

Due to sheer numbers (we had a total of 13 books), I had to eliminate some titles based on length and other reasons (e.g., we've read before in the group, multiple titles by suggester, etc.).

Grant:

Pedro Páramo, Juan Rulfo, 1955, 128 pp.—Mexico

A classic of Mexican modern literature about a haunted village. As one enters Juan Rulfo's legendary novel, one follows a dusty road to a town of death. Time shifts from one consciousness to another in a hypnotic flow of dreams, desires, and memories, a world of ghosts dominated by the figure of *Pedro Páramo*—lover, overlord, murderer. Rulfo's extraordinary mix of sensory images, violent passions, and unfathomable mysteries has been a profound influence on a whole generation of Latin American writers, including Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Gabriel García Márquez. To read *Pedro Páramo* today is as overwhelming an experience as when it was first published in Mexico back in 1955.

Martha:

Waiting, Ha Jin, 1999, 320pp.—China

Waiting, which won the National Book Award in 1999, is the story of an ambitious doctor who has been in love with a woman for 17 years. But back in the traditional world of his home village lives the wife his family chose for him when he was young—a humble and touchingly loyal woman, whom he visits in order to ask, again and again, for a divorce. Every summer, his compliant wife agrees to a divorce but then backs out.

Bonnie:

Klara and the Sun, Kazuo Ishiguro, 2021, 304 pp.—futuristic, unnamed country

The first novel by Ishiguro since winning the Nobel Prize in Literature, tells the story of Klara, an Artificial Friend with outstanding observational qualities, who, from her place in the store, watches carefully the behavior of those who come in to browse, and of those who pass on the street outside. She remains hopeful that a customer will soon choose her.

Paula:

Go Down Moses, William Faulkner, 1942, 365pp.—American South

Go Down, Moses is composed of seven interrelated stories, all of them set in Faulkner's mythic Yoknapatawpha County. From a variety of perspectives, Faulkner examines the complex, changing relationships between blacks and whites, between man and nature, weaving a cohesive novel rich in implication and insight.

Peg:

Homeland Elegies, Ayad Akhtar, 2020, 368 pp.—US fiction-memoir

A deeply personal work by an American-born, Pakistani immigrant about hope and identity in a nation coming apart at the seams, *Homeland Elegies* blends fact and fiction to tell an epic story of belonging and dispossession in the world that 9/11 made. Part family drama, part social essay, part picaresque adventure—at its heart, it is the story of a father, a son, and the country they both call home.

Deb:

The Double Bind, Chris Bohjalian, 2007, 368pp.—US

A woman befriends an elderly man who has a history of mental illness at a Burlington, VT homeless shelter. In his moments of lucidity, she learns that the gentle, likable man was a successful photographer of the rich and famous. A box of photographs and negatives discovered among his meager possessions lends credence to his tale. How could such an accomplished man have fallen on such hard times? Becoming obsessed with uncovering his past, she studies his photographs, tracking down every lead they provide into the mystery of his life before homelessness.

Liz:

Family Lexicon, Natalia Ginsberg, 2017, 224pp.—Italy

A masterpiece of European literature that blends family memoir and fiction. An Italian family, sizable, with its routines and rituals, crazes, pet phrases, and stories, doubtful, comical, indispensable, comes to life. Giuseppe Levi is Jewish, married to Lidia, a Catholic, though neither is religious; they live in the industrial city of Turin. It is all very ordinary, except that the background to the story is Mussolini's Italy in its steady downward descent to race law and world war. The Levis are, among other things, unshakeable anti-fascists. That will complicate their lives.

Steve:

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, Arundhati Roy, 2017, 464pp.—India

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness takes us on a journey of many years—the story spooling outwards from the cramped neighborhoods of Old Delhi into the burgeoning new metropolis and beyond. Anjum, who used to be Aftab, unrolls a threadbare carpet in a city graveyard that she calls home. A baby appears quite suddenly on a pavement, a little after midnight, in a crib of litter.

Lisa

Remarkable Creatures, Tracy Chevalier, 2009, 320 pp—England

In 1810, a sister and brother uncover the fossilized skull of an unknown animal in the cliffs on the south coast of England. The discovery shakes the scientific community and leads to new ways of thinking about the creation of the world. Working in an arena dominated by middle-class men, however, the sister finds herself out of step with her working-class background. In danger of being an outcast in her community, she takes solace in an unlikely friendship with a prickly London spinster with her own passion for fossils.

Alternate titles that we **won't** be reading:

Grant:

The Known World, Edward P. Jones, 2003, 388 pp.

The Known World tells the story of Henry Townsend, a black farmer and former slave who falls under the tutelage of William Robbins, the most powerful man in Manchester County, Virginia. Making certain he never circumvents the law, Townsend runs his affairs with unusual discipline. But when death takes him unexpectedly, his widow, Caldonia, can't uphold the estate's order, and chaos ensues. Jones has woven a footnote of history into an epic that takes an unflinching look at slavery in all its moral complexities.

Martha:

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, Carson McCullers, 1940, 356 pp.

Debut novel by 23 year old Carson McCullers. Set in a small town in the middle of the deep South, it is the story of John Singer, a lonely deaf-mute, and a disparate group of people who are drawn towards his kind, sympathetic nature. The owner of the café where Singer eats every day, a young girl desperate to grow up, an angry drunkard, a frustrated black doctor: each pours their heart out to Singer, their silent confidant, and he in turn changes their disenchanting lives in ways they could never imagine.

Peg:

The Magic Mountain, Thomas Mann, 1924, 706 pp.

In this dizzyingly rich novel of ideas, Mann uses a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps, a community devoted exclusively to sickness, as a microcosm for Europe, which in the years before 1914 was already exhibiting the first symptoms of its own terminal irrationality. *The Magic Mountain* is a monumental work of erudition and irony, sexual tension and intellectual ferment, a book that pulses with life in the midst of death.

Deb:

The Taster, V. S. Alexander, 2018, 323 pp.

In 1943, a young German woman is assigned to the Berghof, Hitler's mountain retreat to be one of several young women tasting the Fuhrer's food, offering herself in sacrifice to keep him from being poisoned. She gradually becomes used to her dangerous occupation. But her love for a conspirator within the SS, and her growing awareness of the Reich's atrocities, draw Magda into a plot that will test her wits and loyalty in a quest for safety, freedom, and ultimately, vengeance.

Liz:

After Hannibal, Barry Unsworth, 2012, 272 pp.

Umbria, where Hannibal invaded and slaughtered a Roman legion, is now invaded by a retired American couple seeking serenity. Instead they encounter corrupt locals, disputatious neighbors, a German haunted by his father's role in a mass killing, a gay couple facing treachery, and a cunning lawyer happy to exploit the faith that these "innocents abroad" have placed in him.