

A More Perfect Union: America at 250
“Let’s Talk About It” Reading and Discussion Themes and Books List

For theme reservation information please contact Program Officer Sarah Olzawski (sarah@okhumanities.org)

Applications to host a reading and discussion program are accepted online via our website. Please contact staff for more information (sarah@okhumanities.org) on hosting a program in your area.

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New Theme: Of Shadows and Light: Stories of African American Resilience- A More Perfect Union theme

This theme explores African American 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.

Books in the Series:

- 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

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New Theme: 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.

Books in the Series:

- 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)

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New Theme: 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.

Books in the Series:

- 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

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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.

Books in the Series:

- 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

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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.

Books in the Series:

- The Known World by Edward P. Jones
- Native Guard by Natasha Tretheway
- 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

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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.

Books in the Series:

- 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

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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.

Books in the Series:

- 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

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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.

Books in the Series:

- 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

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The Oklahoma Experience: Re-Visions

Five contemporary Oklahoma authors present their visions of the Oklahoma experience through realism and without sentimentality.

Books in the Series:

- 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

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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.

Books in the 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

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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.

Books in the Series:

- 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

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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."

Books in the Series:

- 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

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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.

Books in the Series:

- 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

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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.

Books in the Series:

- 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

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