Let’s Talk About It
Discussion 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
*Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir* by Linnie Marsh Wolfe
*The Way West* by A. B. Guthrie, Jr.

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
Growing Up in the Wide World: Perspectives through Contemporary World Literature
Through the prism of world literature, this theme explores the universal experience of “growing up,” offering readers perspectives from around the world.

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* by Mark Haddon
*Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
*Popular Music from Vittula* by Mikael Niemi
*The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini
*The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri

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

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 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

**Not for Children Only**
This series revisits the classics we may have read as children and more recent examples of children’s literature.

*The Classic Fairy Tales* by Iona and Peter Opie  
*Tatterhood and Other Tales* by Ethel Johnston Phelps  
*Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott  
*The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame  
*Charlotte’s Web* by E. B. White  
*Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson  
*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor  
*I Am the Cheese* by Robert Cormier

**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.
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

Rebirth of a Nation: Nationalism and the Civil War
Through historical analyses, memoir, and a novel that galvanized national emotions on the issue of slavery, this series looks at the complexities involved in the Civil War and Reconstruction.

Two Roads to Sumter by William and Bruce Catton
Uncle Tom’s Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe
Ordeal By Fire, Volume II: The Civil War by James McPherson
Reconstruction: After the Civil War by John Hope Franklin
The Private Mary Chesnut: The Unpublished Civil War Diaries edited by C. Vann Woodward and Elizabeth Muhlenfeld

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

Survival
The works presented here help us understand some of the problems and triumphs of survival, including surviving and rebuilding from natural and personal catastrophes and “survivor’s guilt.”
**The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor** by Gabriel Garcia Marquez

**Surfacing** by Margaret Atwood

**One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest** by Ken Kesey

**A Scrap of Time** by Ida Fink

**Their Eyes Were Watching God** by Zora Neale Hurston

**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.
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