

## November 11, 2019 Bookclub Suggestions

**Nothing To See Here** By: Kevin Wilson.

Novel **254 pages**

Libraries are full of books aiming to enlighten the parents of difficult children, including titles such as “Your Defiant Child” and “The Explosive Child.” But as Lillian, the narrator of the perennially weird and wonderful new Kevin Wilson novel “Nothing to See Here” discovers, there are no parenting books about kids who literally burst into flames.

Twenty-eight-year-old Lillian works at a Tennessee Save-A-Lot and lives in her mother’s attic. One day her old friend Madison makes an improbable request. Madison and Lillian met as boarding school roommates. Lillian was on scholarship and Madison came from old money, but the girls bonded through mutual quirkiness and love of basketball. Still, Lillian ended up blamed and expelled for one of Madison’s transgressions, and the trajectory of her life never recovered.

Gorgeous, charmed Madison Roberts, meanwhile, has graduated from Vanderbilt and married a senator with unusual problem children from his first marriage: When agitated, the twins catch fire, leaving their own bodies unharmed but incinerating everything around them. Senator Roberts’ first wife died, and so the kids will come to live at his estate, and Madison asks Lillian to serve as their governess for the summer. Lillian agrees — the pay is irresistible. Besides, she wants to get out of her mother’s attic. She never cared for children until she met these twins, Roland and Bessie, even though Bessie attacks her on first sight. “And as they stared at me, I knew how much of myself I was going to unfairly place in them,” Lillian explains. “They would scratch and kick me, and I was going to scratch and kick anyone who tried to touch them.”

Lillian, who has a charming, down-to-earth perspective and a salty vocabulary, comes up with inventive ways to keep the kids cool and calm as Senator Roberts ends up in line for a promotion that makes concealing the kids’ secret even more crucial.

The premise is fantastical, but Wilson’s portrayal of these fire children conveys more emotional truth about life with a difficult or neurodivergent kid than any of those parenting guides. First, there’s the lowering of expectations. “The kids weren’t on fire,” Lillian explains. “That was my new measuring stick for what was good and what was bad.”

**Flight of the Sparrow** by Amy Belding Brown

Historical Fiction **354 pages**

Even before Mary Rowlandson is captured by Indians on a winter day of violence and terror, she sometimes found herself in conflict with her rigid Puritan community. Now, her home destroyed, her children lost to her, she has been sold into the service of a powerful woman tribal leader, made a pawn in the on-going bloody struggle between English settlers and native people. Battling cold, hunger, and exhaustion, Mary witnesses

harrowing brutality but also unexpected kindness. To her confused surprise, she is drawn to her captors' open and straightforward way of life, a feeling further complicated by her attraction to a generous, protective English-speaking native known as James Printer. All her life, Mary has been taught to fear God, submit to her husband, and abhor Indians. Now, having lived on the other side of the forest, she begins to question the edicts that have guided her, torn between the life she knew and the wisdom the natives have shown her. Based on the compelling true narrative of Mary Rowlandson, *Flight of the Sparrow* is an evocative tale that transports the reader to a little-known time in early America and explores the real meaning of freedom, faith, and acceptance.

**Alias Grace by Margaret Atwood**  
**Historical Fictions 468 pages**

It's 1843, and Grace Marks has been convicted for her involvement in the vicious murders of her employer and his housekeeper and mistress. Some believe Grace is innocent; others think her evil or insane. Now serving a life sentence, Grace claims to have no memory of the murders. An up-and-coming expert in the burgeoning field of mental illness is engaged by a group of reformers and spiritualists who seek a pardon for Grace. He listens to her story while bringing her closer and closer to the day she cannot remember. What will he find in attempting to unlock her memories? Captivating and disturbing, *Alias Grace* showcases best-selling, Booker Prize-winning author Margaret Atwood at the peak of her powers.

**The Dutch House by Ann Patchett**  
**352 Pages Coming of Age Fiction**

A story about inheritance, loss and sibling love. Danny and Maeve were raised in the Dutch House, a lavish estate outside Philly and the obsession of their father. After their mother mysteriously leaves, their dad's new wife strips away every trace of their old life, leaving them penniless. Haunted by memories of their house and their parents, Danny and Maeve rely on each other to forge ahead. The plot is very suspenseful and follows five decades of their lives

**The Far Pavilions by M.M. Kaye**  
**Historical Fiction 955 Pages**

An Englishman is brought up as Hindu. He has a passionate, but dangerous love for an Indian princess. It is the story of divided loyalties, a friendship that endures until death, high adventure and the clash between East and West.

**Killers of the Flower Moon** by David Grann. It is a **non-fiction** murder mystery that recounts the mysterious deaths of 24 Osage Indians in Oklahoma in the 1920's, after oil deposits were discovered on the reservation, making the tribe extremely wealthy, and many Osage refused to sell their oil rights. The investigation that followed reached a shocking conclusion and led to the formation of the FBI. **352 pp.**

**The Thing About Jane** by Sharon Krum  
**Romantic Comedy 315 pages**

At thirty-one, Jane Spring has everything a woman could ask for and seemingly everything a man could long for--great legs, brains, rising star status in the Manhattan D.A.'s office--but she just can't find a man who'll fall madly in love with her. Men are always lining up to ask her out, but for some reason no one wants a second date. So Jane resolves to change her tack. One snowy night while watching a Doris Day marathon on cable it hits her: Doris Day always got her man. Trading her nondescript black pantsuit for petal pink Chanel and pearls, Jane dyes her hair, stops cursing, softens her voice, paints her nails--even her apartment--and embarks on a fun-filled journey to find the smart, sweet, gorgeous, capable, ambitious, courageous, loving, adoring, hardworking man of her dreams.

**Homegoing: A Novel**, by Yaa Gyasi, 313 pp

A novel of breathtaking sweep and emotional power that traces three hundred years in Ghana and along the way also becomes a truly great American novel. Extraordinary for its exquisite language, its implacable sorrow, its soaring beauty, and for its monumental portrait of the forces that shape families and nations, *Homegoing* heralds the arrival of a major new voice in contemporary fiction.

The unforgettable *New York Times* best seller begins with the story of two half-sisters, separated by forces beyond their control: one sold into slavery, the other married to a British slaver. Written with tremendous sweep and power, *Homegoing* traces the generations of family who follow, as their destinies lead them through two continents and three hundred years of history, each life indeliably drawn, as the legacy of slavery is fully revealed in light of the present day.

Accolades:

**Winner of the NBCC's John Leonard First Book Prize**

**A *New York Times* 2016 Notable Book**

**One of Oprah's 10 Favorite Books of 2016**

**NPR's Debut Novel of the Year**

**One of BuzzFeed's Best Fiction Books Of 2016**

**One of *Time*'s Top 10 Novels of 2016**

**The Library Book by Susan Orlean**  
**Non-fiction 336 pages**

On the morning of April 29, 1986, a fire alarm sounded in the Los Angeles Public Library. As the moments passed, the patrons and staff who had been cleared out of the building realized this was not the usual fire alarm. As one fireman recounted, “Once that first stack got going, it was ‘Goodbye, Charlie.’” The fire was disastrous: it reached 2000 degrees and burned for more than seven hours. By the time it was extinguished, it had consumed four hundred thousand books and damaged seven hundred thousand more. Investigators descended on the scene, but more than thirty years later, the mystery remains: Did someone purposefully set fire to the library—and if so, who?

In *The Library Book*, Orlean chronicles the LAPL fire and its aftermath to showcase the larger, crucial role that libraries play in our lives; delves into the evolution of libraries across the country and around the world, from their humble beginnings as a metropolitan charitable initiative to their current status as a cornerstone of national identity; brings each department of the library to vivid life through on-the-ground reporting; studies arson and attempts to burn a copy of a book herself; reflects on her own experiences in libraries; and reexamines the case of Harry Peak, the blond-haired actor long suspected of setting fire to the LAPL more than thirty years ago.

Along the way, Orlean introduces us to an unforgettable cast of characters from libraries past and present—from Mary Foy, who in 1880 at eighteen years old was named the head of the Los Angeles Public Library at a time when men still dominated the role, to Dr. C.J.K. Jones, a pastor, citrus farmer, and polymath known as “The Human Encyclopedia” who roamed the library dispensing information; from Charles Lummis, a wildly eccentric journalist and adventurer who was determined to make the L.A. library one of the best in the world, to the current staff, who do heroic work every day to ensure that their institution remains a vital part of the city it serves.