

Book Group Titles 2024

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Book Group Synopses 2024

Adebayo, Ayobami – A Spell of Good Things

A dazzling story of modern Nigeria and two families caught in the riptides of wealth, power, romantic obsession and political corruption.

Eniola is tall for his age, a boy who looks like a man. His father has lost his job, so Eniola spends his days running errands for the local tailor and begging, dreaming of a big future.

Wuraola is a golden girl, the perfect child of a wealthy family. Now an exhausted young doctor in her first year of practice, she is beloved by Kunle, the volatile son of family friends.

When a local politician takes an interest in Eniola and sudden violence shatters a family party, Wuraola and Eniola's lives become unexpectedly intertwined. In this breathtaking novel, Ayobami Adebayo shines her light on Nigeria, the gaping divides in its society, and the shared humanity that lives in between.

Allende, Isabel – The Wind Knows My Name

No, we're not lost.

The wind knows my name.

And yours too.

Vienna, 1938. Samuel Adler is five years old when his father disappears during Kristallnacht - the night their family loses everything. As her child's safety seems ever harder to guarantee, Samuel's mother secures a spot for him on the last Kindertransport train out of Nazi-occupied Austria to England. He boards alone, carrying nothing but a change of clothes and his violin.

Arizona, 2019. Eight decades later, Anita Diaz and her mother board another train, fleeing looming danger in El Salvador and seeking refuge in the United States. But their arrival coincides with the new family separation policy, and seven-year-old Anita finds herself alone at a camp in Nogales. She escapes her tenuous reality through her trips to Azabahr, a magical world of the imagination. Meanwhile, Selena Duran, a young social worker, enlists the help of a successful lawyer in hopes of tracking down Anita's mother.

Intertwining past and present, *The Wind Knows My Name* tells the tale of these two unforgettable characters, both in search of family and home. It is both a testament to the sacrifices that parents make, and a love letter to the children who survive the most unfathomable dangers - and never stop dreaming.

Aoyama, Michiko – What You Are Looking for is in the Library

What are you looking for?

So asks Tokyo's most enigmatic librarian, Sayuri Komachi.

But she is no ordinary librarian.

Sensing exactly what someone is searching for in life, she provides just the book recommendation to help them find it.

We meet five visitors to the library, each at a different crossroads:

- The restless retail assistant eager to pick up new skills
- The mother faced with a demotion at work after maternity leave
- The conscientious accountant who yearns to open an antique store
- The gifted young manga artist in search of motivation
- The recently retired salaryman on a quest for newfound purpose

Can she help them find what they are looking for?

Which book will you recommend?

Baker, Chandler – Cutting Teeth

A murder. Ten witnesses. But no one saw a thing...

A young teacher is found murdered in the preschool stationery cupboard and the only witnesses are ten toddlers. The problem is the children can't tell the police what happened.

But it soon comes to light that an unsettling medical condition is going around Little Academy: the kids are craving blood, and the parents have been keeping secrets from the authorities that could change everything about the case.

As the police draw closer to the truth, it soon becomes clear that the children are not just witnesses, they're suspects...and so are their mothers.

Part murder mystery, part domestic suspense, Cutting Teeth is a thought-provoking thriller that asks: what wouldn't a parent do for their child?

Brammer, Mikki – The Collected Regrets of Clover

Clover Brooks has forgotten how to live.

It might be because she spends her time caring for people in their final days, working as a death doula in New York City.

Or it might be because she has a regret of her own - one she can't bring herself to let go of.

But then she meets Claudia: a feisty old woman who has one last wish . . .

As Clover begins a new adventure, will she remember how to live her own big, beautiful life?

A big-hearted story about figuring out what you want from life - and then finding the courage to go after it. Perfect for fans of Sally Page, Ruth Hogan and Clare Pooley.

Calvey, Linda – Life Inside: the hard reality of prison and what it takes to survive

Widely known in the criminal underworld as the “Black Widow”, Linda Calvey spent the first half of her life running with the UK’s top gangsters, robbing banks, and rubbing shoulders with the Kray twins. That is, until, in 1990, her lover Ronnie Cook was murdered at point-blank, and she found herself falsely convicted. Linda was sent away for decades, and would go on to become one of Britain’s longest-serving-female prisoners. This is her story of life inside, and how she learnt to survive the many years she spent behind bars. Detailing the systems, characters and rules of prison life, as well as her encounters with notorious criminals Charles Bronson, Rose West and Myra Hindley, Linda gives a full account of her time locked up. Featuring stories of fights, dodgy dealings and what happens when a screw gets taken hostage, this is a gritty and eye-opening look at prison life from a woman who has seen it all.

Coyne, Matt – Frank and Red

Sometimes, the friend you need is the one you never saw coming. Frank and Red are a mess. Frank is a grumpy old curmudgeon. A recluse whose only company is the 'ghost' of his dead wife, Marcie. He is estranged from his friends, his son, and the ever-changing world beyond his front gate. And then Red moves in next door. Red is six. A boy struggling to adjust to the separation of his mum and dad, a new school, and the demonic school bully. Red is curious, smart, he never stops talking, and he's got a trampoline. From the moment Red's blonde mop appears over the top of the fence that divides their two gardens, the unlikelyst of friendships is born. And it is a friendship that will change both of their lives forever.

Davies, Carys – Clear

1843. On a remote Scottish island, Ivar, the sole occupant, leads a life of quiet isolation until the day he finds a man unconscious on the beach below the cliffs. The newcomer is John Ferguson, an impoverished church minister sent to evict Ivar and turn the island into grazing land for sheep. Unaware of the stranger's intentions, Ivar takes him into his home, and in spite of the two men having no common language, a fragile bond begins to form between them. Meanwhile on the mainland, John's wife Mary anxiously awaits news of his mission. Against the rugged backdrop of this faraway spot beyond Shetland, Carys Davies's intimate drama unfolds with tension and tenderness: a touching and crystalline study of ordinary people buffeted by history and a powerful exploration of the distances and connections between us.

Fletcher, C.A. – Dead Water

A water-borne blight hits a remote community on a small island on the edge of the Northern Atlantic. The islanders are a strange mix, some island-born, some seeking a slower life away from the modern world. All have their own secrets, some much darker than others. Rumour says the illness may be a water-borne neural infection from the shellfish farm, a case of mass hysteria - or even a long-buried curse - but when ferry service fails, inconvenience grows into nightmarish ordeal as the outwardly harmonious fabric of the community is unnervingly torn apart.

Heughan, Sam – Waypoints: my Scottish Journey

In this journey of self-discovery, Sam Heughan sets out along the West Highland Way to explore his heritage and reflect on the personal waypoints that define him. The result is a love letter to the wild Scottish landscape that means so much to Sam, and a charming, funny, wise and searching insight to the world through his eyes. The walk itself is the backdrop for this narrative, which tells the story of Sam's life while exploring his outlook, values and interests. Sam is a figure of fascinating contrasts, a Hollywood star with deep roots in rural Scotland, he's both outgoing and content in his own company.

Kashiwai, Hisashi – The Kamogawa Food Detectives

Down a quiet backstreet in Kyoto exists a very special restaurant called the Kamogawa Diner. Customers who can find the hidden establishment are treated to an extravagant meal, but it's not the main reason for visiting...The father-daughter duo who own the restaurant have started advertising their services as "Food Detectives" capable of recreating a dish from their customers' pasts that may well hold the key to unlocking forgotten memories and ongoing happiness.

Kempton, Beth – Kokoro: Japanese wisdom for a life well-lived

One year. Two devastating losses. Three sacred Japanese mountains. A major life transition, a heart full of grief and a revelation that changes everything. Join Japanologist Beth Kempton on a pilgrimage through rural Japan in search of answers to some of life's biggest questions: How do we find calm in the chaos and beauty in the darkness? How do we let go of the past and stop worrying about the future? What can an awareness of impermanence teach us about living well? Together you will journey to the deep north of Japan, hike ancient forest, watch the moon rise over mountains of myth and encounter a host of wise teachers along the way – Noh actors, chefs, taxi drivers, coffee shop owners, poets, philosophers and the spirits that inhabit the land. Kokoro is an invitation to cultivate stillness and contentment in an ever-changing, uncertain world. To explore the kokoro is to

explore the very essence of what it means to be human in this tough yet devastatingly beautiful world. When you learn to live guided by the light in your kokoro, everything changes, and anything is possible.

McDermid, Val – Queen Macbeth

Shakespeare fed us the myth of the Macbeths as murderous conspirators. But now Val McDermid drags the truth out of the shadows, exposing the patriarchal prejudices of history. Expect the unexpected. A thousand years ago in an ancient Scottish landscape, a woman is on the run with her three companions - a healer, a weaver and a seer. The men hunting her will kill her - because she is the only one who stands between them and their violent ambition. She is no lady: she is the first queen of Scotland, married to a king called Macbeth. As the net closes in, we discover a tale of passion, forced marriage, bloody massacre and the harsh realities of medieval Scotland.

Moreno-Garcia, Silvia – Untamed Shore

Baja California, 1979: Viridiana spends her days under the harsh sun, watching the fishermen pulling in their nets and the dead sharks piled beside the seashore. Her head is filled with dreams of romance, travel and of a future beyond this drab town where her only option is to marry and have children.

When a wealthy American writer arrives with his wife and brother-in-law, Viridiana jumps at the offer of a job as his assistant, and she's soon entangled in the glamorous foreigners' lives. They offer excitement, and perhaps an escape from her humdrum life. When one of them dies, eager to protect her new friends, Viridiana lies - but soon enough, someone's asking questions. It's not long before Viridiana has some of her own questions about the identities of her new acquaintances.

Sharks may be dangerous, but there are worse predators nearby, ready to devour a naïve young woman unwittingly entangled in a web of deceit.

Moyes, Jojo – Someone Else's Shoes

Two women living very different lives.

But when their paths cross, causing each a world of trouble - and finding some missing shoes is the only way to solve it - they're left with a choice every woman must face: to walk alone, or stand together . . .

Murray, Paul – The Bee Sting

The Barnes family are in trouble.

Until recently they ran the biggest business in town, now they're teetering on the brink of bankruptcy – and that's just the start of their problems. Dickie and Imelda's marriage is hanging by a thread; straight-A student Cass is careening off the rails; PJ is hopelessly in debt to the school bully.

Meanwhile the ghosts of old mistakes are rising out of the past to meet them, but everyone's too wrapped up in the present to see the danger looming . . .

Napolitano, Ann – Hello Beautiful

Best friends and sisters, the four Padavano girls bring loving chaos to their close-knit Italian American neighbourhood. William Waters grew up in a house silenced by tragedy, where his parents could hardly bear to look at him, much less love him. So, when he meets the spirited and ambitious Julia Padavano, it's as if the world has lit up around him.

With Julia comes her family: Sylvie, the family's dreamer, is happiest with her nose in a book; Cecelia is a free-spirited artist; and Emeline patiently takes care of them all. But when darkness from William's past begins to block the light of his future, it is Sylvie, not Julia, who becomes his closest confidante. The result is a catastrophic rift that leaves the family inhabiting two sides of a fault line.

Can they find their way back to each other? Can love make a broken family whole?

O'Donnell, Leanne – Sparks of Bright Matter

When ambitious apprentice chemist and secret alchemist Peter Woulfe is tasked with caring for a mysterious illustrated book, the Mutus Liber, he quickly realises that the grimy underworld of Georgian London is even more dangerous than he first believed. Soon the book is stolen by the light-fingered Sukie and Peter finds himself being pursued by threatening men who are willing to do anything to get the book back. Where in teeming London might Sukie be found? Why is Peter so enthralled by her? And what is it about the Mutus Liber that is so enticing? As the search for the book becomes an urgent game of cat and mouse, it seems that the key to Peter's present dilemma might only be found in half-remembered events from his childhood, and then further back still, in the mists of Irish myth. A spell-binding and unputdownable tale about spirit and matter, love and lust, and reality and magic.

O'Sullivan, Katriona – Poor

Like young girls everywhere Katriona O'Sullivan grew up bright, enthusiastic, curious. But she was also surrounded by abject poverty and chaos, and after she became pregnant and homeless at 15, what followed was five years of barely surviving. Yet today Katriona is an award-winning academic whose work explores barriers to education for girls like her.

What set Katriona on this unexpected path were the mentors and supporters who truly saw her. The teachers who showed her how to wash in the school toilets or turned up at her door to convince her to sit at least one GCSE. The community worker who encouraged her to apply for training schemes. The friend who introduced Katriona to Trinity College's access program while she was a cleaner. Simple acts that would help her turn her life around.

Told with warmth, clarity and compassion – compassion for her parents, for her younger self, for others – Poor is both an astonishing personal testimony and an impassioned plea for the future of our children.

O'Regan, Noel – Though the Bodies Fall

Micheál Burns lives alone in his family's bungalow at the end of Kerry Head in Ireland. It is a picturesque place, but the cliffs have a darker side to them: for generations they have been a suicide black spot. Micheál's mother saw the saving of these lost souls - these visitors - as her spiritual duty, and now, in the wreckage of his life, Micheál finds himself continuing her work. When his sisters tell him that they want to sell the land, he must choose between his siblings and the visitors, a future or a past.

Perrin, Kristen – How to Solve Your Own Murder:

In 1965, 17-year-old Frances Adams was told by a fortune teller that one day she'd be murdered. Frances spent the next 60 years trying to prevent the crime that would be her eventual demise. No one took her seriously - until she was dead. For Frances, being the village busybody was a form of insurance. She'd spent a lifetime compiling dirt on every person she met, just in case they might turn out to be her killer. In the heart of her sprawling country estate lies an eccentric library of detective work, where the right person could step in and use her findings to solve her murder. When her great-niece Annie arrives from London and discovers that Frances' worst fear has come true, Annie is thrust into her great-aunt's last act of revenge against her sceptical friends and family. Can she unravel the mystery and find justice for Frances, or will digging up the past lead her into the path of the killer?

Pook, Lizzie – Moonlight and the Pearler's Daughter

As the pearling ships return to Bannin Bay after a long diving season, twenty-year-old Eliza Brightwell nervously awaits the arrival of her father's boat. But when his lugger finally limps in, it brings with it a tale of tragedy: Charles Brightwell master pearler, has gone missing at sea. Immediately, whispers from the townsfolk point to mutiny or murder, but headstrong Eliza knows her father, she is sure he is still alive. As the Bay swelters under the heat of the approaching wet season, it falls to Eliza to seek out the truth behind her eccentric father's disappearance. But as she delves beneath the glamorous veneer of South Sea pearling, she discovers that the sun-baked streets she thought she knew so well are teeming with

corruption, prejudice and blackmail. How far is she willing to go to solve the mystery and save the ones she loves? And what family secrets will come to haunt her along the way? Because the truth may cost more than pearls.

Rubin, Gareth – The Turn Glass

1880s England. On the bleak island of Ray, off the Essex coast, an idealistic young doctor, Simeon Lee, is called from London to treat his cousin, Parson Oliver Hawes, who is dying. Parson Hawes, who lives in the only house on the island – Turn glass House - believes he is being poisoned. And he points the finger at his sister-in-law, Florence. Florence was declared insane after killing Oliver's brother in a jealous rage and is now kept in a glass-walled apartment in Oliver's library. An the secret to how she came to be there is found in Oliver's tete-beche journal, where one side tells a very different story from the other.

Smith, Ken – The way of the Hermit: my 40 years in the Scottish Wilderness

Could you leave behind the bustle of modern society and spend your days immersed in nature? In The Way of the Hermit, seventy-four-year-old Ken Smith recounts a life he has chosen to spend alone with the wilderness.

Ken Smith has spent the past four decades in the Scottish Highlands. He lives alone, with no electricity or running water. His home is a log cabin nestled near Loch Treig, known as 'the lonely loch', where he lives off the land: he fishes for his supper, chops his own wood, and even brews his own tippie. He is, in the truest sense of the word, a hermit.

For the first time, Ken shares the story of his life. From his working-class origins in Derbyshire, to the formative years he spent travelling in the Yukon and finally how he came to be the Hermit of Loch Treig. Looking back through decades of diary entries, Ken reflects upon the reasons he turned his back on society, the vulnerability of old age and the awe and wonder of a life lived in nature. The Way of the Hermit is a humorous, transcendent and life-affirming memoir.

Spufford, Francis – Cahokia Jazz

It's 1922 and American are drinking in speakeasies, dancing to jazz, stepping quickly to the tempo of modern times. In the ancient city of Cahokia – a teeming industrial metropolis, a tinderbox of every race and creed – peace holds. Just about. But on a snowy night at the end of winter, two roughshod detectives are called to the roof of a skyscraper. In a world where the usual rules don't apply, their investigations will spill the city's secrets and bring it, against a soundtrack of wailing clarinets, either to destruction or rebirth.

Strachan, Zoë – Catch the Moments as They Fly

Catch the Moments as They Fly is a vividly realised portrait of class, love, and womanhood in mid-twentieth century Scotland, told in Strachan's subtle and delicate prose. A radiant example of historical fiction.

Spanning the 1930s to the 1960s, Catch the Moments as They Fly is a vividly realised portrait of class, ambition and womanhood in a rapidly changing Scotland. Told in Strachan's subtle and delicate prose, it tells the story of Rena--ambitious, attractive, and determined to see her family escape their shameful past. A new town offers a chance at the respectability and independence she craves, but is it enough? When she marries Bobby Young--charming, cosmopolitan and haunted by his own memories - doors begin to open for the couple. Together, they could make their mark on the world--or lose everything they have. Pre- and post-war Scotland are brought to life in this radiant example of historical fiction

Thomas, Kai – In the Upper Country

The fates of two unforgettable women-one just beginning a journey of reckoning and self-discovery and the other completing her life's last vital act-intertwine in this sweeping, powerful novel set at the terminus of the Underground Railroad.

In the 1800s in Dunmore, a Canadian town settled by people fleeing enslavement in the American South, young Lensinda Martin works for a crusading Black journalist.

One night, a neighbouring farmer summons Lensinda after a slave hunter is shot dead by an old woman who recently arrived via the Underground Railroad. The woman refuses to leave before the authorities arrive, and Lensinda must gather testimony from her before she can be condemned for the crime.

But the old woman doesn't want to confess. Instead, she proposes a barter: a story for a story. And so begins an extraordinary exchange of tales that traces the path of the Underground Railroad from Virginia to the Great Lakes communities of Michigan and Canada, revealing the interwoven history of Black and Indigenous peoples of North America in an entirely new and resonant way-and challenging everything Lensinda thought she knew about her family's past.

Toibin, Colm – Long Island

A man with an Irish accent knocks on Eilis Fiorello's door on Long Island and in that moment everything changes. Eilis and Tony have built a secure, happy life here since leaving Brooklyn - perhaps a little stifled by the in-laws so close, but twenty years married and with two children looking towards a good future. And yet this stranger will reveal something that will make Eilis question the life she has created. For the first time in years, she suddenly feels very far from home and the revelation will see her turn towards Ireland once again. Back to her mother. Back to the town and the people she had chosen to leave behind. Did she make the wrong choice marrying Tony all those years ago? Is it too late now to take a different path?

Turton, Stuart – The Last Murder at the End of the World

The world has been destroyed by a fog that swept the planet, killing anyone it touched. But, on the island, all is idyllic. 122 villagers and 3 scientists, living in peaceful harmony. The villagers are content to fish, farm and feast, to obey their nightly curfew, to do what they're told by the scientists. Until, to the horror of the islanders, one of their beloved scientists is found brutally stabbed to death. And they learn the murder has triggered a lowering of the security system around the island, the only thing that was keeping the fog at bay. If the murder isn't solved within 92 hours, the fog will smother the island - and everyone on it. But the security system has also wiped everyone's memories of exactly what happened the night before, which means that someone on the island is a murderer - and they don't even know it.

Weaver, Thomas R – Artificial Wisdom

It's 2050, a decade after a heatwave that killed four hundred million across the Persian Gulf, including journalist Marcus Tully's wife. Now he must uncover the truth: was the disaster natural? Or is the weather now a weapon of genocide? A whistleblower pulls Tully into a murder investigation at the centre of an election battle for a global dictator, with a mandate to prevent a climate apocalypse. A former US President campaigns against the first AI politician for the position, but someone is trying to sway the outcome. Tully must convince the world to face the truth and make hard choices about the future of the species. But will humanity ultimately choose salvation over freedom, whatever the cost?

Wells, Brandi – Cleaner

At night, in a corporate office block in an unnamed metropolitan city, a cleaner begins her shift. As she cleans Sad Intern's desk, she throws away some of her more alarming health supplements, and leaves her healthy snacks instead. Mr Buff's desk is immaculate, but he seems to have a secret smoking habit - not conducive to his fitness journey - which she's going to help him kick. She confiscates the knitted coaster that attractive, sensitive Yarn Guy has given to Cola Woman - someone who clips her nails in the office doesn't deserve his gifts. But tonight, while scrolling through your emails, she'll discover the secret you've been hiding - the one that will threaten her job, and the jobs of everyone she takes care of. And you're about to find out that, sometimes, your most powerful enemy is the one you don't even see.

Woolf, Virginia – To the Lighthouse

Virginia Woolf's most widely praised masterpiece, *To the Lighthouse* traces the thoughts of the Ramseys-the husband, the wife, their children and their friends- over the course of two

ordinary summer days. Based on Woolf's memories of idyllic summers spent in Cornwall, *To the Lighthouse* is also her most autobiographical novel: a personal reckoning with her upbringing, her artistic ambitions, and the legacies of her intellectual father and famously beautiful mother. Moving freely from character to character, Woolf's revolutionary style reveals the awkward, mutinous thoughts of the Ramsey children, Mr. Ramsey's hidden fears and why the independent Lily Briscoe wishes to remain unmarried. Linking them all are the tender machinations of the lovely, often distracted Mrs. Ramsey, whose resemblance to Woolf's mother was so pronounced that Vanessa Bell, Woolf's sister, wrote "It is almost painful to have [our mother] so raised from the dead. An extraordinary work that Woolf herself considered "easily the best of my books". *To the Lighthouse* is a novel that celebrates the glories and the tragedies of everyday life.