

RECENTLY READ BOOKS RECOMMENDATIONS

October

1. The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley

The extraordinary story of the charismatic black leader told with “blistering honesty” and his growth from a bitter, self-destructive petty criminal to an articulate political activist who emphasized self-respect and self-help for African-Americans.

2. Harlem Shuffle by Colson Whitehead

“An ingenious story that plays out in a beautifully recreated New York City in the early 1960s. It’s a family saga masquerading as a crime novel, a hilarious morality play, a social novel about race and power, and ultimately a love letter to Harlem”, written by the winner of two recent Pulitzer Prizes.

3. Lethal Passage: The Story of a Gun by Erik Larson

“This devastating book illuminates America’s gun culture—its manufacturers, dealers, buffs, and propagandists—but also offers concrete solutions to our national epidemic of death by firearm.”

4. The Love Songs of W.E.B. Du Bois by Honoree Fanonne Jeffers

In a combination of historical and modern story, the protagonist, in an attempt to come to terms with her own identity, “embarks on a journey through her family’s past, uncovering the shocking tales of generations of ancestors—indigenous, black, and white—in the deep South. In doing so, she must learn to embrace her full heritage, a legacy of oppression and resistance, bondage and independence, cruelty and resilience that is the story—and the song—of America itself.”

5. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave. Written by Himself

The memoir by the impassioned abolitionist, brilliant writer, newspaper editor, eloquent orator, and former slave.

6. The National Dream: The Great Railway 1871-1881 by Pierre Berton

“In 1871, a tiny nation, just four years old—its population well below the 4 million mark—determined that it would build the world’s longest railroad across empty country, much of it unexplored. The decision—bold to the point of recklessness—was to change the lives of every man, woman, and child in Canada and alter the shape of a nation.

7. On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century by Timothy Snyder

A historian of fascism offers a guide to surviving and resisting America’s turn towards authoritarianism. The book is a “call to arms and a guide to resistance, with invaluable ideas for how we can preserve our freedoms in the uncertain years to come.”

8. The Overstory by Richard Powers

Winner of the 2019 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction, this book, is “a sweeping, impassioned work of activism and resistance that is also a stunning evocation of—and paean to—the natural world.” In the framework of writing about trees, the author tells the story of a handful of people who “learn how to see that world and who are drawn up into its unfolding catastrophe.”

9. The Perfect Weapon: War, Sabotage, and Fear in the Cyber Age by David E. Sanger

This book provides the startling inside story of how the rise of cyberweapons transformed geopolitics like nothing since the invention of the atom bomb. “Moving from the White House Situation Room to the dens of Chinese government hackers to the boardrooms of Silicon Valley, the author, a New York Times national security correspondent, reveals a world coming face-to-face with the perils of technological revolution where everyone is a target.”

10. The Puppet Show by M.W. Craven

In this CWA Dagger Award winner from 2019, the mystery involves a disgraced policeman in rural England who teams with a brilliant but naive and socially awkward data analyst to investigate a series of horrific murders in which the victims are tortured before being burned alive. The plot is intricate, the setting comes alive, the characters are interesting, there is unexpected humor, and the unraveling of the story causes the reader to question who the real monster(s) is (are).

11. Remember: The Science of Memory and the Art of Forgetting by Lisa Genova

A fascinating exploration of the intricacies of how we remember, why we forget, and what we can do to protect our memories, written by a Harvard-trained neuroscientist.

12. Shuggie Bain by Douglas Stuart

“An unforgettable story of a sweet and lonely boy who spends his 1980s childhood in run-down public housing in Glasgow, Scotland.” “A heartbreaking story of addiction, sexuality, and love, the book is an epic portrayal of a working-class family that is rarely seen in fiction.

September

1. Black Ice by Brad Thor

On vacation abroad, America’s top spy has to decide whether to return to his job or resign. When his deadly past comes calling, though, he’s got no choice at all. If he succeeds, he’ll walk away with everything, If not, the U. S. and its allies will be at the mercy of one of the world’s most dangerous actors.

2. Blacktop Wasteland by S. A. Cosby

The winner of the 2020 Anthony Award for best hardback mystery book of the year, the New York Times Book Review calls it a “roaring, full-throttle thriller, crackling with tension and charm.” It tells the story of of an honest mechanic, loving husband, and hard-working father whose dire economic circumstances force him to, for one last time, revisit his previous life as the best getaway driver east of the Mississippi

3. 10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World by Elif Shafak

“A moving novel on the power of friendship in our darkest times”, the book follows a young Turkish woman in the pulsating moments after she’s been murdered when she enters a state of heightened awareness as her brain is still active for 10 minutes and 38 seconds. In her death, “the secrets and wonders of modern Istanbul come to life.”

August

1. The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War by Don Doyle

A bold and fascinating account of the international dimensions of America’s defining conflict. The book frames the Civil War as a pivotal moment in a global struggle that would decide the survival of democracy.

2. Dead by Dawn by Paul Doiron

A Maine game warden fights for his life after being attacked following his agreement to investigate a cold case involving a suspicious drowning that was ruled an accident.

3. In Five Years by Rebecca Serle

An ambitious and workaholic New York lawyer falls asleep next to her long-time boyfriend, but wakes up to find out it is five years later in a different apartment and she is lying next to a different man. It is too real to be a dream, but what else could it be? She lives the next five years haunted by the experience and doing everything in her power to keep it from coming true. The book interestingly explores prescience, inevitability, and the impossibility of understanding the context of events despite their unfurling exactly as you have foreseen them.

4. The Lacuna by Barbara Kingsolver

A fascinating story of life in Mexico and the United States in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s through the eyes of a young man torn between two worlds, including his work with Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo.

5. The Last Billable Hour by Susan Wolfe

A humorous and readable mystery involving a young man who has recently joined a successful and cutthroat law firm in Silicon Valley, unappreciated and underestimated, who becomes a key asset to a female detective who is investigating the murder of a partner in the firm found in his office the night of a staff party. The book’s author is a lawyer herself and makes all the machinations and legal situations believable.

6. This Is How They Tell Me the World Ends: The Cyberweapons Arms Race by Nicole Perlroth

The untold story of the cyberweapons market—the most secretive, invisible, government-backed market on earth—and a terrifying first look at a new kind of global warfare.

July

1. Almost a Miracle—John Ferling

Comprehensive and engaging account of the American Revolutionary War. It was voted best book of 2007 by the New York American Revolution Round Table.

2. The Big Book of Espionage: The Most Complete Compendium of Double Agents, Dead Drops and Duplicitous Deeds Ever Collected—Otto Penzler (Editor)

Includes short stories written by Ian Fleming, Eric Ambler, Jeffrey Deaver, Lee Child and many more.

3. Dirt: Adventures in Lyon as Chef, Father, and Sleuth Looking for the Secret of French Cooking—Bill Buford

Beautifully written account of the author's experience in France.

4. Housekeeping—Marianne Robinson

Evocatively written novel of transience, family, and memory. Heavy subject matter treated with a light touch and wonderful writing.

5. The Mountain Sings—Nguyen Phan Que Mai

A sweeping epic of a multigenerational family in North Vietnam, written in beautiful prose.

6. Open Season—Archer Mayor

The first in a series of police crime novels, whose author uses an unassuming voice and down-to-earth style, while displaying a profound understanding of his region (small-town Vermont) and the protagonist's intuitive ability to relate to the people who live there.