

## Elk Grove Multicultural Book Club: Adult's Reading List

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Many of the authors noted below have written several books about a given culture. This list is meant to help readers get started in their multicultural reading and should not be used to exclude any reading of interest.

***Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life and Death in a Mumbai Undercity***, Katherine Boo  
Profiles everyday life in the settlement of Annawadi as experienced by a Muslim teen, an ambitious rural mother, and a young scrap metal thief, illuminating how their efforts to build better lives are challenged by religious, caste, and economic tensions.

***Girl in Translation***, Jean Kwok

When Kimberly Chang and her mother emigrate from Hong Kong to Brooklyn, Kimberly begins a secret double life: exceptional schoolgirl during the day, Chinatown sweatshop worker at night.

***I am Malala***, Malala Yousafzai

When the Taliban took control of the Swat Valley in Pakistan, one girl spoke out. Malala Yousafzai refused to be silenced and fought for her right to an education.

***Our Lady of Alice Bhatti***, Mohammed Hanif

Following in her healer father's footsteps to become a junior nurse in a Karachi hospital, Alice taps inherent talents to bring relief to suffering patients but is hampered by a bureaucratic caste system, religious prejudice and a dangerous police squad.

***A Teaspoon of Earth and Sea***, Dina Nayeri

Collecting forbidden paraphernalia in her fascination with America, young Saba Hafezi of 1980s Iran becomes convinced that her suddenly missing mother and twin sister have departed for America without her, a situation that compels her to envision her twin's Western life throughout subsequent years.

***Running the Rift***, Naomi Benaron

Rwandan runner Jean Patrick Nkuba dreams of winning an Olympic gold medal and uniting his ethnically divided country, only to be driven from everyone he loves when the violence starts, after which he must find a way back to a better life.

***Tehran Moonlight***, Azin Sametipour

Vividly set in a country where women have no voice, one woman's fight for love and her own identity result in unimaginable consequences.

***The Bathing Women***, Tie Ning

The Bathing Women follows the lives of four women: Tiao, a children's book editor; Fan, her sister, who thinks escaping to America might solve her problems; Fei, a hedonistic and self-destructive young woman; and Youyou, a chef from childhood during the Cultural Revolution to adulthood in the new market economy.

***We the People***, Elizabeth Pinkerton

This is the story of Mary Tsukamoto. She was born in San Francisco, but spent most of her life in Florin, California. She worked in the strawberry fields and grape vineyards and was able to attend the College of the Pacific (now UOP). In 1942, all Japanese Americans in California were removed from their homes and sent to internment camps. The Tsukamotos were sent to Jerome, Arkansas. When the war was over, Mary and Al Tsukamoto returned to Florin. Mary was one of the first Japanese Americans to teach in local schools. Her story was featured in the Smithsonian exhibit on the internment, "And Justice for All" in Washington DC from 1987-2005.

**[American Dervish](#)**, Ayad Akhtar

A young Pakistani boy, whose parents left the fundamentalists behind when they came to America, finds transformation and a path to happiness through a family friend, Mina, who shows him the beauty and power of the Quran.

**[The Buddha in the Attic](#)**, Julie Otsuka

Presents the stories of six Japanese mail-order brides whose new lives in early twentieth-century San Francisco are marked by backbreaking migrant work, cultural struggles, children who reject their heritage, and the prospect of wartime internment.

**[The Barbarian Nurseries](#)**, Hector Tobar

After the husband and wife that she works for disappear, live-in maid Araceli takes their two boys on a journey through sprawling Los Angeles to locate their grandfather.

**[The Twelve Tribes of Hattie](#)**, Ayana Mathis

A debut of extraordinary distinction: Ayana Mathis tells the story of the children of the Great Migration through the trials of one unforgettable family.

**[The Invisible Mountain](#)**, Carolina De Robertis

An intergenerational novel which examines the intertwined fates of twentieth century Uruguay and three women from the same family who are searching for love and authenticity in their lives.

**[Silver Sparrow](#)**, Tayari Jones

In 1980s Atlanta, two teenage girls become friends, with only one knowing that they are in fact both daughters of the same bigamist father, and as their friendship develops their father's secret begins to unravel.

**[Memoires of a Geisha](#)**, Arthur Golden

Nitta Sayuri tells the story of her life as a geisha. It begins in a poor fishing village in 1929, when, as a nine-year-old girl with unusual blue-gray eyes, she is taken from her home and sold into slavery to a renowned geisha house. We witness her transformation as she learns the rigorous arts of the geisha: dance and music; wearing kimono, elaborate makeup, and hair; pouring sake to reveal just a touch of inner wrist; competing with a jealous rival for men's solicitude and the money that goes with it.

It is a unique and triumphant work of fiction—at once romantic, erotic, suspenseful—and completely unforgettable.

**[The Kite Runner](#)**, Khaled Hosseini

The unforgettable, heartbreaking story of the unlikely friendship between a wealthy boy and the son of his father's servant, *The Kite Runner* is a beautifully crafted novel set in a country that is in the process of being destroyed. It is about the power of reading, the price of betrayal, and the possibility of redemption; and an exploration of the power of fathers over sons—their love, their sacrifices, their lies.

A sweeping story of family, love, and friendship told against the devastating backdrop of the history of Afghanistan over the last thirty years.

**[The Color of Water](#)**, James McBride

Who is Ruth McBride Jordan? A self-declared "light-skinned" woman evasive about her ethnicity, yet steadfast in her love for her twelve black children. James McBride, journalist, musician, and son, explores his mother's past, as well as his own upbringing and heritage, in a poignant and powerful debut.

**Angela's Ashes**, Frank McCourt

*"When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I managed to survive at all. It was, of course, a miserable childhood. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood."*

So begins Frank McCourt's memoir. Frank's mother, Angela, has no money to feed the children since Frank's father, Malachy, rarely works, and when he does he drinks his wages. Yet Malachy does nurture in Frank an appetite a story.

Perhaps story accounts for Frank's survival through poverty, near-starvation and the casual cruelty of relatives and neighbors—yet lives to tell his tale with eloquence, exuberance, and remarkable forgiveness.

**History Happened Here**, Elizabeth Pinkerton

Moving stories of Elk Grove, Sloughhouse, Sheldon, Franklin, Florin, Wilton, Laguna Creek, and other places in south Sacramento County, California.

**When We Were Colored**, Eva Rutland

Recounting the civil rights era from the perspective of an African American wife and mother, this memoir travels from growing up in the segregated South before World War II to postwar family life in California.

Told with humor and homespun wisdom, this is the story of an ordinary woman living through extraordinary times. Through the bad and the good, this account shows a family and the people they encounter—black and white—stumbling toward a more equal and just America.

**How to Be a Chicana Role Model**, Michelle Serros

How to be a Chicana Role Model is the fiercely funny tale of a Chicana writer who's trying to find a way to embrace two very different cultures--without losing touch with who she is.

**Chicana Falsa**, Michelle Serros

From the white boy who transforms himself into a full-fledged Chicano, to the self-assured woman who effortlessly terrorizes her Anglo boss, to the junior-high friend who berated her "sloppy Spanish" and accused her of being a "Chicana Falsa," the people and places that Michele Serros brings to vivid life in this collection of poems and stories introduce a unique new viewpoint to the American literary landscape.

Witty, tender, irreverent, and emotionally honest, her words speak to the painful and hilarious identity crises particular to the coming of age of an adolescent caught between two cultures.

**Snowflower and the Secret Fan**, Lisa See

*Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* is a captivating journey back to an era of Chinese history. In 19th century China, in a remote Hunan county, 7 year old Lily, is paired with a laotong, an "old same". The laotong, Snow Flower, introduces herself by sending Lily a silk fan on which she's written a poem in nu shu, a unique language that Chinese women created in order to communicate in secret, away from the influence of men.

As the years pass, Lily and Snow Flower send messages on the fan and compose stories on handkerchiefs, reaching out of isolation to share their hopes, dreams, and accomplishments. Together they endure the agony of footbinding and reflect upon their arranged marriages, their loneliness, and the joys and tragedies of motherhood. The two find solace in their friendship, developing a bond that keeps their spirits alive. But when a misunderstanding arises, their relationship suddenly threatens to tear apart.

***Shanghai Girls***, Lisa See

In 1937 Shanghai—the Paris of Asia—21 year-old Pearl Chin and her younger sister, May, are beautiful, sophisticated, and well-educated, but their family is on the verge of bankruptcy. Hoping to improve their social standing, May and Pearl's parents arrange for their daughters to marry "Gold Mountain men" who have come from Los Angeles to find brides. But when the sisters leave China and arrive at Angel Island (the Ellis Island of the West)--where they are detained, interrogated, and humiliated for months--they feel the harsh reality of leaving home. And when May discovers she's pregnant the situation becomes even more desperate. The sisters make a pact that no one can ever know.

A novel about two sisters, two cultures, and the struggle to find a new life in America while bound to the old, *Shanghai Girls* is a fresh, fascinating adventure.

***Dreams of Joy***, Lisa See

Joy runs away to Shanghai in early 1957. She throws herself into the New Society of Red China, heedless of the dangers in the Communist regime.

Devastated by Joy's flight and terrified for her safety, Pearl is determined to save her daughter. From the crowded city to remote villages, Pearl confronts old demons and almost insurmountable challenges as she follows Joy, hoping for reconciliation.

***The Bonesetter's Daughter***, Amy Tan

At the beginning of Amy Tan's fourth novel, two packets of papers written in Chinese calligraphy fall into the hands of Ruth Young. One bundle is titled *Things I Know Are True* and the other, *Things I Must Not Forget*.

The author? That would be the protagonist's mother, LuLing, who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. In these documents the elderly matriarch, born in China in 1916, has set down a record of her birth and family history, determined to keep the facts from vanishing as her mind deteriorates.

The central portion of *The Bonesetter's Daughter* takes place in China in the remote, mountainous region where anthropologists discovered Peking Man in the 1920s. Here superstition and tradition rule over a succession of tiny villages.

***Night***, Eli Weisel

In Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night*, a scholarly, pious teenager is wracked with guilt at having survived the horror of the Holocaust and the genocidal campaign that consumed his family.

His memories of the nightmare world of the death camps present him with an intolerable question: how can the God he once so fervently believed in have allowed these monstrous events to occur?

There are no easy answers in this harrowing book, which probes life's essential riddles with the lucid anguish only great literature achieves. It marks the crucial first step in Wiesel's lifelong project to bear witness for those who died.

For more information about Teen and Children's reading lists visit:

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