

BOOK LISTS from my BOOK GROUPS

This is a combined list of books I've read in my two monthly book groups. The "J" group reads books of Jewish content or by Jewish authors or that we consider Jewish books for any reason. The "W" group (all women) reads whatever we want. In both groups, we decide together what to read next. Everything is available in the Milwaukee Public Library system.

(*=I liked the book a lot)

2012

The First Dissident	William Safire	A different look at the Biblical Job	J
*In the Garden of Beasts	Eric Larsen	The American Ambassador to Berlin in 1933, and his family.	W
House of Windows: Portrait of a Jerusalem Neighborhood	Adina Hoffman	Memoir of an American woman in Jerusalem	J
*The Island Beneath the Sea	Isabelle Allende	A novel focusing on a slave and her owner, during the time of the rebellion in Haiti.	W
Benny Goodman and the Swing Era	Collier	Biography of the jazz clarinetist	J
*Our Mutual Friend	Charles Dickens	Dickens' last novel, about money and relationships	W
*Ministry of Special Cases	Nathan Englander	Novel about a Jewish family and their "disappeared" son in Argentina in 1976.	J
Brandeis	Melvin Urofsky	A biography of the Supreme Court Justice	J
The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks	Rebecca Skloot	About the woman whose HeLa cells are still being used for medical research	W
The Cookbook Collector	Allegra Goodman	Rambling story of two sisters in Berkeley and Boston. Interesting side story about internet startups.	
*If Not Now When	Primo Levi	Novel about Jewish and Russian WW2 partisans	J
Panther in the Basement	Amos Oz	Novel about a young boy growing up in the last days of Mandate Palestine	J

The Art of Hearing Heartbeats	Jan-Philipp Sendker	Novel set in late 20 th c. Burma	W
The Great Escape	Kati Marton	Nine Jews who fled Hitler and changed the world	J

2011

Farewell Shanghai	Angel Wagenstein	Eastern European Jews taking refuge in Shanghai during WW2	J
David Ben Gurion	David Ben Gurion	Biography of Israel's first prime minister	J
The Finkler Question	Howard Jacobson	A novel of friendship and loss, won the Man Booker Prize.	J
*Ornament of the World	Maria Rosa Menocal	Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Medieval Spain	J
Girl with the Dragon Tattoo	Stief Larssen	Exciting mystery story	W
Founding Mothers	Cokie Roberts	Wives and mothers of the Founding Fathers	W
The Help	Katherine Stockett	Race Relations in the South in the 1950s	W
*Cutting for Stone	Abraham Verghese	The relationship between twin brothers, both doctors, at the time of the revolution in Ethiopia.	W
* Thirty Six Arguments for the Existence of God	Rebecca Goldstein	Relationship novel, clash between faith and reason.	J
One People, Many Paths: A History of Jewish Milwaukee	John Gurda	Comprehensive and well-written, like everything by Milwaukeean John Gurda.	J
Red Hook Road	Ayalet Waldman	How the death of a bride and groom in a car accident affects the family.	W
Mr. Rosenblum Dreams in English	Natasha Solomons	German Jewish refugee builds a golf course so he can be a "real" Englishman.	J
Closed Circle	David Pryce-Jones	Examination of Arab culture	J
*Remarkable Creatures	Tracy Chevalier	A 19 th century British girl discovers dinosaur fossils and becomes embroiled in the controversy about evolution.	W

*Book Thief	Marcus Zusak	Holocaust story about “a girl, some words, an accordionist, some fanatical Germans, a Jewish fist-fighter, and quite a lot of thievery.”	J
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2010

Who wrote the Bible?	R. Friedman	He was unable to come up with a definite answer.	J
Invisible Wall	Harry Bernstein	Memoir - growing up Jewish and poor in England	J
A Peculiar Treasure	Edna Ferber	Memoir - growing up Jewish in Appleton, WI	J
A Tale of Love and Darkness	Amos Oz	Memoir – growing up in Israel during the British Mandate and after.	J
A Long Way Gone	Ishmael Beah	Memoir of a Child Soldier in Sierra Leone	W
Guernsey Potato Peel and Literary Society	Mary Ann Shaffer	Getting through the German occupation in the Channel Islands	W
The Infidel	Ayaan Hirsi Ali	Growing up Somali and finding oneself	W
*When Everything Changed	Gail Collins	The women’s movement from the 1960s onward.	W
Let the Great World Spin	Colum McCann	A tightrope walker crosses between the Twin Towers	W
The Moonstone	Willkie Collins	19 th c. British detective novel (first in English)	W
Fifth Servant	K. Wishnia	Mystery set in 16 th c. Prague	J
* God of Small Things	Arundhati Roy	Sad story of twins in Kerala, India	W
Leonard Bernstein	Humphrey Burton	Biography	J

2009

A Pigeon and A Boy	Shalev	A modern Israeli novel solves a personal mystery from the War of Independence	J
*My Father’s Paradise	Ariel Sabar	History of the author’s family in Jewish Kurdistan	J

*Everything Is Illuminated	Jonathan Safran Foer	An American's wild journey to his Russian roots. (Good book, but see the movie also.)	J
Hiding Places	Daniel Asa Rose	A father and 2 sons discover the places their family hid during the war.	J
All Other Nights	Dara Horn	A Jewish soldier in the American Civil War	J
Breaking the Spell	Daniel Dennett	About religious belief	
Journey from the Land of No	Roya Hakarian	About the author's upbringing as a Jewish girl in Iran.	J
The Hebrew Republic	Bernard Avishai	A suggestion for a Hebrew, rather than Jewish, state.	J
* The Nine	Jeffrey Toobin	Insight into the Supreme Court justices	W
River of Doubt	C. Mallard	Theodore Roosevelt's expedition in the Amazon	W
Margerie Morningstar	Herman Wouk	Growing up Jewish, rich, and spoiled in mid-20 th c. New York	J
Nine Parts of Desire	Geraldine Brooks	Women in Muslim society	W
City of Thieves	David Benioff	An adventure in staying alive during the siege of Leningrad	W
*The Book Thief	Marcus Zusac	A Jewish orphan survives the pain of WW2 through books.	W
The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down	Anne Faddiman	History of Hmong and conflict of cultures via story of girl with epilepsy.	W
A Mercy	Toni Morrison		W
On Stealing Horses	Per Petterson		W

2008

American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer	Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin	The life and trials of the physicist who helped develop the first atomic bomb.	J
Three Cups of Tea	Greg Mortenson	Building schools in Afghanistan	W
Water for Elephants	Sarah Gruen	Story about a circus vet	
*People of the Book	Geraldine Brooks	Fictional history of the (real) Sarajevo Haggadah	W & J
Man in White	Lucette Lagnado	Memoir of Egyptian Jewish	J

Sharkskin Suit		family that emigrated to NY in 1960s.	
George Gershwin	Various authors	Biographies	J
*Gentlemen of the Road	Michael Chabon	Two medieval Jewish swashbucklers get involved in Khazar political shenanigans.	J
*The Zookeeper's Wife	D. Ackerman	True story of Polish zookeepers who hid Jews in zoo during the Holocaust.	
How to Read the Bible	James Kugel	Discusses traditional and modern interpretations of the Bible.	J
Stumbling on Happiness	Daniel Gilbert	Why people are/aren't happy	W
The Uncommon Reader	Alan Bennett	Queen Elizabeth reads books	W
Range of Motion	Elisabeth Berg	Husband goes into coma (I did not like this book.)	W
One Thousand Splendid Suns	K. Hosseini	From the author of Kite Runner	W
*Year of Living Biblically	A.J. Jacobs	Jacobs spends a year following the Bible very literally.	

2007

Murder Duet	Batya Gur	Musical murder mystery set in Israel	J
Einstein, His Life and Universe	Walter Isaacson.	Emphasis on personal life and discussion of his science aimed at non-scientists	J
What Went Wrong: The clash between Islam and modernity in the Middle East	Bernard Lewis	Islamic responses to the rise of European power	J
Book of Lights	Chaim Potok	Novel about a kabbalist who becomes an army chaplain in Korea.	J
The Librettist of Venice: the remarkable life of Lorenzo Da Ponte, Mozart's poet, Casanova's friend, and Italian opera's impresario in America.	Rodney Bold	Mozart's Jewish librettist	J

Lemon Tree	Tolan	Palestinian family visits the house they lived in before 1948.	J
The Rise of David Levinsky	Abraham Cohan	Novel about a Russian Jewish immigrant in New York at the turn of the 20th century.	J
Emma Lazarus	Esther Schor	Biography of the poet who wrote the inscription on Statue of Liberty	J
Depths of Glory	Irving Stone	Biographical novel of "father of impressionism" Camille Pissarro	J
Yiddish Policeman's Union	Michael Chabon	Alternate history/ mystery set among Jewish refugees in Alaska	J
Suite Francaise	Irene Nemirovsky	French author died in Holocaust	W
On Beauty	Zadie Smith		W
Sweet Summer	Bebe Moore Campbell	Summers with her father in the south	W
Rules for Old Men Waiting	Peter Pouncy		W
Slaughterhouse Five	Kurt Vonnegut		W
Glass Castle	Jeannette Walls	Girl growing up in intentionally impoverished home	W
The Wind Done Gone	Alice Randall	Gone with the Wind, a different perspective	W
Bend in the River	V.S. Naipul		W
God's Secretaries	Adam Nicolson	Writing the King James Bible	W

2006

The Manor	I.B. Singer	Experiences of an extended Jewish family in late nineteenth c. Poland.	J
Strangers in the House	Raja Shehadeh	Autobiography of a Palestinian lawyer born in Ramallah	J
*Mazel	Rebecca Goldstein	Novel about three generations of Jewish women.	J
Crossing California	A. Langer	Fictional account of a Chicago suburb in the 1970s	J
At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden: A Jew's Search for God	Yossi Klein Halevy		J

with Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land			
The Fanatic	Meyer Levin	Roman a clef based on Levin's obsession and conflict over Anne Frank's diary.	J
Crimes of the City	Robert Rosenberg	Murder mystery set in Jerusalem in the 1980s	J
Prisoners	Jeffrey Goldberg	American reporter's experience as a soldier in an Israeli prison.	J
* First Wives Club	Olivia Goldsmith	Rejected 1st wives take revenge	W
Mountains Beyond Mountains	Tracy Kidder		W
Our Endangered Values	Jimmy Carter		W
Accordion Crimes	Annie Proulx		W
How to Breathe Underwater	Julie Orringer		W
What's the Matter with Kansas	Thomas Frank		W
The Bad Beginning	Lemony Snicket	Unusual children's book	W

2005

The Plot Against America	Phillip Roth	Alternate history - Lindberg is elected U.S. president and supports Hitler's policies	J
The Last Kabbalist in Lisbon	Richard Zimler	Murder mystery set during the anti-Jewish massacres of 1506 in Portugal	J
Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief	Andrew Newberg, Eugene d'Aquili, and Vince Rause		J
Bethlehem Road Murder	Batya Gur	Mystery set in modern Jerusalem	J
Ordinary Life: Stories	Elizabeth Berg	Ordinary lives of women	W
Desert Solitaire - A Season in the Wilderness	Edward Abbey		W
* The Name of the Rose	Umberto Eco	Medieval Mystery	W

Postville: A Clash of cultures in	Stephen Bloom	Interaction between cultures in Postville, Iowa, after Lubavitch Jews open kosher slaughterhouse	J
Kabalah	Various books		J
Passion of the Mind	Irving Stone	Fictional biography of Sigmund Freud	J
Outwitting History	Aaron Lansky	How the National Yiddish Book Center got started.	J
Inheriting the Holy Land	Jennifer Miller	Viewpoints of a variety of Israelis and Palestinians	J
*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time	Mark Haddon	About an autistic boy	W
Under the Banner of Heaven	Krakauer	Mormons, very interesting	W
A Free Man of Color	Phillip Roth		W

2004

*The Eyre Affair	Jasper Fforde	Pun-filled alternative universe mystery story for book-lovers. The whole series is great fun.	W
Women of the Silk	Gail Tsukiyama	Young girl sold into silk trade.	W
*Cry the Beloved Country	Alan Paton	South Africa. Very sad.	W
Reading Lolita in Teheran	Azar Nafisi	Clandestine book group	W
*Devil in the White City	Erik Larson	The making of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, set alongside the story of a serial murder.	W
The Piano Tuner	Daniel Mason	Brit goes to repair a rare piano in Burma	W
Kite Runner	K. Hosseini		W
Book of Lights	Chaim Potok	American Judaism	J
American Judaism	Jonathan Sarna	Religious and social history	J
As a Driven Leaf	Milton Steinberg		J
The Liberated Bride	A. B. Yehoshua		
The Essential Talmud	Adin Steinsaltz	Survey of the Talmud - history, structure & content, and method	J
*The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Klay	Michael Chabon	Post-war cousins who become comic book writers.	J

The English Disease: A Novel	Joseph Skibell	Novel about an angst-filled Jewish intellectual	J
The Bible Unearthed	Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman	Impact of current archeological studies on our understanding of the Bible	J
Herzog	Saul Bellow	Another novel about an angst-filled Jewish intellectual	J

2003

*The New Rabbi	Stephen Fried	Follows the process of hiring a new rabbi for a major synagogue in Philadelphia.	J
Spinoza: A Life	Steven Nadler	Biography	J
*The Coffee Trader	David Liss	A novel about commercial speculation by Portuguese Jews in 17th century Amsterdam.	J
His Brother's Keeper	Yossi Beilin	By an Israeli politician, about ties between Israel and the American Jewish community.	J
Daniel Deronda	George Eliot	Novel about a 19 th century Jewish Englishman. (The movie is good too.)	J
Peony	Pearl S. Buck	Chinese-Jewish family in the 1840s.	J
Four Letters of Love	Niall Williams		W
My Year of Meats	Ruth Ozeki	Novel about unethical practices of the American meat industry set in Japan.	W
My Father, Sholom Aleichem	Marie Waife Goldberg	Biography of the writer	J
Candide	Voltaire	In this best of all possible worlds	J
The Pilot's Wife	Anita Shreve	A plane mysteriously crashes during the Irish "troubles"	W
*Things Fall Apart	Chinua Achube	Western world comes to Nigeria	W
The Innocents Within	Robert Daley	Novel based on the true story of pastor Andre Trocme of Le Chambon sur Lignon who hid Jews during the Holocaust	W
Loot	Erin Elkins	Jewish art stolen by Nazis	W
Gallileo's Daughter	Dava Sobel	Galileo's life and times, seen through his daughter, a cloistered nun	W
The Short History of a Prince	Jane Hamilton		W

Black Box	Amoz Oz	Novel told entirely in the form of letters, telegrams and notes.	J
*The Ritual Bath	Faye Kellerman	Detective story involving orthodox Jewish detectives. This is the first and best of the series.	J
The Book of Daniel	E.L. Doctorow	Novel based on the trial and execution of the Rosenbergs.	J
We are your Sons	Michael and Robert Meeropol	Written by the sons of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, it is part autobiography and part discussion of the case.	J
Jazz	Toni Morrison		W
Six Days of War	Michael Oren	Detailed discussion of the Six Day War.	J
*Revenge	Laura Blumenfeld	After Blumenfeld's father was shot by a Palestinian terrorist in Jerusalem, she went to Israel to meet the shooter	J W
The Greatest Generation	Tom Brokaw	World War II vignettes	W

2000-2002

The Red Tent	Anita Diamant	Biblical stories from Dina's point of view	
Gifts of the Jews	Thomas Carlisle		J
Sotah	Naomi Regen		J
The Jew Store	Stella Suberman		J
*The Physician	Noah Gordon		J
One People Two Worlds		Two rabbis (orthodox, reform) discuss their points of view	J
Turbulent Souls	Stephen Dubner	Son of converts away from Judaism returns to his roots	J
Color of Water	James McBride	Jewish father, black mother, doesn't return to his roots.	W
The Harlot by the Side of the Road	Jonathan Kersch	Subtitled "Forbidden Biblical Stories"	J
The Iron Cage	Rashid Khalidi	Palestinian Struggle for Statehood	J
The Essential Klezmer			J
After a Long Silence	Helen Fremont		
The Thirteenth Hour	Barbara Sofer		
Bintel Briefs		Real "lonely hearts" letters to the Yiddish press, early 20 th c.	J

One Palestine Complete	Tom Segev	Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate	J
*The Inextinguishable Symphony	Martin Goldsmith	Holocaust love story – a violist and a flutist	J
Jew vs. Jew	Samuel Friedman	Why we don't get along	J
The River Midnight	Lilian Nattell	Growing up in a Polish shtetl at the turn of the 20 th century	J
The Search for God at Harvard	Ari Goldman	NY Times reporter returns to school for divinity degree	J
*For the Relief of Unbearable Urges	Nathan Englander	Short Stories	J
Three Cities	Sholem Asch		J
The Ghost of Hannah Mendes	Naomi Regen		J
The Sacrifice of Isaac	Neil Gordon		J
Small Worlds	Alan Hoffman	Novel about Jewish mysticism, the world of the shtetl	J
See Under: Love	David Grossman		J
Old Men at Midnight	Chaim Potok		W
The Chosen	Chaim Potok		J
I Married Wyatt Earp	Josie Marcus	Wyatt Earp's Jewish wife	J

1994-1999

The Professor and the Madman: The making of the OED	Simon Winchester		
The Divine Secret of the Ya Ya Sisterhood	Rebecca Wells		
*Roommates	Max Apple	Story of a grandson and grandfather.	
Welcome to the World Baby Girl	Fannie Flagg		
Our Kind	Lawrence Gordon		
*The Poisonwood Bible	Barbara Kingsolver	Missionary family in Kenya	
The Sparrow	Mary Doria Russell	Jesuits on another planet – very strange, but I kind of like it.	
Yellow Raft in Blue Water	Michael Dories		
The Beekeeper's Apprentice	Laurie R. King		
The Horse Whisperer	Nicholas Evans		
*The Physician	Noah Gordon	Medieval physician	
Children of God	Mary Doria Russell	Sequel to The Sparrow	
*Time After Time	Allen Appel	Revisits the Russian Revolution	

Cold Mountain	Charles Frazier	Civil war story
The Gates of November	Chaim Potek	
The Weight of Water	Anita Shreve	
The Book of Ruth	Jane Hamilton	
Tortilla Curtain	T.C. Boyles	Mexican immigrants in California
The Color of Water	James McBride	Interracial son deals with life
* Moo	Jane Smiley	Set in a Midwest college; things happen
*Snow In August	Peter Hamill	
The Celestine prophecy	James Redfield	Mayans in Peru, the Catholic Church, old Aramaic manuscripts, and more.
Women of the Inner Sea	Thomas Keneally	
Snow Falling on Cedars	David Guterson	Japanese family in Seattle that was interred during WW2
*Ladder of Years	Anne Tyler	Married woman goes off to find her own life
New Passages	Gail Sheehy	Emma Jane Austin
*Tales of the City	Armistead Maupin	Stories of life in San Francisco – great characters.
The Weight of Water	Anita Shreve	
Death in a Tenured Position	Carolyn G.Heilbrun	Campus mystery
The English Patient		
Like Water For Chocolate	Laura Esquivel	
What Johnny Shouldn't Read	Joan Delfattore	Textbook censorship
Object lessons	Anna Quindlan	
The Road of Coorain	Jill Ker Conway	
The Children of Men	P.D. James	
True North	Jill Ker Conway	
*Pigs in Heaven	Barbara Kingsolver	
*The Shipping News	E. Ann Proulx	
Having our Say	Delaney	100 year old sisters
D-Day	Stephen Ambrose	A history
Men are from Mars, Women are From Venus	John Gray	
Animal Dreams	Barbara Kingsolver	

1993 and earlier (women's group)

Composing a Life	Mary Catherine Bateson	Life of the anthropologist
Women and Doctors	John M. Smith	
Brain Surgeon	Lawrence Shainberg	
Before and After??		
*Wild Swans	Jung Chang	3 generations of Chinese women
A Time to Kill	John Grisham	Legal mystery
Meeting at the Crossroads	Lyn Michel Brown	
Fried Green Tomatoes	Fannie Flagg	
What's Bred in the Bone	Robertson Davies	
Disturbance of the Inner Ear		Crazy cellist
Piano Tuner	Daniel Mason	
An Unequal Music	Vikram Seth	Strange violinist & girlfriend
Secret Life of Bees	Sue Monk Kidd	
Boys Will Be Boys: Breaking the Link Between Masculinity and Violence	Miriam Miedzian	
Daughter of Persia	Farmaian	
War Torn		Women journalists writing about Vietnam
Prodigal Summer	Barbara Kingsolver	Forest ranger, not as good as her other books
Bee Season	Myla Goldberg	Kid in spelling bee, strange family
Interpreter of Maladies	Lahiri	Short stories
To the Heart of the Sea	Philbrick	Whaling family
Map of Love	Arab and American cousins	