

Book Club Selections 2020

January **Book Share**

February **The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto (2015)**
By Mitch Albom

The voice of Music narrates the tale of its most beloved disciple, Frankie Presto, a Spanish war orphan raised by a blind music teacher. At nine years old, Frankie is sent to America in the bottom of a boat. His only possession is an old guitar and six magical strings. But Frankie's talent is touched by the gods, and it weaves him through the musical landscape of the twentieth century, from classical to jazz to rock and roll. Frankie elevates to a rock star himself, yet his gift becomes his burden, as he realizes that he can actually affect people's futures. Overwhelmed by life, loss, and this power, he disappears for years, only to reemerge in a spectacular and mysterious farewell.

March **Radium Girls (2016)**
By Kate Moore

As World War I raged across the globe, hundreds of young women toiled away at the radium-dial factories, where they painted clock faces with a mysterious new substance called radium. Assured by their bosses that the luminous material was safe, the women themselves shone brightly in the dark, covered from head to toe with the glowing dust. With such a coveted job, these "shining girls" were considered the luckiest alive -- until they began to fall mysteriously ill. As the fatal poison of the radium took hold, they found themselves embroiled in one of America's biggest scandals and a groundbreaking battle for workers' rights.

April **A Tree Grows in Brooklyn (1943)**
By Betty Smith

From the moment she entered the world, Francie needed to be made of stern stuff, for the often harsh life of Williamsburg demanded fortitude, precocity, and strength of spirit. Often scorned by neighbors for her family's erratic and eccentric behavior, no one, least of all Francie, could say that the Nolans' life lacked drama. By turns overwhelming, sublime, heartbreaking, and uplifting, the Nolans' daily experiences are tenderly threaded with family connectedness and raw with honesty. Betty Smith captures the joys of humble Williamsburg life—from "junk day" on Saturdays to the special excitement of holidays, bringing cause for celebration and revelry. Betty Smith has artfully caught this sense of exciting life in a novel of childhood, replete with incredibly rich moments of universal experiences—a truly remarkable achievement for any writer.

May **Mornings on Horseback: The Story of an Extraordinary Family, a Vanished Way of Life and the Unique Child Who Became Theodore Roosevelt (1981)**
By David McCullough

This is the story of a remarkable little boy, seriously handicapped by recurrent and almost fatal asthma attacks, and his struggle to manhood: an amazing metamorphosis seen in the context of the very uncommon household in which he was raised. The father is the first Theodore Roosevelt, a figure of unbounded energy, enormously attractive and selfless, a god in the eyes of his small, frail namesake. The mother, Mittie Bulloch Roosevelt, is a Southerner and a celebrated beauty, but also considerably more. There are sisters Anna and Corinne, brother Elliott (who becomes the father of Eleanor Roosevelt), and the lovely, tragic Alice Lee, TR's first love. All are brought to life to make "a beautifully told story, filled with fresh detail" (*The New York Times Book Review*).

June **The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark (1995)**
By Carl Sagan

How can we make intelligent decisions about our increasingly technology-driven lives if we don't understand the difference between the myths of pseudoscience and the testable hypotheses of science? Carl Sagan argues that scientific thinking is critical not only to the pursuit of truth but to the very well-being of our democratic institutions. Casting a wide net through history and culture, Sagan examines and debunks such celebrated fallacies of the past as witchcraft, faith healing, demons, and UFOs. And yet, disturbingly, in today's so-called information

age, pseudoscience is burgeoning with stories of alien abduction, channeling past lives, and communal hallucinations commanding growing attention and respect. As Sagan demonstrates, the siren song of unreason is not just a cultural wrong turn but a dangerous plunge into darkness that threatens our most basic freedoms.

July **NO BOOK CLUB**

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September **The Brothers Karamazov (1880)**
By Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Dostoevsky's last and greatest novel is both a brilliantly told crime story and a passionate philosophical debate. The dissolute landowner Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov is murdered; his sons--the atheist intellectual Ivan, the hot-blooded Dmitry, and the saintly novice Alyosha--are all involved at some level. Brilliantly bound up with this psychological drama is Dostoevsky's intense and disturbing exploration of many deeply felt ideas about the existence of God, freedom of will, the collective nature of guilt, and the disastrous consequences of rationalism.

October **Hiroshima (1946)**
By John Hersey

On August 6, 1945, Hiroshima was destroyed by the first atom bomb ever dropped on a city. This book, tells what happened on that day. Told through the memories of survivors, this timeless, powerful and compassionate document has become a classic "that stirs the conscience of humanity" (New York Times). Almost four decades after the original publication of this celebrated book, John Hersey went back to Hiroshima in search of the people whose stories he had told. His account of what he discovered about them is now the eloquent and moving final chapter of the book.

November **Little Fires Everywhere**
By Celeste Ng

In Shaker Heights, everything is planned. And no one embodies this spirit more than Elena Richardson, whose guiding principle is playing by the rules. Enter Mia Warren - an enigmatic artist and single mother - who arrives in this idyllic bubble with her teenaged daughter Pearl, and rents a house from the Richardsons. Soon all four Richardson children are drawn to the mother-daughter pair. But Mia carries with her a mysterious past and a disregard for the status quo that threatens to upend this carefully ordered community. When the Richardsons' old family friends attempt to adopt a Chinese-American baby, a custody battle erupts that dramatically divides the town--and puts Mia and Elena on opposing sides. Suspicious of Mia and her motives, Elena is determined to uncover the secrets in Mia's past, but her obsession will come at unexpected and devastating costs.

December **Dopesick (2018)**
By Beth Macy

Beginning with a single dealer who lands in a small Virginia town and sets about turning high school football stars into heroin overdose statistics, Macy sets out to answer a grieving mother's question--why her only son died--and comes away with a gripping, unputdownable story of greed and need. From the introduction of OxyContin in 1996, Macy investigates the powerful forces that led America's doctors and patients to embrace a medical culture where overtreatment with painkillers became the norm. In some of the same communities featured in her book *Factory Man*, the unemployed use painkillers both to numb the pain of joblessness and pay their bills, while privileged teens trade pills in cul-de-sacs, and even high school standouts fall prey to prostitution, jail, and death.