

Let's Talk About It, Oklahoma 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

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

Scandal monger 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.

Cowboy Life: Reconstructing an American Myth edited by William W. Savage, Jr.

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

Get Your Reading Kicks on Route 66

Travel the length of the Mother Road through history, memory, mystery, and romance.

Route 66: The Mother Road by Michael Wallis
Mother Road by Dorothy Garlock
Route 66 Remembered by Michael Witzel
West on 66: A Mystery by James Cobb

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

Invisibility and Identity: The Search for Self in African American Fiction

Beginning with Ralph Ellison's seminal novel, *Invisible Man*, the search for personal identity is the major theme of these African American fiction works. This theme was developed with funding from the We the People initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison
Little Scarlet by Walter Mosley
The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison
Meridian by Alice Walker
The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman by Ernest Gaines

The Journey Inward: Women's Autobiography

“No woman has ever told the whole truth of her life,” says Isadora Duncan in her autobiography. The lives of women portrayed in this series and their denial or glossing over of the truth frequently prove Duncan's sentiment.

One Writer's Beginnings by Eudora Welty
Letters of a Woman Homesteader by Elinore Pruitt Stewart
Dust Tracks on a Road by Zora Neale Hurston
My Life by Isadora Duncan
Blackberry Winter by Margaret Mead

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

Muslim Journeys: American Stories

While the large presence of Muslims in the United States dates to the 1960s, Muslims have been a part of the history of America since colonial times. American Muslims' stories draw attention to ways in which people of varying religious, cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds interact to shape both their communities' identities and our collective past.

Prince Among Slaves by Terry Alford
The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States edited by Edward E. Curtis, IV
Acts of Faith by Eboo Patel
A Quiet Revolution by Leila Ahmed
The Butterfly Mosque by G. Willow Wilson

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: From Wilderness to Metropolis

Readings illuminate the development of community in Oklahoma, from Washington Irving's description of the empty prairie in the 1830s to the changing metropolis of Oklahoma City in the 1970s.

A Tour on the Prairies by Washington Irving

Sand in My Eyes by Signiora Russell Laune

Catalogue by George Milburn

Briarpatch by Ross Thomas

The Oklahoma Experience: In Our Own Words

The Oklahoma experience is not only historical; it is also personal. This series consists of autobiographies written by “ordinary” Oklahomans about their everyday lives, families, and friends.

Leaves in the Wind by LaDonna K. Meinders
Hurrah for My New Free Country by Leon C. Fouquet
The Cherokee Strip by Marquis James
On Coon Mountain by Glen Ross
Flight from Innocence by Judson Jerome

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
A Case for Lone Star by Kinky Friedman

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

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