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 Philipp 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 Brookhisier
*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

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  
*Crossroads 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 (NEW for Spring 2022!)
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 (NEW for Spring 2022!)
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 Memo 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 (NEW for Spring 2022!)
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

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 (NEW for Spring 2022!)
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