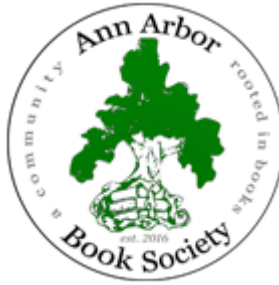


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Ann Arbor Book Society February Newsletter

a2books.org

February Book Event Highlights

Wednesday, February 6th at 7 pm: [Viewing party and talk with Veronica Kirin, author of *Stories of Elders*](#), Nicola's Books, 2513 Jackson Ave.

Friday, February 8th at 7:30 pm: [A Conversation with Dr. Madeleine Albright, 64th Secretary of State](#), Michigan Theater, 603 E. Liberty St.

Monday, February 11th at 7 pm: [Elemental: A Collection of Creative Nonfiction](#), Literati Bookstore, 124 E. Washington

Tuesday, February 12th at 4:45 pm: [Bibliobandido Bookmaking Workshop with 826michigan](#), Stamps Gallery, 201 S. Division St.

Friday, February 22nd at 7 pm: [Nate Powell Book Signing](#), Vault of Midnight, 219 S. Main St.

Saturday. February 23rd and Sunday, February 24th: [Friends of the Ann Arbor District Library Bag Sale](#), Ann Arbor District Library Downtown Branch, 343 S. Fifth Ave.

Sunday, February 24th: [Third Annual African-American Family Book Expo](#), Northwest Activities Center, 18100 Meyers Rd, Detroit 48235

For more February book events, check out our calendar at
a2books.org!

Ann Arbor Book Trivia Question

The creator and original owner of Crazy Wisdom Bookstore went on to co-found what international spiritual community headquartered in Ann Arbor? (Find the answer at the bottom of the newsletter!)

Event Photo Highlight



Author Michelle Kuo signs copies of *Reading with Patrick* after her appearance at Rackham Auditorium for the 2019 Washtenaw Reads Author Event, Wednesday, January 16th.

Book Club Spotlight: Literati Book Club

Part of the mission of the Ann Arbor Book Society is to help connect local readers, and what better way to do this than to highlight some of the great book groups in Ann Arbor? Over the coming months we plan to feature various book groups in our newsletter and on our website. This month we interviewed Matthew Flores, event coordinator for Literati Bookstore and facilitator for the Literati Book Club.

Linda Kimmel: Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the efforts of the Ann Arbor Book Society to help promote local book groups. First, when did your book group start?

Matthew Flores: Our Literati Book Club started soon after the bookstore first opened, about 5 years ago.

Linda: What type of genre or genres does your group read?

Matthew: We typically read new & noteworthy fiction and non-fiction.

Linda: How are books selected for your group?

Matthew: As the facilitator of the book club I get to pick the books each month! Choosing the books is a big responsibility so I'll often chat with fellow booksellers and book club members about what they think would make for a good discussion.

Linda: How many people attend a typical meeting?

Matthew: We typically have about a dozen members attend the meetings.

Linda: How would you describe a typical meeting as far as style of moderation, formation of discussion, etc.?

Matthew: We strive to keep the discussion informal and fun! My job as facilitator is to really make sure everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts and has the opportunity to speak.

Linda: What are the last three books your group has read?

Matthew: Well, we don't meet in December because the bookstore stays busy during the holidays, but in November we read *Little* by Edward Carey (my favorite novel of 2018!) and in October we read *Lincoln in the Bardo* by George Saunders and in September we were joined by our Poetry Book Club to discuss *Bluets* by Maggie Nelson.

Linda: Usually, some books generate a lively discussion, while sometimes another book will generate almost no discussion. What are some books that have generated the most and least discussion in your group and what is it about those books that either encouraged or discouraged discussion?

Matthew: Amazingly, lack of discussion has never been a big issue for us! It may take a couple of minutes for us to get comfortable and dig in, but our regular members always have insightful thoughts to share. I will say that our discussion of *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* by Ottessa Moshfegh was interesting! Half of the group loved the novel and the other half definitely did not. The novel may have been divisive, but one of the benefits of a good book club is being able to hear and understand differing opinions on books. These conversations have the potential to widen our appreciation of literature and focus our own critical reading skills. My favorite meeting of the year would probably be our discussion of *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee. We had a great turn out and I feel like I walked away with a deeper understanding of the story.

Linda: How often, where, and when does your book group meet?

Matthew: Literati Book Club meets once a month, typically in the last week of the month, at 7pm in the cafe space of Literati Coffee.

Linda: Is there someplace online where people can learn more about your book group?

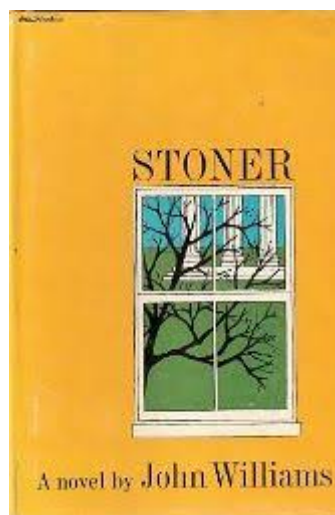
Matthew: Yes! You can learn more from our website at literatibookstore.com

Linda: Is there anything else you would like to let our readers know about your book group?

Matthew: Literati Bookstore hosts other great book clubs too! The Feminist Book Club and Poetry Book Club both meet every month in the cafe. The Eco Book Club meets every other month. And the Arts, Ideas & Politics Book Club meets at the University of Michigan Museum of Art. And Literati offers a 15% discount for all book club selections each month.

Do you belong to or host a book group that is open to new members? If so, we want to hear from you! Please email us at info@a2books.org so we can include your group on our upcoming book club page on our website and possibly feature it in a future newsletter!

Book Review Special: Best Novel Ever!



To say that John Williams' *Stoner* is the best novel I ever read would not be an exaggeration. You might guess that I had time to read a lot of books owning a

storefront bookshop for 27 years, but I had to sneak novels during the slow times, as almost every day offered a new experience beyond the page, to talk, to share, to listen. It was like theatre, sometimes. Through it all, I did read two to three books a week and if you do the math that's 9,000 or so books in a lifetime. So why does *Stoner* stand out?

I stumbled upon *Stoner* about 25 years ago when reading the *Rediscoveries* series edited by literary critic David Madden, which presented some of the finest overlooked works of fiction which had been reviewed favorably but had enjoyed little audience appreciation or sales. I began a quest to identify and read all these forgotten gems.

Once I located *Stoner*, I read it with relish. Written in 1965, it is a novel of an intellectual life spent at a major university, spanning the decades from 1915 to 1950. *Stoner* was widely considered a snoozer: the political climate of 1965 was exploding all over college campuses with activism, anti-war sentiment, students' rights, drugs, and new music as the foci. However, the focus of the *Stoner* saga (for Williams, not double-entendre for a state of inebriation) did not match what his readers saw, instead portraying academic life as the drudgery, routine, petty politics, and institutional in-fighting of the university. But if that wasn't enough to hook you, Williams' novel offered a thesis on the joy of teaching. Excited yet?

The basic bare-bones plot: a Missouri farm boy discovers the joy of literature, has an awakening which develops similarly to Henry Miller's protagonist in *Call It Sleep*, substituting a farm boy for Miller's Jewish city boy, though in some ways both are recent immigrants to America. The story moves through the long stretch of history from the start of World War I to the Jazz Age, through the Great Depression, World War II, and finally into post-war America. Seamlessly, the narrative voice is subtle but so persuasive, neither chatty nor overly cerebral, with slight changes to track the passage of time that seems barely perceptible in the end.

The protagonist, cheekily named William Stoner, sees himself as a failure, as an inconsequential academic in an obscure discipline that few care about. He has no significant place in the world and is forgotten by his colleagues and students. So why was I and am I still moved? Why is *Stoner* a hero? Why do I continue to name this my favorite novel?

Stoner avoided service in World War I, when both of his best friends enlisted, one of whom died in combat. He could not leave his "damaged" destructive wife for the love of his life. Despite this and a host of other disappointments, *Stoner* emerges as one of the classic "anti-heroes" of mid-century literature, a status not born of greatness but honesty, integrity, and courage, fighting against institutions, fighting for purity in learning and truth.

Williams' writing is simple, not grandiose, and gives his characters the space to breathe, and then grow. Describing *Stoner*'s first professor, Williams writes "his long thin fingers moved with grace and persuasion as if giving words a shape that his voice could not." While drawing the protagonist's wife, the poet eclipses the novelist, "With wonder, *Stoner* realized that she was crying deeply and silently, with the shame and awkwardness of one who seldom weeps." Later, of true love, Williams muses,

“the person one loves at first is not the person one loves at last, and that love is not an end but a process through which one person attempts to know another.”

One scene follows the response to Stoner’s father-in-law’s suicide, settling on his wife’s relief. At home, after the funeral, she destroys all the toys from her childhood her controlling father had given her, seeking to free herself from the constraints of that burden.

Soon after reading Stoner the first time 25 years ago, I was appraising a houseful of books and furniture. In the basement were boxes meant to be thrown away. The boxes strained at their edges with broken toys and dolls dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. I thought of Stoner’s wife, destroying her childhood possessions, and asked permission to “rescue” the broken memories. I took the boxes to my storefront, [Kaleidoscope Books & Collectibles](#), and created a display window of lost and broken things that needed love and a new home, to honor the once forgotten novel that was never really broken. It was among the more successful windows throughout my 27 years.

Which is to say: thank you, John Williams, for giving me a more modern *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, a more compassionate look at broken marriage than *Revolutionary Road*, and a more intimate feel for academia than conveyed in *War Between the Tates*. And thank you for helping me see that sometimes an ordinary life is an extraordinary one.

--Jeff Pickell

Owner, [Kaleidoscope Books & Collectibles](#)

Book Ends



On January 18th, the Library of Michigan announced the 20 [Notable Books of 2019](#), which includes *Notes from a Public Typewriter*,

Save the Date!

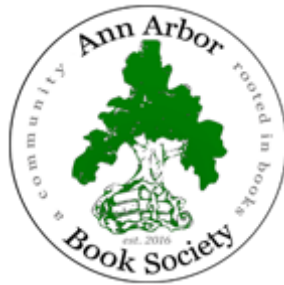
Thursday, April 4th: [Sarah Vowell](#)

Sunday, April 7th-Sunday, April 14th: [Bookstock](#)

Saturday, April 27th: [Midwest Literary Walk](#)

Saturday, April 27th-Sunday, April 28th: [Friends of the Ann Arbor District Library Special Sale](#)

edited by Literati co-owner Michael Gustafson. Congratulations to Michael and all authors whose works are included on this year's list!



Help the Ann Arbor Book Society become the go-to place for all book-related news and events! If you haven't already done so, we'd love for you to take five minutes to fill out our Reader Survey.

[2019 Reader Survey](#)

Sunday, July 21st: [Detroit Book Fest](#)



Bookbound will be closed from February 4th through February 11th so owners Megan and Peter Blackshear can take a well-deserved vacation after their busy holiday season.

Snapshot of the Past



"Mrs. Peter Vanderwaart surrounded by books donated during the Washtenaw County and Ann Arbor Victory Book Campaign, February 1943." Courtesy of [AADL](#).

Ann Arbor Book Trivia Answer

Aura Glaser, owner of Crazy Wisdom Bookstore from 1982 to 1989, went on to co-found the international Buddhist organization [Jewel Heart](#), with Gelek Rinpoche, in 1988. Allen Ginsberg was among Jewel Heart's prominent members, and he and composer Phillip Glass jointly staged benefits in support of the organization.



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