



Book Club Books Summer 2002

Below are this summer's Book Club selections. Chosen to represent a range of interests, it is hoped these books will stimulate thought and discussion among our diverse group of readers. As always, your comments and suggestions are welcome.

Becoming Madame Mao by Anchee Min

She began as a beautiful actress, but became the “white boned demon” during her reign of terror. Min grew up fascinated by this complex woman, and in this novel she moves back and forth between stories of the film star and the evil dictator, and how China shaped her.

Bel Canto by Ann Patchett

Winner of the Pen/Faulkner award, “Patchett’s tragicomic novel - a fantasia of guns and Puccini and Red Cross negotiations - invokes the glorious, unreliable promises of art, politics, and love” wrote the *New Yorker* in 2001.

Botany of Desire by Michael Pollan

This work ingeniously explores the reciprocal relationship between people and domesticated plants. Four fundamental human desires - sweetness, beauty, intoxication, and control are paired with the plants that satisfy them: apples, tulips, marijuana, and potatoes.

Death of Vishnu by Manil Suri

Vishnu is the odd-jobs man for a Bombay apartment complex. As he lies dying, the building’s tenants’ lives unfold around him. Their stories, and Vishnu’s fevered recollections of his past, blend comedy, Hindu mythology, and much compassionate tenderness.

Empire Falls by Richard Russo

The author again tells of blue-collar life, but this time he sets in motion a large cast of characters from every social stratum in their depressed mill town. Russo’s comedic timing, great dialogue and poignant story made this the 2002 winner of the Pulitzer Prize.

Expecting Adam by Martha Beck

“Wickedly funny and wrenchingly sad memoirs of a young mother awaiting the birth of a Down Syndrome baby while simultaneously pursuing a doctorate at Harvard” wrote *Kirkus Reviews* in 1998.

A Gesture Life by Chang-rae Lee

Franklin Hata, Korean-born, brought up in Japan, and now living in a New York suburb, has tried to fit in with each of these cultures. Through Franklin's compelling life the novel explores the dilemma of being an outsider, and the heartbreaking lengths a person will go in order to adapt.

In Sunlight, In a Beautiful Garden by Kathleen Cambor

The Johnstown PA flood of 1889 unleashes nature's wrath on a beautiful Memorial Day weekend. Both the town's wealthy industrialists, enjoying their gentlemen's club, and the less fortunate who live below the dam that burst, are forever scarred by this tragedy that took over 2000 lives. The author tells the story from many socioeconomic perspectives, intertwined with a lyrical, bittersweet romance involving pampered, elite Nora and working class protestor Daniel.

Interpreter of Maladies by Jhumpa Lahiri

"In Lahiri's sympathetic tales, the pang of disappointment turns into a sudden hunger to know more...She breathes unpredictable life into the page, and the reader finishes each story reseduced, wishing he could spend a whole novel with its characters" wrote *The New York Times Book Review* in 1999.

One Thousand White Women by Jim Fergus

Little Wolf, chief of the Cheyenne, suggests to President Ulysses S. Grant that peace could be established if his tribe were given white women as wives. Mary Dodd soon finds herself traveling west and her historic adventures are affectingly portrayed in this novel.

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe

First published in 1959, this worldwide classic masterpiece is still relevant for today. Okonkwo is a successful, solid man in his tribe, but he also exhibits all-too-human flaws well-known in Greek tragedy. It is a simple tale, set in Nigeria before and after the coming of colonialism, but it resonates with a keen awareness of the qualities all people have in common.

When We Were Orphans by Kazuo Ishiguro

Christopher Banks is an English boy born in Shanghai before World War I. Orphaned at age nine, he grows up to be a renowned detective focused on unraveling the mystery of the disappearance of his parents, while the Sino-Japanese War rages. This many-layered story illuminates the power of one's past to determine memory, perception, and understanding.



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