



Book Club Books Summer 2004

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.

The Big House: A Century in the Life of an American Summer Home by George Colt

Built by Colt's great-grandfather one hundred years ago on Cape Cod, the author has written a loving memoir to the place as he anticipates its sale. Evoking universal memories of the bittersweet delights of summers past, he uses what may be "the last" visit to the house to describe the societal and personal events that affected his Boston Brahmin family over the years, both good and bad.

Brick Lane by Monica Ali

Young Nazneen leaves her Bangladeshi village and is sent to London to marry an older man. There she observes her neighbors, raises a family and learns to truly love. This beautiful book is about honesty, bravery, love and the kindness of strangers.

The Colour by Rose Tremain

1860's New Zealand is the setting for this passionate story about immigrants caught up in that country's gold rush. It's a sweeping historical adventure encompassing lives lived at full tilt, awesome landscapes, and the human heart laid bare.

Crabwalk by Gunter Grass

Nobel author Grass again explores Germany's tortured past. This novel begins with a torpedoed Nazi cruise ship that results in the death of 9,000 people. The consequences for many people involved, right up to the present, are told in an engrossing story and a meditation on Germany's struggle with its wartime memories.

Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Cape Town by Paul Theroux

This is the writer's "experience of vanishing" into the African continent, where his encounters with the natives, aid workers and other tourists make for entertaining reading. Yet he also offers a sobering look at the social and political chaos that engulfs most of Africa today.

Fabulous Small Jews by Joseph Epstein

A short story collection by a local author. With Jewish Chicago as the background, the stories thoughtfully explore how people make sense of life, live honest lives, and die at peace. The characters tend to be hardworking and solitary, having survived poverty, the Holocaust, tough working conditions, and much more.

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini

Politics takes a back seat in this beautiful story of two friends, the wealthy Amir and his servant, Hassan. It opens during the final days of Afghanistan's monarchy and chronicles what happens to this boyhood friendship as the wrenching contemporary history of their country unfolds.

The Mammoth Cheese by Sheri Holman

Eleven premature babies are born to dog trainer Manda Frank in a little Virginia town, and thus begins this moving and pleasurable novel. Full of diverse characters in a vivid setting, including the making of a 1,235-pound cheese in an attempt to save the family farm, the author explores the burdens and joys of rural America.

Waiting for Snow in Havana by Carlos Eire

A beautifully wrought memoir of growing up in colorful 1950s Havana and then the devastation caused by Castro's coming to power. The son of a judge, Eire was eventually shipped off to Florida and he never saw his father again. This book is both an ode to paradise lost and a captivating baring of the author's soul.

Wintering: A Novel of Sylvia Plath by Kate Moses

Covering the last few months of the poet's life, the author focuses most on the collapse of her marriage to Ted Hughes, and the fevered activities leading up to her suicide. The author deftly captures the mood and emotions of that manic time, while also portraying Plath's joy in words and images, her fierce motherhood, and domestic drive.