Fiction

The Sweetness at the Bottom of the Pie – first title in the Flavia deLuce series by Alan Bradley: Picture an ancient country house somewhere in England. The year is 1950. Picture a girl who lives there with her most eccentric family. Her name is Flavia deLuce and she is almost 11. Picture a long-abandoned chemistry laboratory; no one ever goes there but Flavia. Put them all together and you have a deliciously original approach to detective fiction. Sandi’s pick

Still Life – first title in the Chief Inspector Armand Gamache Series by Louise Penny: Gamache digs beneath the idyllic surface of village life in Three Pines, Quebec, finding long buried secrets. He probes for emotional truth as well as for facts as he works to solve murders. Penny does a superb job of creating a world of rich characters along with mouth-watering descriptions of French cuisine. These are great to listen to on audio to help with pronunciation of the French words. Sandi’s pick

Saving Cee Cee Honeycut by Beth Hoffman (audio book): Steel Magnolias meets The Help in this Southern debut novel sparkling with humor, heart and feminine wisdom. Laugh-out-loud funny, Hoffman’s charming work offers the story of a young girl who loses one mother and finds many others. Not the typical book I would listen to, but a good story and good narrator. Audrey’s pick

Where’d You Go, Bernadette by Maria Semple: This fresh, funny, novel is absolutely delightful. Told in epistolary style using 21st century forms (emails, text messages, etc), readers immediately fall for the whole family – Bernadette (Mom, genius architect), Elgie(Dad, Microsoft guru), and Bee(daughter, budding flutist and brilliant eighth grader) as they deal with Bee’s request to go to Antarctica over Christmas break. This sets in motion one improbable (but still believable) event after another, culminating in Bernadette’s disappearance. Judith’s pick

Out of Warranty by Haywood Smith: Light, sweet, but sassy novel about two late middle-aged people who meet in a doctor’s office because they have the same rare disease – chronic fungal arthritis. One a widow, the other a divorced, retired college English professor, they become friends. Short chapters, written from both his and her point of view, make this a fast, entertaining read. Judith’s pick

Thirteenth Tale by Diane Setterfield: A gothic ghost story reminiscent of Bronte’s Jane Eyre and DuMaurier’s Rebecca, involves two heroines, secrets, writers and books. Engaging plot, interesting characters, and seamless, flowing narrative make for great storytelling. Davonne’s pick

Moonrise Kingdom (DVD): Set on an island off the coast of New England in the summer of 1965, Moonrise Kingdom tells the story of two twelve-year-olds who fall in love, make a secret pact, and run away together into the wilderness. This wryly humorous story, set in the 1960s and told in bright colors and funky music, exhibits a “Peter Pan” quality. The movie is nominated for a Golden Globe and an Academy Award. Davonne’s pick
Beasts of the Southern Wild (DVD): Excellent acting & cinematography. Many of the people involved were first time actors and/or film makers. The special effects are wonderful and done the old-fashioned way, without the use of computers (CGI) or digital technology. The story is a fantastic mix of realistic situations and the lore of the American south. This was a grass-roots film making project and the results were more original and impressive than a Hollywood production. Child actress, Quvenzhane Wallis, nominated for Oscar best actress. Amy’s pick

Les Miserables by Victor Hugo: If you haven’t read this classic piece of French literature, it’s time to dive in. It’s a brilliant look at the different classes of people in France in the 1800’s. Much like the title suggests, this book is about human suffering. Not just the suffering of the poor, but the suffering of the upper and emerging middle classes. It really makes you think about the things you have and the desire you have within you to achieve more; acquire more. There is another layer to the story, and that is a great lesson in the value of mercy and forgiveness (and is much more in-depth than any of the movies), as you see this policeman obsessed with catching a ‘criminal’ who is no longer even a threat to society and has, in fact, done great good for the less fortunate over his lifetime. There are many other lessons and ongoing storylines in this tome of epic proportions. This is a long book; allow lots of time; it’s well worth it. Amy’s pick

A Working Theory of Love by Scott Hutchins: Highly entertaining, this author’s debut novel focuses on the adventures of a recently divorced man trying to negotiate the 30-something singles life in San Francisco. Complicating his life, is his work in artificial intelligence inputting his father’s diary into a computer which has started to respond like a human. This often humorous book questions everything from the meaning of life to the role of a new women he meets. Susan’s pick

The Unfinished Garden by Barbara Claypole White: James Nealy is haunted by irrational fears and inescapable compulsions. A successful software developer, he's thrown himself into a new goal: he'll confront his darkest fears and build something beautiful - a garden. When he meets Tilly Silverberg, he knows she holds the key...even if she doesn’t think so. After her husband’s death, gardening became Tilly's livelihood and her salvation. Her thriving North Carolina business and her young son, Isaac, are the excuses she needs to hide from the world. So when oddly attractive, incredibly tenacious James demands that she take him on as a client, her answer is a flat no. When a family emergency lures Tilly back to England, she’s secretly glad. With Isaac in tow, she retreats to her childhood village, which has always stayed obligingly the same, until now. Her best friend is keeping secrets. Her mother is plotting. Her first love is unexpectedly, temptingly available. And then James appears on her doorstep. This book falls squarely into the chick lit/romance genre, but the well-developed characters, each with their own secrets and struggles, add a unique and appealing dimension to this novel. For someone looking for a heartwarming escapist read (as I admit I sometimes am), this is the perfect book. –Beth’s pick
Non-Fiction:

**Extra Virginity: The Sublime and Scandalous World of Olive Oil by Tom Mueller**: Everything that you want and did not want to know about olive oil. Extra-Virginity is an explosive story of oil fraud – a story of globalization, deception, and crime in the food industry from ancient times to the present – but it’s also an inspiring account of the artisanal producers, food activists, chemists, and chefs who are defending the extraordinary oils that truly deserve the name “extra virgin”. **Sandi’s pick**

**The Price of Inequality: How today’s Divided Society Endangers our Future by Joseph E. Stiglitz**: Winner of the Nobel prize in Economics, Stiglitz has penned a tremendous book that is very readable and details an agenda to create a more dynamic economy and a freer and more equal society. His plan involves a “comprehensive attack” by doing such things as ending corporate welfare, government giveaways, tax reform, improving access to education, encouraging ordinary Americans to save, instituting national health care, strengthening social protection programs, correcting trade imbalances, to name a few. He says repeatedly that his long term economic reform agenda will not completely eliminate the power of the one percent who hold all the wealth, but if the ninety-nine insist, it could “offer the prospect of a new era – for our economy, our politics, and our society.”(p. 286) **Judith’s pick**

**The Things That Matter by Nate Berkus**: Decorator, Talk Show Host, Makeover Maven - this book by Nate Berkus is filled with gorgeous photos of his signature rooms primarily comprised of black and white color schemes with earhtone accents. Berkus’s writing is candid, funny, and wonderfully descriptive. The photos seem to do his work justice, with many close-ups of pieces that are quirky and unique. In addition to a wonderful trip down the lane explaining Nate’s evolution as a decorator, the book is organized in chapters of a dozen clients, with interesting discussion of the challenges, and process he went through to create their spaces, using “the things that matter” to each individual. While a gorgeous “coffee table book”, this is worth reading as well. **Judith’s pick**

**Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Talking by Susan Cain**: A fascinating and well-researched study of introversion, how our society (the United States) favors extroversion. and an explanation of why the world needs both personality types. The book won numerous “Best Book” awards for 2012. The author provides an excellent overview of the book in a 20-minute TED Talk at [http://www.ted.com/talks/susan_cain_the_power_of_introverts.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/susan_cain_the_power_of_introverts.html) **Davonne’s pick**

**Bend, not Break: a Life in Two Worlds by Ping Fu**: China's Cultural Revolution brought about the displacement of thousands of children of merchants, bankers, college professors, and others. In 1966, at age eight, Ping Fu was seized from wealthy relatives and suffered savage treatment and deprivation for years. Later, while attending college, she interviewed mothers about the killing of thousands of female babies and created what was considered subversive literature. For this she was eventually deported from her native land to America, where she arrived with only a few dollars, very little English, and a strong will to survive. In 1988, she graduated with a degree in computer science from the University of California at San Diego and worked on the team that created NCSA Mosaic, later known as the Netscape Web browser. Next, Ping and her husband founded Geomagic, a 3D software company, which has counted Mattel and Boeing as its clients. This inspiring tale of courage, compassion, and undaunted curiosity reveals the life of a genuine hero who remains committed to making the world a better place. **Beth’s pick**
The Best Care Possible A physician’s quest to transform care through the end of life.
by Ira Byock, MD: “At a time when a long life can become a curse as readily as a blessing, this lucid and compassionate book points the way to more humane treatment of a life’s last days” Rabbi Harold Kushner’s statement precisely sums up this book. In addition, Dr. Byock lays out compelling rationale for Medicare and Medicaid reform. We must delve into this discussion as a society, as we are fast approaching the time, when the need will be greater than our ability to supply.
Judith’s pick

The Party is Over: How Republicans went crazy, Democrats became useless, and the Middle Class got shafted by Mike Lofgren This is a short book, but it’s long on good analysis from a man who spent twenty-eight years working in Congress, the last sixteen as a senior analyst on the House and Senate Budget committees. He left government service in 2011, and this book is an expansion of ideas that he first penned in an article for Truthout.com, “Goodbye to All That: Reflections of a GOP Operative Who Left the Cult.” He calls for lots of reform, but the one that appeals to me most is his plan for election reform. Judith’s pick

Working with Worms: the complete guide to using the gardener’s best friend for organic gardening and composting by Wendy Vincent: A book about worms! Who’d have thought… However, this IS an excellent and interesting guide to composting in general, as well as detailed descriptions of composting with worms. “Vermicomposting – the process of using worms to decompose organic waste and turn it into natural fertilizer” (p. 53) – seems like it has plenty of benefits worth considering. Judith’s pick