Brown Bag Book Review
Wednesday, June 12, 2024
12:00 PM-1:00 PM

Reviewers: Abby, Sarah BV, Lauren H, Lee, Lauren S, Sarah H, Carl, Carly, Emma

Drunk On All Your Strange New Words by Eddie Robson [Abby]
The Book That Wouldn’t Burn by Mark Lawrence [Abby]
Symphony of Secrets by Brendan Slocumb [Abby]
The Abhorsen series by Garth Nix [Sarah BV]
Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands by Kate Beaton [Lauren H]
Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver [Lauren H]
Birthday by Meredith Russo [Lee]
A Very Large Expanse of Sea by Tahereh Mafi [Lee]
Love Letters for Joy by Melissa See [Lee]
Horse Crazy by Sarah Maslin Nir [Lauren S]
Everything’s Fine by Cecilia Rabess [Sarah H]
The Rachel Incident by Caroline O’Donoghue [Sarah H]
Solito by Javier Zamora [Sarah H]
The Oregon Trail: a New American Journey by Rinker Buck [Carl]
Lunar New Year Love Story by Gene Luen Yang [Carly]
North Woods by Daniel Mason [Emma]
Spin by Rebecca Caprara [Emma]
Drunk On All Your Strange New Words by Eddie Robson

A locked room mystery in a near future world of politics and alien diplomacy.

Lydia works as translator for the Logi cultural attaché to Earth. They work well together, even if the act of translating his thoughts into English makes her somewhat wobbly on her feet. She's not the agency's best translator, but what else is she going to do? She has no qualifications, and no discernible talent in any other field.

So, when tragedy strikes, and Lydia finds herself at the center of an intergalactic incident, her future employment prospects look dire—that is, if she can keep herself out of jail!

But Lydia soon discovers that help can appear from the most unexpected source...

[Abby]

The Book That Wouldn’t Burn by Mark Lawrence

A boy has lived his whole life trapped within a vast library, older than empires and larger than cities.

A girl has spent hers in a tiny settlement out on the Dust where nightmares stalk and no one goes.

The world has never even noticed them. That's about to change.

Their stories spiral around each other, across worlds and time. This is a tale of truth and lies and hearts, and the blurring of one into another. A journey on which knowledge erodes certainty, and on which, though the pen may be mightier than the sword, blood will be spilled and cities burned.

[Abby]

Symphony of Secrets by Brendan Slocumb

Bern Hendricks has just received the call of a lifetime. As one of the world’s preeminent experts on the famed twentieth-century composer Frederick Delaney, Bern knows everything there is to know about the man behind the music. When Mallory Roberts, a board member of the distinguished Delaney Foundation and direct descendant of the man himself, asks for Bern's help authenticating a newly discovered piece, which may be his famous lost opera, RED, he jumps at the chance. With the help of his tech-savvy acquaintance Eboni, Bern soon discovers that the truth is far more complicated than history would have them believe.

In 1920s Manhattan, Josephine Reed is living on the streets and frequenting jazz clubs when she meets the struggling musician Fred Delaney. But where young Delaney struggles, Josephine soars. She’s a natural prodigy who hears beautiful music in the sounds of the world around her. With Josephine as his silent partner, Delaney’s career takes off—but who is the real genius here?

In the present day, Bern and Eboni begin to uncover more clues that indicate Delaney may have had help in composing his most successful work. Armed with more questions than answers and caught in
the crosshairs of a powerful organization who will stop at nothing to keep their secret hidden, Bern and Eboni will move heaven and earth in their dogged quest to right history’s wrongs.

[Abby]

The Abhorsen series books 1-3 by Garth Nix

Sabriel- Sent to a boarding school in Ancelstierre as a young child, Sabriel has had little experience with the random power of Free Magic or the Dead who refuse to stay dead in the Old Kingdom. But during her final semester, her father, the Abhorsen, goes missing, and Sabriel knows she must enter the Old Kingdom to find him.

Lirael- Lirael has never felt like a true daughter of the Clayr. Now, two years past the time when she should have received the Sight that is the Clayr's birthright, she feels alone, abandoned, unsure of who she is. Nevertheless, the fate of the Old Kingdom lies in her hands. With only her faithful companion, the Disreputable Dog, Lirael must undertake a desperate mission under the growing shadow of an ancient evil.

Abhorsen- Everything depends upon Lirael. A heavy, perhaps even impossible burden for a young woman who just days ago was merely a Second Assistant Librarian. With only a vision from the Clayr to guide her, and the rather mixed help of her companions, Lirael must search in both Life and Death for some means to defeat the Destroyer. Before it is too late...

[Sarah BV]

Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands by Kate Beaton

Beaton’s natural cartooning prowess is on full display as she draws colossal machinery and mammoth vehicles set against a sublime Albertan backdrop of wildlife, Northern Lights, and Rocky Mountains. Her first full-length graphic narrative, Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands is an untold story of Canada: a country that prides itself on its egalitarian ethos and natural beauty while simultaneously exploiting both the riches of its land and the humanity of its people.

[Lauren H]

Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver

Set in the mountains of southern Appalachia, this is the story of a boy born to a teenaged single mother in a single-wide trailer, with no assets beyond his dead father’s good looks and copper-colored hair, a caustic wit, and a fierce talent for survival. In a plot that never pauses for breath, relayed in his own unsparing voice, he braves the modern perils of foster care, child labor, derelict schools, athletic success, addiction, disastrous loves, and crushing losses. Through all of it, he reckons with his own invisibility in a popular culture where even the superheroes have abandoned rural people in favor of cities.

Many generations ago, Charles Dickens wrote David Copperfield from his experience as a survivor of institutional poverty and its damages to children in his society. Those problems have yet to be solved in ours. Dickens is not a prerequisite for readers of this novel, but he provided its inspiration. In transposing a Victorian epic novel to the contemporary American South, Barbara Kingsolver enlists Dickens' anger and compassion, and above all, his faith in the transformative powers of a good story. Demon Copperhead speaks for a new generation of lost boys, and all those born into beautiful, cursed places they can't imagine leaving behind.

[Lauren H]
Birthday by Meredith Russo

Two kids, Morgan and Eric, are bonded for life after being born on the same day at the same time. We meet them once a year on their shared birthday as they grow and change: as Eric figures out who he is and how he fits into the world, and as Morgan makes the difficult choice to live as her true self. Over the years, they will drift apart, come together, fight, make up, and break up—and ultimately, realize how inextricably they are a part of each other.

[Lee]

A Very Large Expanse of Sea by Tahereh Mafi

It’s 2002, a year after 9/11. It’s an extremely turbulent time politically, but especially so for someone like Shirin, a sixteen-year-old Muslim girl who’s tired of being stereotyped.

Shirin is never surprised by how horrible people can be. She’s tired of the rude stares, the degrading comments - even the physical violence - she endures as a result of her race, her religion, and the hijab she wears every day. So she’s built up protective walls and refuses to let anyone close enough to hurt her. Instead, she drowns her frustrations in music and spends her afternoons break-dancing with her brother.

But then she meets Ocean James. He’s the first person in forever who really seems to want to get to know Shirin. It terrifies her - they seem to come from two irreconcilable worlds - and Shirin has had her guard up for so long that she’s not sure she’ll ever be able to let it down.

[Lee]

Love Letters for Joy by Melissa See

Less than a year away from graduation, seventeen-year-old Joy is too busy overachieving to be worried about relationships. She’s determined to be Caldwell Prep’s first disabled valedictorian. And she only has one person to beat, her academic rival Nathaniel.

But it’s senior year and everyone seems to be obsessed with pairing up. One of her best friends may be developing feelings for her and the other uses Caldwell’s anonymous love-letter writer to snag the girl of her dreams. Joy starts to wonder if she has missed out on a quintessential high school experience. She is asexual, but that’s no reason she can’t experience first love, right?

She writes to Caldwell Cupid to help her sort out these new feelings and, over time, finds herself falling for the mysterious voice behind the letters. But falling in love might mean risking what she wants most, especially when the letter-writer turns out to be the last person she would ever expect.

[Lee]

Horse Crazy by Sarah Maslin Nir

It may surprise you to learn that there are over seven million horses in America—even more than when they were the only means of transportation—and nearly two million horse owners. Acclaimed journalist and avid equestrian Sarah Maslin Nir is one of them; she began riding horses when she was just two years old and hasn’t stopped since. Horse Crazy is a fascinating, funny, and moving love letter to these graceful animals and the people who—like her—are obsessed with them. It is also a coming-of-age story of Nir growing up an outsider within the world’s most elite inner circles, and finding her true north in horses.
Nir takes us into the lesser-known corners of the riding world and profiles some of its most captivating figures. We meet Monty Roberts, the California trainer whose prowess earned him the nickname “the man who listens to horses”; George and Ann Blair, the African-American husband and wife who run a riding academy for inner city youth on a tiny island in the middle of Manhattan’s East River; and Francesca Kelly, a wealthy London socialite whose love for an Indian nobleman shaped her life’s mission: to rescue an endangered Indian breed of horse and bring them—illegally—to America.

Woven into these compelling character studies, Nir shares her own moving personal narrative. She details her father’s harrowing tale of surviving the Holocaust and describes an enchanted but deeply lonely upbringing in Manhattan, where horses became her family. She found them even in the middle of the city, in a stable disguised in an old townhouse and in Central Park, when she chased down truants as an auxiliary mounted patrol officer. And she speaks candidly of how horses have helped her overcome heartbreak and loss.

Infused with heart and wit, and with each chapter named after a horse Nir has loved, Horse Crazy is an unforgettable blend of beautifully written memoir and first-rate reporting.

[Lauren S]

Everything's Fine by Cecilia Rabess

Everything’s Fine is an utterly original and deeply moving take on an age-old question from a dazzling new voice: what have you got to lose when you fall in love?

When Jess first meets Josh at their Ivy League college she dislikes him immediately: an entitled guy in chinos, ready to take over the world. Meanwhile Jess is almost always the only Black woman in their class. And Josh can’t accept that life might be easier for him because he’s white.

After graduating, Jess and Josh end up working together in the same investment bank. As they lunch, spar and pick each other's brains, Jess begins to see Josh in a different light.

Soon, their tempestuous friendship turns into an electrifying romance that shocks them both, and Jess finds herself questioning who she really is and whether she’s willing to compromise that for love.

[Sarah H]

The Rachel Incident by Caroline O'Donoghue

A brilliantly funny novel about friends, lovers, Ireland in chaos, and a young woman desperately trying to manage all three

Rachel is a student working at a bookstore when she meets James, and it’s love at first sight. Effervescent and insistently heterosexual, James soon invites Rachel to be his roommate and the two begin a friendship that changes the course of both their lives forever. Together, they run riot through the streets of Cork city, trying to maintain a bohemian existence while the threat of the financial crash looms before them.

When Rachel falls in love with her married professor, Dr. Fred Byrne, James helps her devise a reading at their local bookstore, with the goal that she might seduce him afterwards. But Fred has other desires. So begins a series of secrets and compromises that intertwine the fates of James, Rachel, Fred, and Fred’s glamorous, well-connected, bourgeois wife. Aching with unrequited love, shot through with delicious, sparkling humor, The Rachel Incident is a triumph.

[Sarah H]
Solito by Javier Zamora

A young poet tells the story of his harrowing migration from El Salvador to the United States at the age of nine in this memoir.

Trip. My parents started using that word about a year ago—"one day, you'll take a trip to be with us. Like an adventure."

Javier's adventure is a three-thousand-mile journey from his small town in El Salvador, through Guatemala and Mexico, and across the U.S. border. He will leave behind his beloved aunt and grandparents to reunite with a mother who left four years ago and a father he barely remembers. Traveling alone except for a group of strangers and a coyote hired to lead them to safety, Javier's trip is supposed to last two short weeks.

At nine years old, all Javier can imagine is rushing into his parents' arms, snuggling in bed between them, living under the same roof again. He does not see the perilous boat trips, relentless desert treks, pointed guns, arrests and deceptions that await him; nor can he know that those two weeks will expand into two life-altering months alongside a group of strangers who will come to encircle him like an unexpected family.

Sarah H

The Oregon Trail: a New American Journey by Rinker Buck

panning 2,000 miles and traversing six states from Missouri to the Pacific Ocean, the Oregon Trail is the route that made America. In the fifteen years before the Civil War, when 400,000 pioneers used it to emigrate West--historians still regard this as the largest land migration of all time--the trail united the coasts, doubled the size of the country, and laid the groundwork for the railroads. The trail years also solidified the American character: our plucky determination in the face of adversity, our impetuous cycle of financial bubbles and busts, the fractious clash of ethnic populations competing for the same jobs and space. Today, amazingly, the trail is all but forgotten.

With "The Oregon Trail "he seeks to bring the most important road in American history back to life. At once a majestic American journey, a significant work of history, and a personal saga reminiscent of bestsellers by Bill Bryson and Cheryl Strayed, the book tells the story of Buck's 2,000-mile expedition across the plains with tremendous humor and heart. He was accompanied by three cantankerous mules, his boisterous brother, Nick, and an "incurably filthy" Jack Russell terrier named Olive Oyl.

Along the way, Buck dodges thunderstorms in Nebraska, chases his runaway mules across miles of Wyoming plains, scouts more than five hundred miles of nearly vanished trail on foot, crosses the Rockies, makes desperate fifty-mile forced marches for water, and repairs so many broken wheels and axels that he nearly reinvents the art of wagon travel itself.

Carl

Lunar New Year Love Story by Gene Luen Yang

Valentina Tran was named after Valentine's Day, which used to be her favorite holiday. But when Val learns the truth behind what happened with her parents and why she's being raised by a single father, she realizes true love is a lie. This is reinforced when she meets the spirit of Saint Valentine, who tells her she and her family are cursed to always be unlucky in love. Val is ready to give into her fate, until one Lunar New Year festival, where a mysterious lion dancer hands her a paper heart, and ZING. Val
becomes determined to change her destiny, prove Saint Valentine wrong, and give her heart to the right person.

Meanwhile, lion dancing is the only thing that has given Jae peace after his dad passed away. It's also what keeps him connected to his father's side of the family. Both Jae and his cousin Leslie notice Val at the Lunar New Year festival, and for some inexplicable reason, Jae hands Val a paper heart. But it's Leslie, with his K-Pop good looks, who starts to date Val. Jae still feels this connection with Val and feels it's somehow tied to how he feels about losing his father.

Both Val and Jae struggle with the spirits who haunt them as they are inextricably brought together in a love story that is satisfying, sweet, and moving.

[Carly]

North Woods by Daniel Mason

A sweeping novel about a single house in the woods of New England, told through the lives of those who inhabit it across the centuries—a daring, moving tale of memory and fate from the Pulitzer Prize finalist and author of The Piano Tuner and The Winter Soldier.

When a pair of young lovers abscend from a Puritan colony, little do they know that their humble cabin in the woods will become home to an extraordinary succession of inhabitants. An English soldier, destined for glory, abandons the battlefields of the New World to devote himself to apples. A pair of spinster twins survive war and famine, only to succumb to envy and desire. A crime reporter unearths a mass grave, but finds the ancient trees refuse to give up their secrets. A lovelorn painter, a conman, a stalking panther, a lusty beetle; as each one confronts the mysteries of the north woods, they come to realize that the dark, raucous, beautiful past is very much alive.

Traversing cycles of history, nature, and even literature, North Woods shows the myriad, magical ways in which we’re connected to our environment and to one another, across time, language and space. Written along with the seasons and divided into the twelve months of the year, it is an unforgettable novel about secrets and fates that asks the timeless how do we live on, even after we’re gone?

[Emma]

Spin by Rebecca Caprara

Sixteen-year-old Arachne is ostracized by all but her family and closest friend, Celandine. Turning to her loom for solace, Arachne learns to weave, finding her voice and her strength through the craft. After the tragic loss of her family, Arachne and Celandine flee to the city of Colophon, where Arachne’s skills are put to the test. Word of her talent spreads quickly, leading to a confrontation with the goddess Athena, who demands that Arachne repent.

But Arachne will not be silenced. She challenges Athena, and a fateful weaving contest ensues, resulting in an exposé of divine misdeeds, a shocking transformation, and unexpected redemption.

[Emma]

Check out all our Brown Bag Book Review Titles on our Goodreads!
https://www.goodreads.com/user/show/133935491-fairport-public-library
You can also get there through our website fairportlibrary.org
Adults>Recommended Reading> Goodreads