Let’s Talk About It Themes

**The American Frontier: A Pulitzer Prize Centennial Series**
Cultural, diplomatic, economic, military, political, and social factors, or a combination of these features, frequently drive history. This series reflects the influence of individuals on the historical process during the development of the American West.

*The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region* by Richard White
*Across the Wide Missouri* by Bernard DeVoto
*The Way West* by A. B. Guthrie, Jr.
*Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir* by Linnie Marsh Wolfe
*The Son* by Phillipp Meyer

**American Icons: The American Presidency, 1789-1815**
Americans have long viewed the founding fathers and mothers as icons of history. Through biography, history, and novels, this theme reveals the true American Presidency. This theme was developed with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

*Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington* by Richard Brookhiser
*American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* by Joseph J. Ellis
*Scandalmonger* by William Safire
*Adams vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800* by John Ferling
*Dolley: A Novel of Dolley Madison in Love and War* by Rita Mae Brown

**Being Ethnic, Becoming American: Struggles, Successes, Symbols**
In a nation of people with different ethnicities, it’s as important to understand other cultures as it is our own. An ethnic identity can sometimes be at odds with being an American. This series explores the rewards and obstacles of being ethnic and becoming American.

*Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya
*Go Tell It on the Mountain* by James Baldwin
*The Way to Rainy Mountain* by N. Scott Momaday
*Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* by Maxine Hong Kingston

**Civil Rights and Equality: A Pulitzer Prize Centennial Series**
The current moment in our culture requires that we look hard at our ideals and history and the extent to which we have—and have not—ensured the enactment and protection of civil rights within our society.

*The Known World* by Edward P. Jones
*Native Guard* by Natasha Trethewey
*The Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* by Kevin Boyle
*A Plague of Doves* by Louise Erdrich
Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity by Katherine Boo

**Coming and Going in Oklahoma Indian Country**
This theme, created by author Joy Harjo, offers short stories, memoir, poetry, and personal essays written by contemporary native authors. These personal stories invite us to consider the ways in which indigenous peoples have continued to shape the distinctive history and culture of this land that we call Oklahoma.

*Cheyenne Madonna* by Eddie Chuculate  
*Crazy Brave* by Joy Harjo  
*Leaving Holes* by Joe Dale Tate Nevaquayah  
*The Woman Who Watches Over the World: A Native Memoir* by Linda Hogan  
*Choctalking on Other Realities* by LeAnne Howe

**Coming of Age in America**
This sampling of initiation stories portrays young adults facing adult problems and the change that occurs from their confrontations.

*The Silver DeSoto* by Patty Lou Floyd  
*The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger  
*The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* by Carson McCullers  
*The Last Picture Show* by Larry McMurtry

**The Cowboy**
Readings on the historical cowboy include reminiscences from “real” cowboys and fictional depictions—from Owen Wister’s romantic idealization to Larry McMurtry’s sometimes humorous realism.

*The Virginian* by Owen Wister  
*The Log of a Cowboy* by Andy Adams  
*Monte Walsh* by Jack Schaefer  
*Lonesome Dove* by Larry McMurtry

**Crime and Comedy: The Lighter Side of Murder and Misdemeanor**
“Crime and Comedy” explores the growing trend in comic crime fiction through books that feature both unlikely investigators as well as perpetrators.

*The Code of the Woosters* by P. G. Wodehouse  
*The Burglar Who Traded Ted Williams* by Lawrence Block  
*Native Tongue* by Carl Hiaasen  
*Cozy: A Stanley Hastings Mystery* by Parnell Hall  
*One for the Money* by Janet Evanovich
Crime and Punishment
Is justice served by the law? Readings include fiction, true crime analysis, and a science fiction portrayal of a future resembling today’s teenage gangs.

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee
In Cold Blood by Truman Capote
A Clockwork Orange by Anthony Burgess
A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest J. Gaines

The Dynamics of Dysfunction: To Laugh or Cry or Both
Just because we are born into a set of family members doesn’t mean that we will like them, respect them, or even get along with them. The novels in this series can make readers cry or laugh or both. They show us problematic family relationships and how family members survive and even thrive amongst them.

Joe by Larry Brown
As I Lay Dying by William Faulkner
This is Where I Leave You by Jonathan Tropper
My Last Days as Roy Rogers by Pat Cunningham Devoto
The Sleepy Hollow Family Almanac by Kris D’Agostino

Friendship
Explore the subject of friendship and its power to enrich and sustain our lives.

Jacob Have I Loved by Katherine Paterson
The Chosen by Chaim Potok
The Color Purple by Alice Walker
Turtle Diary by Russell Hoban
Recovering: A Journal by May Sarton

The Gilded Age
America experienced a new affluence between the Civil War and World War I, a period described as “the Gilded Age.” Despite the affluence for some, widespread political and business corruption created great hardships for the working class. Read these authors’ responses to social change during this complex era.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain
The Red Badge of Courage by Stephen Crane
The Awakening by Kate Chopin
The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. DuBois
The Call of the Wild by Jack London

Hope Amidst Hardship
No one gets through this life without some pain along the way. What we don’t always know is that we are not alone in that pain. When we read about people who experience hardship and
persevere, we find hope. Sometimes this hope comes from deep within us. Sometimes it comes from others in unexpected ways.

_The Glass Castle_ by Jeannette Walls  
_Wonder_ by R. J. Palacio  
_Where the Heart Is_ by Billie Letts  
_The Secret Life of Bees_ by Sue Monk Kidd  
_Tuesdays with Morrie_ by Mitch Albom

**Immigration Stories in Contemporary Literature: Suspended Between Borders**  
Desire for a better life compels many to emigrate from their original home, and yet the drama of leaving one’s homeland is fraught with danger and uncertainty. This theme challenges us to reflect on our own ideas about global immigration, by considering the similarities and differences between immigrants and those who are already citizens. In what ways do these immigration stories share different narratives and yet resemble each other?

_Brother, I’m Dying_ by Edwidge Danticat  
_The Beekeeper of Aleppo_ by Christy Lefteri  
_Native Speaker_ by Chang-Rae Lee  
_The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears_ by Dinaw Mengestu  
_Enrique’s Journey_ by Sonia Nazario

**Journey Stories**  
Beginning with the grandfather of all journey stories, Homer’s Odyssey, this theme takes readers on a variety of travels across the United States and around the world.

_The Odyssey_ by Homer  
_On the Road_ by Jack Kerouac  
_Travels with Charley_ by John Steinbeck  
_Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance_ by Robert M. Pirsig  
_The Life of Pi_ by Yann Martel

**Living with Limits**  
The promise of possibility within one’s life can illuminate paths to follow and offer hope. But what happens when each of us realizes factors can call into question this optimistic perspective, when each of us comes up against obstacles within our personal heritage or life events in our culture? This series explores how we live within the limits we find in our individual reality.

_When Breath Becomes Air_ by Paul Kalanithi  
_Slaughterhouse-Five_ by Kurt Vonnegut  
_Gilead_ by Marilynne Robinson  
_Jump and Other Stories_ by Nadine Gordimer  
_The Underground Railroad_ by Colson Whitehead
**Making Sense of the American Civil War**
From the moment Americans found themselves pulled into a civil war of unimaginable scale and consequence, they tried desperately to make sense of what was happening to them. The readings selected give us a glimpse of the vast sweep and profound breadth of Americans’ war among and against themselves.

*March* by Geraldine Brooks  
*America’s War* edited by Edward L. Ayers  
*Croosroads of Freedom: Antietam* by James M. McPherson

**Many Trails, Many Tribes: Images of American Indians in Fiction**
American Indians have captured the imagination of authors and readers alike. This series traces American Indians as fictional characters, from the stereotypes of James Fenimore Cooper to the complex individuals portrayed by Linda Hogan and Barbara Kingsolver.

*The Last of the Mohicans* by James Fenimore Cooper  
*Okla Hannali* by R. A. Lafferty  
*Mean Spirit* by Linda Hogan  
*House Made of Dawn* by N. Scott Momaday  
*Pigs in Heaven* by Barbara Kingsolver

**Memory, Memorials, and Painful Pasts: A More Perfect Union theme**
Historical sites and the memorials we place on them can bring communities together or tear them apart. Often those with the greatest ability to do both are sites where tragic or painful events have taken place. Through works of both non-fiction and fiction, this theme explores cases in which the public memory of painful pasts has had profound impacts on communities in the present.

*The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* by Edward Linenthal  
*The Submission* by Amy Waldman  
*How the Word is Passed* by Clint Smith  
*Down Along With That Devil’s Bones* by Connor Towne O’Neil  
*The Memory Monster* by Yishai Sarid

**Much Depends on Dinner**
Nearly every aspect of our lives affects what we eat: politics, religion, economics, geography, culture and ethnicity, aesthetics, health and personal taste. As a species, we have elevated many of our basic needs to an expression of who we are, what we believe, how we interact with our environments, and how we communicate and express ourselves. Food is no exception.

*The Last Chinese Chef* by Nicole Mones  
*The Tummy Trilogy* by Calvin Trillin  
*In Defense of Food* by Michael Pollan  
*A Homemade Life* by Molly Wizenberg
Secrets of the Tsil Café by Thomas Fox Averill

Mysterious Fears and Ghastly Longings
One of the most popular forms of fiction today, the Gothic or horror novel, deliberately induces a pleasurable shiver of fear, fulfilled here in classic nineteenth-century and contemporary examples of the genre.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson / The Dark Half by Stephen King
Frankenstein by Mary Shelley / Mutation by Robin Cook
Dracula by Bram Stoker / Salem’s Lot by Stephen King
Northanger Abbey by Jane Austen / The Mistress of Mellyn by Victoria Holt

Myth and Literature
Beginning with Bill Moyers’ interviews with Joseph Campbell, who discusses the relevance of myths from many cultures, this series shows how authors use existing mythologies and create new ones to explain our world.

The Power of Myth by Joseph Campbell
Black Elk Speaks by John G. Neihardt
A Passage to India by E. M. Forster
The Summer Before the Dark by Doris Lessing
The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Native American Identity From Past to Present: A More Perfect Union theme
Literature and popular media are littered with stereotypical and fantastical images and stories of Native American people, often painting them as people living in a mystical past or as a pure but vanishing race who remain on reservations, far removed from the rest of American society. This theme challenges this narrative by presenting Native American identity through the lens of Native writers and Native experiences. These writers speak to the complexities of Native identity: including mixed identity; colonial traumas, such as removal; living in urban spaces; and the way the past informs the present for Native American people, families, and tribal nations.

The Removed by Brandon Hobson (Cherokee)
There There by Tommy Orange (Cheyenne and Arapaho)
The Round House by Louise Erdrich (Chippewa)
Firekeeper’s Daughter by Angeline Boulley (Ojibwe)
Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir by Deborah Miranda (Esselen and Chumash)

Native American Writers of the Plains
Contemporary Native American writers first gained national attention when N. Scott Momaday won the Pulitzer Prize for House Made of Dawn in 1969. Since then, writers from many tribes have told their stories through popular novels. In this series, four Native American novelists tell the stories of tribes that continue to live in the Great Plains.

Fools Crow by James Welch
Mean Spirit by Linda Hogan
The Bingo Palace by Louise Erdrich
Medicine River by Thomas King

Of Shadows and Light: Stories of African American Resilience- A More Perfect Union Theme
This series on the modern African American experience explores the theme of resilience in the struggle against marginalization and exclusion that have historically shaped Black life. Collectively, these works not only give insight into the endeavor of trying to find a sense of place and belonging within American society, but also challenge us to reflect upon the meaning of the democratic ideals that bind Americans together.

A Matter of Black and White by Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher
Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates
Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston
Citizen: An American Lyric by Claudia Rankine
The Cross and the Lynching Tree by James Cone

The Oklahoma Experience: Looking for Home
Sometimes the search for home is not only for a place on the landscape, but also for the peace of mind that comes from a sense of belonging.

The White Man’s Road by Benjamin Capps
Sundown by John Joseph Mathews
Walking on Borrowed Land by William A. Owens
Bound for Glory by Woody Guthrie

The Oklahoma Experience: Re-Visions
Five contemporary Oklahoma authors present their visions of the Oklahoma experience through realism and without sentimentality.

Pushing the Bear by Diane Glancy
Fire in Beulah by Rilla Askew
Red Dirt: Growing Up Okie by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz
Shell Shaker by LeAnne Howe
The Honk and Holler Opening Soon by Billie Letts

The Oklahoma Experience: The Thirties
The decade of the 1930s remains the most misunderstood in Oklahoma history. This series approaches the historical problems of this trying period.

Will Rogers: His Wife’s Story by Betty Rogers
The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck
Roughneck by Jim Thompson
The Silver DeSoto by Patty Lou Floyd
Oklahoma Private Investigations
The best crime and mystery novels are situated in “place.” As you will see from these varied plots, mystery and investigation stories find a ready home in Oklahoma and provide a window on the character of the state.

*The Old Buzzard Had It Coming* by Donis Casey
*Letter from Home* by Carolyn Hart
*Capitol Offense* by William Bernhardt
*Twisted Perception* by Bob Avey
*The American Café* by Sara Sue Hoklotubbe

Piecing the Quilt, Stirring the Stew: Ethnic American Women’s Voices
Two common metaphors that describe America’s ethnic diversity, the patchwork quilt and the melting pot, suggest women’s experiences as represented in this series.

*The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros
*The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan
*A Leak in the Heart* by Faye Moskowitz
*Blanche on the Lam* by Barbara Neely
*Arabian Jazz* by Diana Abu-Jaber

Play Ball: The American Sport Meets the American Dream
Bart Giamatti, former Commissioner of Baseball, once called America’s sense of baseball “an enduring public trust”—and the richness, breadth, and depth of literature written about the sport reflect just that. Through the territory of the diamond on which the human dramas in this series are played, a great deal is accomplished in showing us how to live our lives authentically.

*Miko Kings: An Indian Baseball Story* by LeAnne Howe
*Shoeless Joe* by W. P. Kinsella
*The Boys of Summer* by Roger Kahn
*Bang the Drum Slowly* by Mark Harris
*Wait Til Next Year* by Doris Kearns Goodwin

Private Investigations: Hard-Boiled and Soft-Hearted Heroes
The hard-boiled detective story is uniquely American. This series begins with Raymond Chandler, who perfected and defined the genre, samples three more contemporary authors, and concludes with a quirky, tongue-in-cheek take on the detective story by Kinky Friedman.

*The Big Sleep* and *The Long Goodbye* by Raymond Chandler
*Death in a Tenured Position* by Amanda Cross
*The Ghostway* by Tony Hillerman
*Killing Orders* by Sara Paretsky
Problems with Progress: the Human Place in Ecosystems
The notion of progress is often assumed to be inherently positive, but progress can present various challenges and have negative effects for us, individually, and collectively as a society. This theme includes authors who value, and situate, the human place within various ecosystems.

* A River Runs Through It by Norman Maclean
* Pilgrim at Tinker Creek by Annie Dillard
* A Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold
* Let There Be Night: Testimony on Behalf of the Dark by Paul Bogard
* Goodbye to a River by John Graves

Sovereign Worlds
This theme presents views on American Indian sovereignty, from the perspective of American Indian tribes and individuals, and illustrates the contributions made by American Indians to global culture.

* Custer Died for Your Sins by Vine Deloria, Jr.
* After Columbus: The Smithsonian Chronicle of North American Indians by Herman J. Viola
* Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World by Jack Weatherford
* Love Medicine by Louise Erdrich
* The Indian Lawyer by James Welch

Speculative Women, Future Bodies
Science Fiction has allowed many women to re-imagine their place in society, as a hypothetical future can challenge universal ‘truths’ about gender, race, and sexuality. This theme traces many such futures through pivotal works from the 70’s to more modern works that continue to confront our collective past.

* The Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula Le Guin
* The Female Man by Joanna Russ
* The Parable of the Sower by Octavia Butler
* Binti by Nnedi Okorafor
* Ms. Marvel, Vol.1: No Normal by G. Willow Wilson

Travel: New Ways of Seeing
The books in this series include a variety of tensions even if many of us resonate with the transformative potential of travel, an unexpected kind of illumination achieved through pilgrimage, a realization about race and culture in a larger context than the parochial views of our region and our nation.

* Blue Highways: A Journey into America by William Least Heat-Moon
* Daisy Miller: A Study by Henry James/A Small Place by Jamaica Kincaid
* Less by Andrew Sean Greer
* America for Beginners by Leah Franqui
Nickel Boys by Colson Whitehead

Wade in the Water
This series cultivates conversations about the importance of water, our ways of interacting with water, the issues and challenges we face in relation to water, and how we can relate to water in sustainable and resilient ways so that human and ecological flourishing might continue throughout our world.

A Long Walk to Water by Linda Sue Park
Green Grass, Running Water by Thomas King
The Activist by Alec Connon
Forty Signs of Rain by Kim Stanley Robinson
The Water Knife by Paolo Bacigalupi

War, Not-War, and Peace: A Pulitzer Prize Centennial Series
Too often, “peace” is simply the absence of active war. This series explores both the active elements of war as well as the long-lived legacies of war, in those periods optimistically called “peace.”

The Things They Carried by Tim O’Brien
Empire of the Summer Moon by S. C. Gwynne
Maus by Art Spiegelman
Neon Vernacular by Yusef Komunyakaa
All the Light We Cannot See by Anthony Doerr

The Way We Were, The Way We Are: Seasons in the Contemporary American Family
Through a variety of literary genres, we see the importance of memory and change in defining American families during the twentieth century.

The House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind by Ivan Doig
A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry
The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams
Ordinary People by Judith Guest
Points of View: An Anthology of Short Stories edited by James Moffett and Kenneth McElheny
During the Reign of the Queen of Persia by Joan Chase

What America Reads: Myth Making in Popular Fiction
What makes us respond so powerfully to certain novels that we make them bestsellers? In these novels, we find characters who achieve mythic status—Uncle Tom, Scarlett O’Hara, Shane—and many capture a significant historical era.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe
Gone with the Wind by Margaret Mitchell
Shane by Jack Schaefer
*From Here to Eternity* by James Jones
*A Tan and Sandy Silence* by John D. MacDonald

**Working to Survive: Surviving to Work**
Is work a blessing or a curse? To many, it can be both. The books in this series focus on the way work mixes with the quest for human dignity, the psychology of honest work and the existential meaning of individual life itself.

*The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair
*The Help* by Kathryn Stockett
*Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* by Barbara Ehrenreich
*Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street* by Herman Melville
*The Cliff Walk: A Job Lost and a Life Found* by Don J. Snyder

**The Worst Hard Time Revisited: Oklahoma in the Dust Bowl Years**
Through history, novels, letters, and poetry, readers learn how ordinary people coped with extraordinary circumstances.

*The Worst Hard Time* by Timothy Egan
*Letters from the Dust Bowl* by Caroline Henderson edited by Alvin O. Turner
*Now in November* by Josephine W. Johnson
*Whose Names Are Unknown* by Sanora Babb
*Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse

**Writing Worlds**
Is an anthropologist an objective observer of culture and a novelist an imaginative inventor? Do we, in reality, invent our world? This theme explores how we observe and participate in our own cultures.

*Into the Heart* by Kenneth Good
*The Storyteller* by Mario Vargas Llosa
*Everything that Rises Must Converge* by Flannery O’Connor
*A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* by Robert Olin Butler
*An American Childhood* by Annie Dillard

**Young Adult Crossover Fiction: Crumbling Borders between Adolescents and Adults**
The adults writing these novels focus on young adults grappling with the quest of coming to terms with their roots and identity, of learning to distinguish between authenticity and artifice, and of finding a place for themselves within the framework of life. The stories are thought-provoking and expose some of the difficult challenges faced by young adults.

*After the First Death* by Robert Cormier
*Monster* by Walter Dean Myers
*True Believer* by Virginia Ewer Wolff
*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie
Annie John by Jamaica Kincaid