**Book Discussion Reading List 2025**

**January—The Last Lifeboat, by Hazel Gaynor**

 1940, Kent: Alice King is not brave or daring—she’s happiest finding adventure through the safe pages of books. But times of war demand courage, and as the threat of German invasion looms, a plane crash near her home awakens a strength in Alice she’d long forgotten. Determined to do her part, she finds a role ideally suited to her experience as a schoolteacher—to help evacuate Britain’s children overseas.

 1940, London: Lily Nichols once dreamed of using her mathematical talents for more than tabulating the cost of groceries, but life and love charted her a different course. With two lively children and a loving husband, Lily’s humble home is her world until war tears everything asunder. With her husband gone and bombs raining down, Lily is faced with an impossible choice: keep her son and daughter close, knowing she may not be able to protect them or enroll them in a risky evacuation scheme, where safety awaits so very far away.

 When a Nazi U-boat torpedoes the S. S. Carlisle carrying a ship of children to Canada, a single lifeboat is left adrift in the storm-tossed Atlantic. Alice and Lily, strangers to each other—one on land, the other at sea—will quickly become one another’s best hope as their lives are fatefully entwined.

**February—Lone Women, by Victor LaValle**

 Adelaide Henry carries an enormous steamer trunk with her wherever she goes. It’s locked at all times. Because when the trunk opens, people around Adelaide start to disappear.

 The year is 1915, and Adelaide is in trouble. Her secret sin killed her parents, forcing her to flee California in a hellfire rush and make her way to Montana as a homesteader. Dragging the trunk with her at every stop, she will become one of the “lone women” taking advantage of the government’s offer of free land for those who can tame it—except Adelaide isn’t alone. And the secret she’s tried so desperately to lock away might be the only thing that will help her survive the harsh territory.

 Crafted by a modern master of magical suspense, Lone Women blends shimmering prose, an unforgettable cast of adventurers who find horror and sisterhood in a brutal landscape, and a portrait of early-twentieth-century America like you’ve never seen. At its heart is the gripping story of a woman desperate to bury her past—or redeem it.

**March—All the Little Hopes, by Leah Weiss**

 Deep in the tobacco land of North Carolina, nothing's been the same since the boys shipped off to war, and worry took their place. Thirteen-year-old Lucy Brown is precocious and itching for adventure. Then Allie Bert Tucker wanders into town, an outcast with a puzzling past, and Lucy figures the two of them can solve any curious crime they find―just like her hero, Nancy Drew.

 Their chance comes when a man goes missing, a woman stops speaking, and an eccentric gives the girls a mystery to solve that takes them beyond the ordinary. Their quiet town, seasoned with honeybees and sweet tea, becomes home to a Nazi prisoner-of-war camp. More men go missing. And together, the girls embark on a journey to discover if we ever really know who the enemy is.

 Lush with Southern atmosphere, All The Little Hopes is the story of two girls growing up as war creeps closer, blurring the difference between right and wrong and what we know to be true.

**April—The Trees, by Percival Everett**

 Percival Everett’s The Trees is a page-turner that opens with a series of brutal murders in the rural town of Money, Mississippi. When a pair of detectives from the Mississippi Bureau of Investigation arrive, they meet expected resistance from the local sheriff, his deputy, the coroner, and a string of racist White townsfolk. The murders present a puzzle, for at each crime scene, there is a second dead body: that of a man who resembles Emmett Till.

 The detectives suspect that these are killings of retribution but soon discover that eerily similar murders are taking place all over the country. Something truly strange is afoot. As the bodies pile up, the MBI detectives seek answers from a local root doctor who has been documenting every lynching in the country for years, uncovering a history that refuses to be buried. In this bold, provocative book, Everett takes direct aim at racism and police violence in a fast-paced style that ensures the reader can’t look away. The Trees is an enormously powerful novel of lasting importance from an author with his finger on America’s pulse.

**May—Dancing with the Octopus: A Memoir of a Crime, by Deborah Harding**

 One Omaha winter day in November 1978, when Debora Harding was just fourteen, she was abducted at knifepoint from a church parking lot. She was thrown into a van, assaulted, held for ransom, and then left to die as an ice storm descended over the city.

 Debora survived. She identified her attacker to the police and then returned to her teenage life in a dysfunctional home where she was expected to simply move on. Denial became the family coping strategy offered by her fun-loving, conflicted father and her cruelly resentful mother.

 It wasn't until decades later - when beset by the symptoms of PTSD- that Debora undertook a radical project: she met her childhood attacker face-to-face in prison and began to reconsider and reimagine his complex story. This was a quest for the truth that would threaten the lie at the heart of her family and with it the sacred bond that once saved her.

 Dexterously shifting between the past and present, Debora Harding untangles the incident of her kidnapping and escape from unexpected angles, offering a vivid, intimate portrait of one family's disintegration in the 1970s Midwest.

Written with dark humor and the pacing of a thriller, Dancing with the Octopus is a literary tour de force and a groundbreaking narrative of reckoning, recovery, and the inexhaustible strength it takes to survive.

**June—My Three Dogs, by W. Bruce Cameron**

 When a tragic accident separates three dogs from their human, they find themselves up for adoption -- separately. But Riggs, a dedicated, loyal Australian Shepherd, refuses to see his family torn apart. After the exuberant and fun-loving doodle, Archie and quick-witted Jack Russell Luna are taken to new homes, and Riggs' powerful herding instincts send him on a journey to bring his pack back together again.

**July—Bewilderment, by Richard Powers**

 The astrobiologist Theo Byrne searches for life throughout the cosmos while single-handedly raising his unusual nine-year-old, Robin, following the death of his wife. Robin is a warm, kind boy who spends hours painting elaborate pictures of endangered animals. He’s also about to be expelled from third grade for smashing his friend in the face. As his son grows more troubled, Theo hopes to keep him off psychoactive drugs. He learns of an experimental neurofeedback treatment to bolster Robin’s emotional control, one that involves training the boy on the recorded patterns of his mother’s brain…

 With its soaring descriptions of the natural world, its compelling vision of life beyond, and its account of a father and son’s ferocious love, Bewilderment marks Richard Powers’s most intimate and moving novel. At its heart lies the question: How can we tell our children the truth about this beautiful, imperiled planet?

**August—The Book Woman’s Daughter, by Kim Michele Richardson**

 In the ruggedness of the beautiful Kentucky mountains, Honey Lovett has always known that the old ways can make a hard life harder. As the daughter of the famed, blue-skinned Troublesome Creek packhorse librarian, Honey, and her family have been hiding from the law all her life. But when her mother and father are imprisoned, Honey realizes she must fight to stay free or risk being sent away for good.

 Picking up her mother’s old packhorse library route, Honey begins to deliver books to the remote hollers of Appalachia. Honey is looking to prove that she doesn’t need anyone telling her how to survive. But the route can be treacherous, and some folks aren’t keen to let a woman pave her way.

 If Honey wants to bring the freedom books provide to the families who need it most, she’s going to have to fight for her place and, along the way, learn that the extraordinary women who run the hills and hollers can make all the difference in the world.

**September—Dust Child, by Nguyen Phan Que Mai**

 In 1969, sisters Trang and Quỳnh, desperate to help their parents pay off debts, leave their rural village to work in a bar in Sài Gòn. Once in the big city, the young girls learn how to drink and flirt (and more) with American GIs in return for money.

 Decades later, an American veteran, Dan, returns to Việt Nam with his wife, Linda, hoping to find a way to heal from his PTSD; instead, secrets he thought he had buried surface and threaten his marriage. At the same time, Phong—the son of a Black American soldier and a Vietnamese woman—embarks on a search to find both his parents and a way out of Việt Nam to a better life in the United States for himself, his wife Bình, and his children.

 Past and present converge as these characters come together to confront decisions made during a war—decisions that reverberate throughout one another's lives and ultimately allow them to find common ground across race, generation, culture, and language. Immersive, moving, and lyrical, Dust Child tells an unforgettable story of how those who inherited tragedy can redefine their destinies with hard-earned wisdom, compassion, courage, and joy.

**October—Frankenstein by Mary Shelly**

 Consumed by the desire to discover the secret of life, Victor Frankenstein, a man with unremitting curiosity and hunger for knowledge, infuses a spark of life into the inanimate body created from stolen body parts. But as the dull yellow eyes of the creature open, Victor is chilled to the marrow. Appalled by his work, he runs away.

 What happens as his creation, the monster, becomes a murderer, seeking out his creator, demanding companionship? Will Victor Frankenstein create another monster?

**November—A Patchwork Planet by Anne Tyler**

 Barnaby Gaitlin has been in trouble ever since adolescence. He had this habit of breaking into other people's houses. It wasn't the big loot he was after, like his teenage cohorts. It was just that he liked to read other people's mail, pore over their family photo albums, and appropriate a few of their precious mementos.

 But for eleven years, he's been working steadily for Rent-a-Back, renting his back to old folks and shut-ins who can't move their porch furniture or bring the Christmas tree down from the attic. At last, his life seems to be on an even keel.

 Still, the Gaitlins (of "old" Baltimore) cannot forget the price they paid for buying off Barnaby's former victims. His ex-wife would just as soon as he didn't show up to visit their little girl, Opal. Even the nice, steady woman (his guardian angel?) who seems to have designs on him doesn't fully trust him, it develops, when the chips are down, and it looks as though his world may fall apart again.

 There is no one like Anne Tyler, with her sharp, funny, tender perceptions about how human beings navigate on a puzzling planet. She keeps us enthralled from start to finish in this delicious new novel.

**December—Pandora’s Clock, by John J. Nance**

 On a snowy road in a German forest, Ernest Helms sees a man trying to break into his car. After a scuffle, Helms escapes with only a cut on his hand. Hours later, he collapses aboard a flight from Frankfurt to New York. The pilot, Capt. James Holland, radios London to plan an emergency landing to save Helms—and then the nightmare begins.

 Heathrow denies Holland permission to land: Helms has been stricken with an ultra-contagious pathogen that threatens the entire planet. When Germany also refuses to let him land, Holland and his passengers are prisoners of the sky, caught between a deadly disease and a world that would rather shoot them down than risk contamination.

 Written by a former aviator known as the master of mile-high suspense, this is a pulse-pounding thriller about infectious disease in the tradition of Outbreak and The Andromeda Strain. Threatened by hostile governments on the ground and disease in the sky, Captain Holland is in for the flight of his life.