

# Book Club in a Bag Titles

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***The Alchemist*** by Paulo Coelho

The charming tale of Santiago, a shepherd boy who dreams of seeing the world, gains resonance through the many lessons he learns during his adventures from Spain to Morocco and eventually Egypt, where a fateful encounter with an alchemist brings him at last to self-understanding.

***Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*** by Barbara Kingsolver

When Kingsolver and her family move from suburban Arizona to rural Appalachia, they take on a new challenge: to spend a year on a locally produced diet, paying close attention to the provenance of all they consume.

***Atonement*** by Ian McEwan

Three children lose their innocence, as the sweltering summer heat bears down on the hottest day in 1935, and their lives are changed forever.

***Away*** by Amy Bloom

Arriving in America alone after her family is destroyed in a Russian pogrom, Lillian Leyb receives word that her daughter, Sophie, might still be alive. She embarks on a risky odyssey that takes her from New York's Lower East Side to Siberia to find the missing girl.

***Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*** by Amy Chua

Chua's memoir describes how she raised her two daughters according to traditional Chinese methods and values, in contrast to what she views as the overly permissive and less effective Western style of parenting. Critics of the book have found themselves in the uncomfortable position of questioning her authoritarian

and borderline abusive parenting style while simultaneously admiring the unquestionable academic successes of her daughters.

***The Beekeeper's Apprentice*** by Laurie King

When Mary Russell meets famous detective Sherlock Holmes, she discovers that he is also a beekeeper. Soon she finds herself on the trail of kidnappers and discovers a plot to kill both her and Holmes.

***The Bluest Eye*** by Toni Morrison

Eleven-year-old Pecola Breedlove, an African-American girl in an America whose love for blond, blue-eyed children can devastate all others, prays for her eyes to turn blue, so that she will be beautiful, people will notice her, and her world will be different.

***The Book Thief*** by Markus Zusak

Trying to make sense of the horrors of World War II, Death relates the story of Liesel, a young German girl whose book-stealing and story-telling talents help sustain her family and the Jewish man they are hiding, as well as their neighbors.

***The Cookbook Collector*** by Allegra Goodman

This novel, following the story of 2 sisters and their romantic lives, weaves together the worlds of Silicon Valley and rare book collecting in a delicious novel about appetite, temptation, and fulfillment.

***Cutting for Stone*** by Abraham Verghese

Marion and Shiva Stone are twin brothers born of a secret union between a beautiful Indian nun and a brash

British surgeon at a mission hospital in Addis Ababa. Orphaned by their mother's death in childbirth and their father's disappearance, the twins come of age as Ethiopia hovers on the brink of revolution. Yet it will be love, not politics that will tear them apart and force Marion to flee his homeland. When the past catches up to him, he must entrust his life to the two men he thought he trusted least in the world: the surgeon father who abandoned him and the brother who betrayed him.

***The Daughter of Time*** by Josephine Tey

A hospitalized twentieth century policeman sees a picture of Richard III and reinvestigates the murder of the two Princes in the Tower using all available information about Richard's time.

***The Devil in the White City*** by Erik Larson

Larson unearths the lost history of the 1893 World's Fair and of a madman who grimly parodied the fair's achievements. While the fair ushered in a new epoch in American history, Holmes marked the emergence of the serial killer, who thrived on the forces transforming the country.

***The Double Bind*** by Chris Bohjalian

While working at a homeless shelter, Laurel Estabrook encounters Bobby Crocker, a man with a history of mental illness and a box of secret photos. When Bobby dies suddenly, Laurel embarks on an obsessive search for the truth behind the photos.

***Eat, Pray, Love*** by Elizabeth Gilbert

A happily married woman who is trying to get pregnant realizes that her life needs to go in a new direction. After a painful divorce, she risks everything and embarks on a journey around the world that becomes a quest for self-discovery.

***Faith*** by Jennifer Haigh

Set in 2002 amid the sexual abuse crisis that has rocked the Catholic Church, and particularly the Boston archdiocese, Haigh's novel reaches far beneath the headlines to imagine the impact of allegations on one priest's family. Arthur Breen became a priest when such a career path was considered a logical, honorable choice for an intelligent young Catholic man.

***First Mothers: The Women Who Shaped the Presidents*** by Bonnie Angelo

Eleven biographical portraits reveal how the 20<sup>th</sup> Century presidents' beliefs and leadership styles were shaped by their relationships with their mothers.

***The Flower Master*** by Sujata Massey

A young woman working as an antiques dealer in Japan goes to school to train in the ancient art of ikebana (flower arranging), and becomes inadvertently caught up in solving a bizarre murder.

***Freedom*** by Jonathon Franzen

The idyllic lives of civic-minded environmentalists Patty and Walter Berglund come into question when their son moves in with aggressive Republican neighbors, green lawyer Walter takes a job in the coal industry, and go-

getter Patty becomes increasingly unstable and enraged. A story of flaws, and surprisingly, hope.

***The Glass Castle*** by Jeannette Walls

This memoir recounts the author's upbringing by destitute, dysfunctional parents and the resourceful means by which she and her siblings survived.

***The Great Gatsby*** by F. Scott Fitzgerald

In this commentary on the shallowness of 1920s America, Jay Gatsby is a self-made Long Island millionaire on a quest to reunite with a long-lost love, with tragic results.

***The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*** by

Mary Ann Shaffer & Annie Barrows

Set in 1946, the novel portrays the Nazi occupation of the island of Guernsey through letters written by its inhabitants.

***Handle With Care*** by Jodi Picoult

A child born with brittle bone disease and her family struggle to come to terms with the effects of her illness on all of their lives.

***The Help*** by Kathryn Stockett

An idealistic young woman collects stories from black housekeepers about their experiences working for white families in Mississippi at the dawn of the Civil Rights era.

***Her Husband: Hughes and Plath, a Marriage*** by Diane

Middlebrook

Examining the marriage of writers Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath, this book offers almost voyeuristic details gleaned from letters, diaries, interviews, and past biographies in a

scholarly commitment to infuse the reading of Hughes and Plath's marriage with a reading of their poetry and prose.

***The History of Love*** by Nicole Krauss

The manuscript for a novel travels from Nazi-era Poland to present-day New York and we learn about the lives of the people intertwined with it.

***The Hundred Secret Senses*** by Amy Tan

Two Chinese-American half sisters meet for the first time after their father's death and forge a relationship despite their vastly different worldviews.

***The Hunger Games*** by Suzanne Collins

In a postapocalyptic world where a replacement for the United States demands a tribute from each of its territories, two children are to be used as gladiators in a televised fight to the death.

***I Capture the Castle*** by Dodie Smith

Set in 1930s England, an aspiring young writer lives with her family in an isolated castle, until a wealthy family moves into a nearby estate, bringing excitement into their lives.

***In Defense of Food*** by Michael Pollan

Examining the question of what to eat from the perspective of health, this powerfully argued, thoroughly researched and elegant manifesto cuts straight to the chase with a maxim that is deceptively simple: Eat food, not too much, mostly plants.

***The Inheritance of Loss*** by Kiran Dessai

In this alternately comical and contemplative novel set in mid-1980s India, Desai deftly shuttles between first and third worlds, illuminating the pain of exile, the ambiguities of post-colonialism and the blinding desire for a "better life," when one person's wealth means another's poverty.

***The Irresistible Henry House*** by Lisa Grunwald

From his earliest days as a "practice baby" through his adult adventures in 1960s New York City, Disney's Burbank studios, and the delirious world of the Beatles' London, Henry remains handsome, charming, universally adored—and never entirely accessible to the women he conquers. *The Irresistible Henry House* portrays the cultural tumult of the mid-twentieth century as it explores the inner tumult of a young man trying to transcend a damaged childhood.

***Kabul Beauty School*** by Deborah Rodriguez

Rodriguez, a hairdresser from Michigan, joined an aid organization on a mission to the war-torn nation of Afghanistan. In *Kabul*, she chronicles her efforts to help establish the country's first modern beauty school and training salon while offering us a glimpse into life behind the veil.

***The Knitting Circle*** by Ann Hood

Mary Baxter, living in Hood's own Providence, R.I., loses her five-year-old daughter to meningitis. Mary joins a knitting circle and discovers that knitting soothes without distracting. The structure of the story quickly becomes obvious: each knitter has a tragedy that she'll reveal to Mary.

***The Language of Flowers*** by Vanessa Diffenbaugh

Eighteen and emancipated from the foster care system, Victoria has nowhere to go and sleeps in a public park, where she plants a small garden of her own. Soon a local florist discovers her talents, and Victoria realizes she has a gift for helping others through the flowers she chooses for them. But a mysterious vendor at the flower market has her questioning what's been missing in her life, and when she's forced to confront a painful secret from her past, she must decide whether it's worth risking everything for a second chance at happiness.

***Lark and Termite*** by Jayne Ann Phillips

This poetic novel alternates between the last hours of Robert Leavitt, a corporal in the U.S. Army pinned down in a tunnel in South Korea in 1950, and the story of his disabled son, Termite, who, nine years later, is living with his half sister, Lark, and their aunt in West Virginia.

***Little Heathens*** by Mildred Armstrong Kalish

Kalish's memoir of her Iowa childhood, set against the backdrop of the Depression, captures a vanished way of traditional living and a specific moment in American history.

***Look Me in the Eye*** by John Elder Robison

Robison gives a thoughtful and thoroughly memorable account of growing up with Asperger's syndrome in a time when it was an unknown disorder.

***The Lost Painting*** by Jonathan Harr

A clue—a single entry in an old listing of family possessions uncovered by a young art student—leads to a residence

in Ireland and the subsequent restoration of an Italian Baroque masterpiece.

**Loving Frank** by Nancy Horan

Horan's ambitious first novel is a fictionalization of the life of Mamah Borthwick Cheney, best known as the woman who wrecked Frank Lloyd Wright's first marriage.

**March** by Geraldine Brooks

Brooks's luminous second novel, after 2001's acclaimed *Year of Wonders*, imagines the Civil War experiences of Mr. March, the absent father in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*.

**Mayflower** by Nathaniel Philbrick

*Mayflower* rethinks the events and players that gave rise to a national mythology about Pilgrims living harmoniously with their Indian neighbors.

**The Memory Keeper's Daughter** by Kim Edwards

In 1964, a woman gives birth to twins: a healthy boy and a girl with Down Syndrome. Her husband's decision to give the daughter up for adoption will plague the family for years and erode the family's core.

**Mennonite in a Little Black Dress** by Rhoda Janzen

In this memoir, the author describes the implosion of her adult life and her subsequent decision to move back in with her Mennonite parents.

**Middlesex** by Jeffrey Eugenides

Cal/Calliope is a hermaphrodite born in 1960 near Detroit, MI. The narrative spans 80 years of family history and explores the nature of gender.

**The Namesake** by Jhumpa Lahiri

A second-generation immigrant, Gogol struggles to find his place in both American and Indian cultures.

**Neverland: The Dark Side of J.M. Barrie, the Du Mauriers, and the Dark Side of Peter Pan** by Piers Dudgeon

This biography of J.M. Barrie explores an unknown side of the author and the creation of his most famous character, Peter Pan.

**No Ordinary Time** by Doris Kearns Goodwin

A compelling chronicle of a nation and its leaders during the period when modern America was created. With an uncanny feel for detail and a novelist's grasp of drama and depth, Doris Kearns Goodwin brilliantly narrates the interrelationship between the inner workings of the Roosevelt White House and the destiny of the United States. Goodwin paints a comprehensive, intimate portrait that fills in a historical gap in the story of our nation under the Roosevelts.

**Outliers: the Story of Success** by Malcolm Gladwell

*Outliers* aims to answer why some people lead successful and productive lives while others seem unable to meet their full potential.

**Peace Like a River** by Leif Enger

After being arrested for shooting two school bullies in self-defense, Davy breaks out of jail and is on the lam. While trying to find him in rural Minnesota, his family endures a journey that questions their faith and the nature of God.

**Persepolis** by Marjane Satrapi

This graphic novel tells the story of the author's childhood and coming of age in Iran during the Islamic Revolution in the late 1970s.

**Plain Truth** by Jodi Picoult

Centering around the trial of an Amish teen for the murder of her newborn child, the contrast between the Amish and "English" cultures creates a tension by which to explore our ideas of faith, duty, and honesty.

**The Reading Promise** by Alice Ozma

Alice tells the story of how her father read to her for ten minutes each night from her 4<sup>th</sup> grade year until she left for college. In this delightful memoir, she reveals their unbreakable bond, the books they treasured and the life lessons learned along the way.

**Room** by Emma Donoghue

Five-year-old Jack has lived his entire life in an 11x11 room in which he and his mother are held captive by a man he refers to as Old Nick. For Jack, life revolves around daydreaming and entertaining himself with what he can fashion into makeshift toys. For Ma, life revolves around memories of life outside the room and thoughts of how she and Jack can get out alive.

**Sarah's Key** by Tatiana de Rosnay

In 2002, a journalist is working on a story about the Vel' d'Hiv, a velodrome in which French Jews were held captive by French authorities before being sent to concentration camps. Her research uncovers disturbing family secrets that lead her to the story of Sarah, a 10-

year-old who was taken, along with her family, in the largest detainment of Jews on French soil.

**Saving CeeCee Honeycutt** by Beth Hoffman

When 12 year-old CeeCee's mother is killed in an accident, she is sent to live with her long lost great aunt. This Southern novel sparkles with humor, heart, and feminine wisdom while exploring the indomitable strengths of female friendship and gives us the story of a young girl who loses one mother and finds many others.

**Sense and Sensibility** by Jane Austen

Two sisters, one practical and conventional and the other emotional and sentimental, find that only through compromise of their mutual differences can they get along.

**Shutter Island** by Dennis Lehane

U.S. Marshal Teddy Daniels and his partner, Chuck Aule, come to Shutter Island's Ashcliffe Hospital in search of an escaped mental patient, but uncover true wickedness as Ashcliffe's mysterious patient treatments propel them to the brink of insanity.

**Snow Flower and the Secret Fan** by Lisa See

A story of friendship set in nineteenth-century China follows an elderly woman and her companion as they communicate their hopes, dreams, joys, and tragedies through a unique secret language.

**The Soloist** by Steve Lopez

This is the story of *L.A. Times* columnist Steve Lopez and his chance meeting with Nathaniel Ayers, a schizophrenic homeless man who was playing violin on the street one

day. Compelled by the beauty of Ayers' playing, Lopez is moved to help and comes to understand the complex face of homelessness.

***The Space Between Us*** by Thrity Umrigar

Captures the delicate balance of class and gender in contemporary India as witnessed through the lives of two women--Sera Dubash, an upper middle-class housewife, and Bhima, an illiterate domestic hardened by a life of loss and despair.

***Tender at the Bone*** by Ruth Reichl

*New York Times* restaurant critic Ruth Reichl writes this memoir with humor, care, and intimacy. She incorporates the voices of the chefs, waiters, and gourmands who taught her to love food and its preparation. We listen as her halting French becomes fluent, as she shares weekend forays for forbidden smoked meat and cream puffs (the cure for all homesickness) and as her encounter with a friend's father introduces her to a new level of joy in food.

***Testimony*** by Anita Shreve

A New England boarding school is rocked in the wake of a sex scandal in which participants were caught on videotape, a situation that derails the innocence and best intentions of students, parents, and others in life-shattering ways.

***Thinking in Pictures*** by Temple Grandin

An accomplished animal scientist, Grandin writes about how she experiences the world with autism.

***Three Cups of Tea*** by Greg Mortenson

An inspirational story of one man's efforts to address poverty, educate girls, and overcome cultural divides in central Asia.

***Time Traveler's Wife*** by Audrey Niffenegger

This clever and inventive tale works on three levels: as an intriguing science fiction concept, a realistic character study and a touching love story. Henry De Tamble is a Chicago librarian with "Chrono Displacement" disorder; at random times, he suddenly disappears without warning and finds himself in the past or future, dropping in or out of his (future/current) wife's life.

***A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*** by Betty Smith

Encouraged by her idealistic, if luckless, father, a bright and imaginative young woman comes of age in a Brooklyn tenement during the early 1900s.

***Uncommon Arrangements: Seven Marriages*** by Katie Roiphe

In this astute and engrossing examination of seven artsy marriages from 20th-century England, Roiphe couples her penchant for social criticism with her training in English literature. The themes focused on remain relevant to 21st-century marriages: is domesticity compatible with long-term emotional engagement, or are marriages destined to become boring?

***Waiting for Snow in Havana*** by Carlos Eire

A touching memoir about Eire's experience as a child during Operation Pedro Pan, the airlift that separated

14,000 Cuban children from their families after the Cuban Revolution.

***Water for Elephants*** by Sara Gruen

During the Great Depression, a veterinary student abandons his studies after his parents are killed and joins a traveling circus as their vet. He cares for a menagerie of exotic creatures and falls in love with the wife of his sadistic boss.

***What is the What*** by Dave Eggers

Based closely on actual experiences, a young boy is separated from his family and becomes a refugee in war-ravaged southern Sudan. His travels bring him in contact with enemy soldiers, liberation rebels, hyenas and lions, disease and starvation, and with deadly murahaleen (militias on horseback).

***While My Sister Sleeps*** by Barbara Delinsky

Two sisters are in the prime of their lives, when Robin suffers a massive heart attack and may never regain consciousness. As the family struggles to cope with the shocking news, it's up to Molly to make the tough decisions, and she soon makes discoveries that threaten to shatter everything she thought she knew about her sister.

***Wicked*** by Gregory Maguire

When Dorothy triumphed over the Wicked Witch of the West in L. Frank Baum's classic tale, we heard her side of the story. But what about her arch-nemesis, the mysterious Witch? Where did she come from? How did she become so wicked? And what is the true nature of evil?

***The Winter's Tale*** by William Shakespeare

A romantic comedy with elements of tragedy. Leontes, the king of Sicilia, jealously believes that his faithful wife Hermione has committed adultery with his old friend Polixenes, the king of Bohemia. After various mishaps, all three are ultimately reconciled after the wedding of Florizel (son of Polixenes) and Perdita (daughter of Leontes and Hermione).

***The Year of Magical Thinking*** by Joan Didion

Just after they return from the hospital where their only child is lying in a coma, Didion's husband dies of a heart attack. This memoir is Didion's effort to make sense of a time when nothing made sense.

***Year of Wonders*** by Geraldine Brooks

Based on an actual event, Brooks tells a fascinating tale of a village in rural 17th century England that experiences a sudden outbreak of plague. The citizens quarantine themselves to avoid spreading the disease to neighboring villages and give themselves up to God's mercy.

***Yiddish Policemen's Union*** by Michael Chabon

Meyer Landsman is a drunken rogue cop who wakes in a flophouse to find that one of his neighbors has been murdered. With his half-Tlingit, half-Jewish partner and his sexy-tough boss, who also happens to be his ex-wife, Landsman investigates a fascinating underworld of Orthodox black-hat gangs and crime-lord rabbis.

***Zookeeper's Wife*** by Diane Ackerman

This book tells the remarkable WWII story of Jan Zabinski, the director of the Warsaw Zoo, and his wife, Antonina,

who, with courage and ingenuity, sheltered 300 Jews as well as Polish resisters in their villa and in animal cages and sheds.