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Waters (Dodge City).

## **Prodigal Summer**

by Barbara Kingsolver

This novel focuses on three sets of intertwined lives. Forest ranger Deanna Wolfe tries to protect coyotes from a Wyoming rancher. City-girl Lusa Landowski must decide whether to take up her dead husband's farm despite the in-laws disapproval. Long-time neighbors feud about changes and choices in the modern world. 444 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prash (Topeka), Rieke (Leavenworth), Stewart (Junction City), Waters (Dodge City).

## **Spartina**

by John Casey

Dick Pierce is a stubborn, individualistic fisherman and boat builder. An unfinished, boat is his last hope for becoming his own boss. Pierce could be viewed as heroic, refusing to give in or as a selfish, driven man who neglects his family, cheats on his wife, and gambles with their economic future. 375 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – 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.

While the region has long been a significant part of the daily news, people have failed to look beyond the media headlines to the vast amount of information to be found about the region. This series of books moves beyond stereotypes to delve into the complexities of the region's people and cultures.

This set of fiction and non-fiction explores twentieth-century Iran, Egypt, Israel, and their neighbors. The four books complement each other by telling us broadly about the contemporary history of the region, the role of women, and the role of religion in society. By learning about the diversity of religions, societies, and histories of the region, readers will move beyond current impressions of a homogeneous region to see greater diversity and interconnections.



## ***The Israelis: Ordinary People in an Extraordinary Land*** by Donna Rosenthal

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. 482 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Sanchez (Wichita), Shump (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***My Prison, My Home: One Woman's Story of Captivity in Iran*** by Haleh Esfandiari

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. 232 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Sanchez (Wichita), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*** by Marjane Satrapi

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. 153 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prash (Topeka), Sanchez (Wichita), Shump (Lawrence), Stanley (McPherson), Tucker (Topeka), Waters (Dodge City).

## ***The Yacoubian Building*** by Alaa Al Aswany

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. 255 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Carlson (Pittsburg), Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Prash (Topeka), Sanchez (Wichita), Stanley (McPherson).

# TALK Series – Native American Mysteries

The tales of detective fiction created by Edgar Allan Poe and the modern hard-boiled fiction by Sara Paretsky and Marcia Mueller have little in common, except that they belong to the same genre. These works do reveal, however, the changing tastes of the reading public. The plots, geographical locales, themes, heroes, and heroines, reflect the changing social, ethnic, and political face of America. The writers in this series are creating ingenious, fast-paced plots, integrating Native American history and culture, and crafting resourceful, intelligent protagonists who solve the mysteries, in part, because they are familiar with Native American life. Many of these authors write about a particular locale and represent its habits, speech, manners, folklore, and religion.



**NOTE:** This title is required reading for the series.

## ***DreadfulWater Shows Up*** by Hartley Goodweather

Cherokee Thumps DreadfulWater, an ex-cop, moved to a Montana reservation to shed memories of a killer who got away. Thumps serves as the town's photographer, pursuing a relationship with Claire Merchant, head of the local tribal council. After a murder at the reservation's casino, Claire's son becomes a suspect, and Thumps reluctantly tracks the real killer. 259 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Prasch (Topeka), Reeves (Prairie Village), Sanchez (Wichita), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***Dance for the Dead*** by Thomas Perry

Seneca Jane Whitefield, a "guide" who specializes in making victims vanish, conjures up new identities for people with nowhere left to run. But when a killer stalks an eight-year-old boy, Jane faces dangerous obstacles that will put her powers – and her life – to a terrifying test. 400 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Prasch (Topeka), Sanchez (Wichita), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***Dance Hall of the Dead*** by Tony Hillerman

Two young boys suddenly disappear. One of them, a Zuni, leaves a pool of blood behind. Lt. Joe Leaphorn of the Navajo Tribal Police tracks the brutal killer. Three things complicate the search: an archeological dig, a steel hypodermic needle, and the strange laws of the Zuni. 258 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence),

Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Prasch (Topeka), Sanchez (Wichita), Shump (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***The Ghost Walker*** by Margaret Coel

Father John O'Malley, head of the mission on the Wind River Reservation, discovers a body on a remote reservation road. When the police reach the scene, the corpse has disappeared. Arapaho's believe the deceased is doomed to walk the earth, creating death and destruction until it receives a proper burial. And, indeed, that is what happens. 243 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Prasch (Topeka), Reeves (Prairie Village), Sanchez (Wichita), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***The Shaman Sings*** by James D. Doss

The novel combines Ute Indian prophesy, scientific investigation, and Mexican fatalism, to solve the brutal evisceration of a Rocky Mountain Polytechnic's student. Who stands to gain from her death? Switching points of view, from the killer to the police, Doss exposes his characters and their complex motivations. 248 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Prasch (Topeka), Sanchez (Wichita).

# TALK Series – On the Lighter Side

Life can, on occasion, be sad, stressful and depressing. Family, friends, and neighbors can disappoint or betray us. Times change. Old age or ill health can bring all sorts of problems. But humor writers can 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.

Successful comedy writing isn't easy to execute or to define. Readers famously differ over what kinds of things they find funny. Analyzing comic writing can be maddeningly complex. The reader takes into account the author's language, situations, and characters. Topical humor, while initially amusing, can often be doomed to lose its edge over time. Readers are encouraged to think about humor writing from multiple perspectives, and decide for themselves where comedic novels fit in with "serious" literature.



## ***How Elizabeth Barrett Browning Saved My Life***

**by Mameve Medwed**

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. 255 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***Quite a Year for Plums***

**by Bailey White**

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. 220 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Kolich (Leavenworth), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***Standing in the Rainbow***

**by Fannie Flagg**

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, 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. 529 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***Walking Across Egypt***

**by Clyde Edgerton**

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. 225 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – Reader’s Choice

Kansans are rooted in the prairie, a place of boundless space overarched by skies that can change in minutes from clear to threatening, towering with thunderheads charged with life-sustaining rain or deadly winds and ice. Our space is dotted with small towns interspersed with a few cities. Families are important, as are neighbors whose lives have been intertwined for generations. Our values are rooted in the practical, straight-forward practices of our pioneer ancestors.

How, as Kansans, does that environment shape us? How does it figure into what we choose to read? When Kansas readers were asked at the 2007 Book Festival in Wichita to declare their favorite book, the choices were diverse, but the top vote-getters shared some terrain familiar to Kansans. Two of the narratives are set in spaces as vast – and as formidable – as the Kansas plains, and the third is set in a small rural town where, as in Kansas, roots span generations. All unfold from a young person’s uncluttered viewpoint, but where two of the narrators are straight-forward, the third narrator’s story stretches credulity in unexpected ways, ultimately ringing with a deeper truth. These narratives spring from family relationships.

One story is steeped in family mythology, one in a father’s philosophy, and one in shared familial knowledge which makes survival possible. The vastness of space and the closeness of communities and families in these novels are familiar elements, but ultimately, each book underscores the resiliency of the human spirit, a theme that resonates with Kansans. Perhaps that explains their devotion to the books in the **Reader’s Choice** series.



## **Holes**

by **Louis Sachar (1998)**

When Stanley Yelnats is sent to Camp Green Lake, a juvenile detention center, he discovers that the lake is a vast dry bed where the inmates dig holes each day in the searing sun. The mystery of the Warden’s obsession with digging is gradually revealed as Louis Sachar weaves the story of Stanley’s incarceration with family myths of his “no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather,” whose long ago actions set in motion a cosmic plan that determines Stanley’s fate.

233 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Oakley), Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Stanley (McPherson), Waters (Dodge City), Wilson (Hays).

## **Life of Pi**

by **Yann Martel (2001)**

A boy’s family perishes when their ship sinks in the Atlantic; he survives, adrift in a 26-foot life boat for 227 days. His shipmate: a 450 pound Bengal tiger. No, this is not a fantasy tiger that embodies human qualities and philosophizes with his human companion; it is a real, dangerous carnivore and Pi Patel must employ all his knowledge and cunning to survive. Martel’s story is filled with gripping tension, fascinating views of animal behavior, reflections on the spiritual life, and an

unforgettable narrator. 401 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Shump (Lawrence), Waters (Dodge City), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## **To Kill a Mockingbird**

by **Harper Lee (1960)**

Harper Lee evokes the timelessness of small town life in her classic tale. Scout Finch, her older brother Jem, and their friend Dill discover the injustice of racism for the first time when Atticus Finch defends a black man charged with raping a white woman. Sheltered by neighbors who care for and protect the Finch children, Scout experiences the cruelty of humans and, ultimately, confirms the basic decency that Atticus believes abides in human hearts.

281 pp.  
**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Brown-Kuchera (Oakley), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Rieke (Leavenworth), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka), Waters (Dodge City), Weso (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series –

## 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 best humor writing also challenges us to think more deeply about a number of topics. Exactly what makes each book funny, or not? What is distinctive about comic, as compared to non-comic, writing? What do the books in the series tell us about expected men’s and women’s roles in pre-World War II America or 1960s Dublin? How does Bailey White’s Deep South compare with Kansans’ stereotypes of that region? How much has American childhood changed since Jean Shepherd’s memories of the 1930s? And of course, what is it that reaches across time and place that we all share, together, as human beings?



### ***The Egg and I*** by Betty MacDonald (1945)

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. 287 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Reeves (Prairie Village), Tucker (Topeka).

### ***I’m a Stranger Here Myself*** by Bill Bryson (1999)

In this collection of essays written for a London magazine, Bryson wonders what modern America looks like to an American newly returned after twenty 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. 288 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prash (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Stanley (McPherson), Tucker (Topeka).

### ***In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash*** by Jean Shepherd (1966)

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. 264 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Keller (Emporia), Klaus (Lenexa),

Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka).

### ***Mama Makes Up Her Mind and Other Dangers of Southern Living*** by Bailey White (1993)

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 road kill into gourmet meals. 229 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Carlson (Pittsburg), Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Quantic (Derby), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Rieke (Leavenworth), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka).

### ***The Mammy*** by Brendan O’Carroll (1994)

This funny, tender and moving portrait of working-class Dublin life in the sixties centers on Agnes Browne, widowed mother of seven and indomitable neighborhood character. 174 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Hawkins (Topeka), Lewis (Lindsborg), Tucker (Topeka).

# TALK Series – Today’s Mysteries

The original mystery writers of the 19th and early 20th centuries presented readers with appealing and eccentric “sleuths” who liked to solve puzzles, thereby restoring order and justice. After World War II, the mystery field expanded to include spy thrillers, police procedurals, and psychological cliff-hangers. Women joined men as private investigators, and high society settings gave way to a wide variety of cultural and historic contexts.

The best mysteries, now as then, are powerfully written and strongly plotted. They feature fascinating characters and raise crucial questions of justice, modern societal problems, and human motivation.



## ***Bootlegger’s Daughter***

**by Margaret Maron**

Talked into investigating an unsolved murder case, attorney Deborah Knott turns up decades-old secrets and finds that someone is plotting to destroy her career – and her life. 261 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Reflex***

**by Dick Francis**

When jockey Philip Nore begins to suspect that a track photographer’s fatal accident was really murder, he sets out to discover the truth and to trap the killer – but he must avoid becoming the next victim. 346 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Hastings (Shawnee), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence).

## ***Shroud for a Nightingale***

**by P. D. James**

Two student nurses lie dead, the great hospital nursing school of Nightingale House is shadowed in terror, and it’s up to Adam Dalgliesh of Scotland Yard to unmask the killer. 287 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Hastings (Shawnee), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Sanchez (Wichita), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***Talking God***

**by Tony Hillerman**

As Navajo policemen Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee investigate a robbery and a murder case, they unwittingly enter the dangerous arena of ancient ceremony and living gods. 338 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Prash (Topeka), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Where Echoes Live***

**by Marcia Muller**

Private investigator Sharon McCone sets out to help environmentalists fight the development of a gold mine, then a murder turns this into the most disturbing case of her career. 358 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series –

## Urban Indians: Native American Writers of the 1990s

Until a generation ago, most books about Indians were ethnographies or biographies, often written by non-Indians. In the 1970s, a renaissance in American Indian writing produced lyrical novels set largely on the reservation and looking toward the tribal past. Now, the 1990s have brought forth a new generation of Indian writers whose works are increasingly hard-edged and urban.

A common theme among these writers, many of whom are of mixed blood, is the search for identity in a world where cultural boundaries are being redefined. This series introduces four Indian writers of the 1990s: Louise Erdrich, Chippewa; Louis Owens, Choctaw; Sherman Alexie, Spokane; and Susan Power, Sioux.



### ***Bone Game***

by Louis Owens

A murder mystery unfolds on a grand scale, as mixed-blood Indian Cole McCurtain suspects a link between his dreams of a Spanish priest slain in 1812 and a serial killer who's terrorizing California. 243 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Reeves (Prairie Village), Stewart (Junction City), Weso (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

### ***The Grass Dancer***

by Susan Power

Harley Wind Soldier, Charlene Thunder, and the Sioux dancers gathered for the powwow are swept up in romantic rivalry and a powerful journey of mystery and hope that weaves together young and old, the living and the dead. 333 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Prasch (Topeka), Tucker (Topeka), Weso (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

### ***Reservation Blues***

by Sherman Alexie

When a blues musician passes his legendary guitar to Thomas Builds-the-Fire, a magical odyssey begins as Thomas and his all-Indian band ride their rock-and-roll dreams to the reservation bars and beyond. 306 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Carlson (Pittsburg), Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Lewis (Lindsborg), Low (Lawrence), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Reeves (Prairie Village), Shump (Lawrence), Stanley (McPherson), Wiechert (Lawrence).

### ***Tracks***

by Louise Erdrich

Told in the voices of tribal patriarch Nanapush and young mixed-blood Pauline, this Chippewa saga revolves around the mysterious Fleur Pillager, sorceress, seductress, determined to save her ancestral land at all costs. 226 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hastings (Shawnee), Kolich (Leavenworth), Krisuk (Dodge City), Lewis (Lindsborg), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Rabas (Emporia), Shump (Lawrence), Stanley (McPherson), Thierer (Admire), Weso (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – 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**

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. 581 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown (Salina), Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Krisuk (Dodge City), Lewis (Lindsborg), Lubert (Kansas City), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Waters (Dodge City).

## ***A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains***

**by Isabella L. Bird**

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. 249 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***The Last Cattle Drive***

**by Robert Day**

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. 222 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Foulke (Ottawa), Hawkins (Topeka), Hoy (Emporia), Klaus

(Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Quantic (Derby), Rabas (Emporia), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Shump (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka), Weso (Lawrence), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Letters of a Woman Homesteader***

**by Elinore Pruitt Stewart**

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. 282 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Brown (Salina), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Keller (Emporia), Klaus (Lenexa), Krisuk (Dodge City), Peterson (Lawrence), Pouppirt (Overland Park), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***A Scattered People:***

### ***An American Family Moves West***

**by Gerald McFarland**

McFarland offers a vivid, personal history of five generations of his family who migrated west over the course of two centuries. Their struggles, successes, and causes (one relative was John Brown) mirror our country's history and dreams. 245 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Peterson (Lawrence), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Thierer (Admire), Tucker (Topeka).

# TALK Series – A Woman’s Place

What is a woman’s place? Who decides? We have been talking about women’s roles in our society for two hundred years now, and the books in this series all reflect the state of the dialogue in the twentieth century. Each author looks at the way women develop personal strength of character while dealing with society’s or loved ones’ perceptions of what they should be. The tensions between mothers and daughters, wives and husbands, career and family are all explored in these stories of women seeking to define themselves and their relationships.



## ***A Doll’s House***

**by Henrik Ibsen**

The heroine of this famous play experiences a crisis of self-knowledge when she realizes that she must break free of a marriage that has made her her husband’s child. 232 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Carlson (Pittsburg), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Krisuk (Dodge City), Lubert (Kansas City), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Tucker (Topeka), Waters (Dodge City).

## ***The Joy Luck Club***

**by Amy Tan**

One of the four Chinese members of the Joy Luck Club has died, and her daughter June must now fulfill her mother’s lifelong wish. Her journey brings the other members to an unexpected confrontation with their pasts and with their American daughters. 288 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Sanchez (Wichita), Shump (Lawrence), Waters (Dodge City), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***A Lost Lady***

**by Willa Cather**

Stereotyped as goddess, mother, friend, adulteress, the glamorous Marian Forrester is an enigma to her young neighbor Niel Herbert – a woman whose charm is mixed with a terrifying vulnerability. 150 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Carlson (Pittsburg), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Quantic (Derby), Richter (NW Oklahoma), Stewart (Junction City), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***Their Eyes Were Watching God***

**by Zora Neale Hurston**

First treated as a “mule” and then as another man’s “queen,” Janie Crawford finds only disappointment in marriage until she meets a younger man who treats her as a companion and an equal. 195 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Birney (Admire), Carlson (Pittsburg), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Hill (Lawrence), Klaus (Lenexa), Kolich (Leavenworth), Krusik (Dodge City), Lewis (Lindsborg), Low (Lawrence), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Rieke (Leavenworth), Shump (Lawrence), Stewart (Junction City), Tidwell (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

## ***A Yellow Raft in Blue Water***

**by Michael Dorris**

This novel starts in the present and moves backward in time to tell the story of 15-year-old Rayona, her American Indian mother Christine, and the fierce and mysterious Ida, whose secrets, betrayals, and dreams bind all three women’s lives together. 372 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Birney (Admire), Etzel (Topeka), Kolich (Leavenworth), Low (Lawrence), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Quantic (Derby), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – Women Around the World

Some of the most powerful fiction today is being produced by women in the developing 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, the struggle of mothers and daughters for respect and identity.



## ***The Country Girls Trilogy***

**by Edna O'Brien (Ireland)**

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. 532 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hope (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Lewis (Lindsborg), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Stanley (McPherson).

## ***The House of the Spirits***

**by Isabel Allende (Chile)**

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. 433 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Chávez (Kansas City), Craven (Hays), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Low (Lawrence), Lubert (Kansas City), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Quantic (Derby), Sanchez (Wichita), Shump (Lawrence).

## ***Like Water for Chocolate***

**by Laura Esquivel (Mexico)**

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. 246 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Carlson (Pittsburg), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Goossen (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Hawkins (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Rieke (Leavenworth), Sanchez (Wichita), Shump (Lawrence).

## ***None to Accompany Me***

**by Nadine Gordimer (South Africa)**

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. 324 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Alexander (Lawrence), Birney (Admire), Carlson (Pittsburg), Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hastings (Shawnee), Hope (Lawrence), Lubert (Kansas City), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia).

## ***So Long a Letter***

**by Mariama Ba (Senegal)**

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. 89 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Brown-Kuchera (Quinter), Carlson (Pittsburg), Etzel (Topeka), Hawkins (Topeka), Hill (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Shump (Lawrence), Stanley (McPherson), Tucker (Topeka), Wiechert (Lawrence).

# TALK Series – World War II Generation

In 1939, barely twenty years after the end of World War I, the eruption of war in Europe led to worldwide conflict for the second time in the 20th century. World War II would not end until 1945, following the defeat of Nazi Germany and the surrender of the Japanese.

World War II resulted in more than 60 million deaths. This grotesque toll was the result of new, more efficient war technologies; the Nazi campaign of genocide against European Jews, gypsies, and homosexuals; and the brutality of the Japanese occupation in regions of Asia and the Pacific (in which well over half of the total deaths were those of civilians). In the wake of World War II, Europe was remapped, large swaths of Asia and Africa began moving towards independence and rejection of European colonization, global power dynamics were fundamentally reordered, and massive numbers of refugees sought new homes.

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 recent 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)**

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. 357 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Etzel (Topeka), Hacker (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka), Rabas (Emporia), Stanley (McPherson).

## ***The Gardens of Kyoto***

**by Kate Walbert (2001)**

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. 286 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Klaus (Lenexa), Mirriam-Goldberg (Lawrence), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka).

## ***Once Upon a Town***

**by Bob Greene (2002)**

This journalistic account of North Platt, Nebraska’s citizenry, 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. 257 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chance-Reay (Manhattan), Etzel (Topeka), Foulke (Ottawa), Klaus (Lenexa), Lewis (Lindsborg), Peterson (Lawrence), Tucker (Topeka).

## ***When the Elephants Dance***

**by Tess Uriza Holthe (2002)**

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. 367 pp.

**Discussion leaders:** Chávez (Kansas City), Etzel (Topeka), Hope (Lawrence), Kolich (Leavenworth), Peterson (Lawrence), Prasch (Topeka).

# TALK Scholar Directory

Use this directory to contact discussion leaders for your TALK programs. *Travel* indicates how many hours discussion leaders are usually willing to travel from their hometown. If you're not sure about travel, go ahead and contact the person and give him/her an opportunity to say "yes." You may schedule up to three scholars per book series.

**Shawn Alexander** is assistant professor of African and African-American studies at KU.



Shawn Leigh Alexander  
African & African American Studies  
University of Kansas  
1440 Jayhawk Blvd #9  
Lawrence KS 66045-7574  
785/864-5044 (w)  
413/687-7521 (c)  
slalexan@ku.edu  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Byron Caminero-Santangelo** is a professor of English and Environmental Studies at the University of Kansas.



Byron Caminero-Santangelo  
Kansas African Studies Center  
University of Kansas  
785/864-3745  
bsantang@ku.edu  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Ann Birney** is an independent scholar of American Studies and co-director of Ride Into History.



Ann Birney  
2886 N. Hwy 99  
Admire KS 66830-9171  
620/528-3580 (h)  
ridehist@satelephone.com  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Susan Anne Carlson** is professor of English at Pittsburg State University.



Susan Anne Carlson  
English Department  
Pittsburg State University  
620/235-4692 (w)  
620/235-1573  
scarlson@pittstate.edu  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Bill Brown** is a professor emeritus of English and Humanities at Kansas Wesleyan University.



William Clyde Brown  
1420 S. 11th St.  
Salina KS 67401-5507  
785/827-5193 (h)  
limestonecottage1@sbcglobal.net  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Mickey Chance-Reay** is an author and historian who teaches at Kansas State University.



Michaeline Chance-Reay  
College of Education  
Kansas State University  
224 Bluemont Hall  
Manhattan KS 66506-5333  
785/532-6047 (w)  
mreay@ksu.edu  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Valerie Brown-Kuchera** coordinates seminars for the Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center.



Valerie Brown-Kuchera  
PO Box 247  
Quinter KS 67752-0247  
785/754-8125 (h)  
785/754-3660 (w)  
vbrown@nkesc.org  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Gene Chávez** consults on diversity issues as president of Chávez & Associates.



Gene T. Chávez  
6825 Bluejacket St.  
Kansas City KS 66203-3864  
913/486-2213 (h)  
gtchavez45@gmail.com  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Brenda Craven** is an instructor of English at Fort Hays State University.



Brenda Craven  
Dept. of English  
Fort Hays State University  
600 Park St.  
Hays KS 67601-4099  
785/628-5384 (w) • 625-9396 (h)  
bcraven@fhsu.edu  
*Travel: **Statewide.***

**Randi Hacker** is the outreach director for the Center for East Asian Studies at the University of Kansas.



Randi Hacker  
Center for East Asian Studies  
University of Kansas  
785/864-3832  
rhacker@ku.edu  
*Travel: **Statewide.***

**Dennis Etzel** is a poet and teaches English at Washburn University.



Dennis Etzel Jr.  
1003 NE Arter Ave.  
Topeka KS 66616-1602  
785/554-2018 (h)  
785/670-1912 (w)  
dennis.etzel@washburn.edu  
*Travel: **Statewide.***

**Sandy Calvin Hastings** is professor emeritus of English at Johnson County Community College.



Sandra Calvin Hastings  
14918 W. 64th St.  
Shawnee KS 66216-2115  
913/268-0456 (h)  
sandrac@jccc.edu  
*Travel: **4 hrs/Kansas City.***

**Steve Foulke** is a geographer who specializes in the Great Plains region.



Steven Foulke  
History & Political Science  
Ottawa University  
1001 S. Cedar  
Ottawa KS 66067-3399  
785/242-5200 x5053 (w)  
steven.foulke@ottawa.edu  
*Travel: **Statewide.***

**Anne Hawkins** teaches history at Washburn University.



Anne Hawkins  
2021 SW High Ave.  
Topeka KS 66604-3126  
785/230-2102 (cell)  
apwhawkins@msn.com  
*Travel: **Statewide.***

**Marwa Ghazali** researches anthropology at the University of Kansas.



Marwa Ghazali  
Kansas African Studies Center  
University of Kansas  
785/864-3745  
marmoora@ku.edu  
*Travel: **Statewide.***

**Nancy Hope** is associate director for the Kansas Consortium for Teaching about Asia.



Nancy Hope  
Center for East Asian Studies  
University of Kansas  
785/864-3918 (w)  
nfhope@ku.edu  
*Travel: **Statewide.***

**Rachel Goossen** is a professor of history at Washburn University.



Rachel Waltner Goossen  
Dept. of History  
Washburn University  
1700 SW College Ave.  
Topeka KS 66621-0001  
785/670-1762 (w) • 862-1933 (h)  
rachel.goossen@washburn.edu  
*Travel: **Statewide.***

**Jim Hoy** teaches folklore and literature at Emporia State University.



Jim Hoy  
938 Road 130  
Emporia KS 66801-7519  
620/343-3192 (h)  
620/341-5549 (w)  
jhoy@emporia.edu  
*Travel: **Statewide.***

**Dick Keller** is a professor of English at Emporia State University.



Richard D. Keller  
Dept. of English, CB 4019  
Emporia State University  
1200 Commercial  
Emporia KS 66801-5087  
620/341-5216 (w) • 343-3441 (h)  
rkeller@emporia.edu  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Denise Low** is a retired humanities professor and former poet laureate of the state of Kansas.



Denise Low  
1916 Stratford Rd  
Lawrence KS 66044-4540  
785/841-5757 (h)  
785/749-8431 x206 (w)  
deniselow9@hotmail.com  
*Travel: 4 hrs/Lawrence.*

**Marilyn Klaus** is a lecturer with KU Religious Studies and with African and African American Studies.



Marilyn E. Klaus  
8848 Hirling Rd  
Lenexa KS 66220-2536  
913/859-9283 (h)  
marilyn@marilynklaus.com  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Alan Lubert** teaches philosophy at Baker University.



Alan S. Lubert  
338 Olive St.  
Kansas City MO 64124-1768  
816/474-9878 (h)  
816/842-8321 (w)  
alubert@rmhckc.org  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Sr. Rosie Kolich** teaches English at Saint Mary's University.



Rosemary Kolich, S.C.L.  
Dept. of English  
University of Saint Mary  
4100 S. 4th St.  
Leavenworth KS 66048-5082  
913/758-4377 (w)  
kolichr@stmary.edu  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Elizabeth MacGonagle** is a historian of Africa and its diaspora at the University of Kansas.



Elizabeth MacGonagle  
Kansas African Studies Center  
University of Kansas  
785/864-3745  
macgonag@ku.edu  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Jennifer Krisuk** is an English instructor at Dodge City Community College.



Jennifer J. Krisuk  
Instructor of English  
Dodge City Community College  
620/518-1045 (w)  
jkrisuk@gmail.com  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg** is a professor at Goddard College, Plainfield VT, and writer, poet, and author.



Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg  
1357 N. 1000 Road  
Lawrence KS 66046-9608  
785/766-7159 (h)  
carynmirriamgoldberg@  
gmail.com  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Linda Lewis** is professor emeritus of English at Bethany College.



Linda M. Lewis  
709 N. 1st St.  
Lindsborg KS 67456-1633  
785/227-3847 (h)  
785/227-3380 x8127 (w)  
lewisl@bethanylb.edu  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Deborah Peterson** is an instructor of Chinese language and East Asian civilization.



Deborah E. Peterson  
Lawrence KS 66045-7594  
785/749-3509  
Deborah.firelake@gmail.com  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Erin Pouppirt** is a member of the Kaw Nation and an independent scholar.



Erin Pouppirt  
8236 W. 98th Terr.  
Overland Park KS 66212-3496  
913/322-1740 (h)  
ecanze@yahoo.com  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Sara Richter** teaches English at Oklahoma Panhandle State University.



Sara Jane Richter  
2216 N. Oklahoma St.  
Guymon OK 73942-2508  
580/338-2357 (h)  
580/349-1472 (w)  
saraj@opsu.edu  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Tom Prasch** chairs the Department of History at Washburn University.



Thomas Prasch  
Dept. of History  
Washburn University  
1700 SW College Ave.  
Topeka KS 66621-0001  
785/670-1892 (w) • 357-0928 (h)  
tom.prasch@washburn.edu  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Susan Rieke** is a professor of English at the University of Saint Mary.



Susan Rieke  
University of Saint Mary  
Leavenworth KS 66048-5082  
913/758-6214 (w)  
riekess@stmary.edu  
*Travel: 4 hrs/Leavenworth.*

**Diane Quantic** is a retired professor of English.



Diane Quantic  
1213 N. Hamilton Cir  
Derby KS 67037-9063  
316/788-1192 (h)  
dianequantic@gmail.com  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Martha Sanchez** is City Community Educator and teaches ethnic studies at Wichita State University.



Martha Ortiz Sanchez  
2826 N. Edwards  
Wichita KS 67204-4621  
316/821-9787 (h)  
316/303-8042 (w)  
MarthaSanchez121@gmail.com  
*Travel: 4 hrs/Wichita.*

**Kevin Rabas** is an associate professor of English at Emporia State University.



Kevin J. Rabas  
Dept. of English, CB 4019  
Emporia State University  
1200 Commercial  
Emporia KS 66801-5087  
620/341-5218 (w) • 913/909-4345 (h)  
krabas@emporia.edu  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Nicolas Shump** teaches history and English at The Barstow School in Kansas City.



Nicolas Shump  
4713 W. 24th St.  
Lawrence KS 66047-9660  
785/766-0929 (h)  
nicshump@gmail.com  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Trish Reeves** teaches English at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence.



Trish Reeves  
2514 W. 71st Terr.  
Prairie Village KS 66208-3326  
913/269-1184 (cell)  
913/499-8960 (h)  
trishreeves@mac.com  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Kim Stanley** chairs the Department of Modern Languages at McPherson College.



Kim Stanley  
1129 N. Grimes  
McPherson KS 67460-2828  
620/241-7214 (h)  
620/241-0731 (w)  
stanleyk@mcpherson.edu  
*Travel: 4 hrs/McPherson.*

**Margy Stewart** is a professor emeritus of English.



Margy Stewart  
11003 Lower McDowell Rd  
Junction City KS 66441-7742  
785/539-5592 (h)  
margystewart785@gmail.com  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Tom Weso** is an educator and artist.



Thomas Weso  
1916 Stratford Rd  
Lawrence KS 66044-4540  
785/423-5363 (h)  
TomWesoArt@gmail.com  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Joyce Thierer** teaches history at Emporia State University and is co-director of Ride Into History.



Joyce Thierer  
2886 N. Hwy 99  
Admire KS 66830-9171  
620/528-3580 (h)  
ridehist@satelephone.com  
*Travel: Limited availability.*

**Sandra Wiechert** is a retired teacher and library reference assistant/community relations coordinator.



Sandra Wiechert  
813 Highland Dr.  
Lawrence KS 66044-2431  
785/842-5467 (h)  
wiechert@ku.edu  
*Travel: Statewide.*

**Edgar Tidwell** teaches African American and American literature at KU.



John Edgar Tidwell  
Dept. of English  
University of Kansas  
785/331-4201 (h)  
tidwelje@ku.edu  
*Travel: East of Wichita.*

**Sara Tucker** is a professor of history at Washburn University.



Sara W. Tucker  
8050 SW Huntoon St.  
Topeka KS 66615-1417  
785/478-4692 (h)  
sara.tucker@washburn.edu  
*Travel: 2 hrs/Topeka.*

**Dana Waters** is professor emeritus of English at Dodge City Community College.



Dana Waters  
Dept. of English  
PO Box 323  
Fowler, KS 67844  
620/255-3751 (c) • 620/646-5642 (h)  
danapwaters@gmail.com  
*Travel: Statewide.*