Fiction

The Color Master: Stories by Aimee Bender: Aimee Bender’s writing style is very unique; it is commonly called “magical realism.” I would describe her writing as imaginative, quirky, exciting, and intelligent. In these deeply resonant stories, we see ourselves reflected as if in a funhouse mirror. This collection of stories is evocative, funny, beautiful, and sad. Sarah’s pick

The Dogs of Christmas by Bruce Cameron: A cute holiday novel that had me tearing up a tad. The Dogs of Christmas is a "tail" of a non-dog owner turning into a dog lover and advocate. Set in a mountain town in Colorado, Lucy the dog is dropped off in the driveway of Josh the human. Josh becomes instantly responsible for not one, but 6 dogs! Lucy has pups, but there's something different about this litter and you will have to read this "tail" to find out just what it is. This was a warm, fun read; a great book to sit in front of the fire while sipping coffee. Rebecca’s pick

Duke of Midnight by Elizabeth Hoyt: Romance fans should pick up on Hoyt, if you haven’t already discovered this regency romance writer. Duke of Midnight is set in 18th century England. The story has complexity, and the hero and heroine are intriguing characters. There’s plenty of action. I picked this up not knowing it was book six of the "Maiden Lane Series”, and didn’t feel I had missed out on anything. Entertaining. Judith’s pick

How the Light Gets In by Louise Penny: Fans of the Inspector Gamache Three Pines mysteries will not be disappointed with Penny’s latest endeavor. She very skillfully melds three mysteries, two of them interconnected, and one that is used as a metaphor for the other two. Gamache is working on them simultaneously. What I love about these characters is that the good guys, while flawed, have the greater good of their families, their work place, the society as the focus of their lives. It’s so refreshing. Congress should take lessons. I listened to it on audio. Narrator Ralph Cosham is excellent. Judith’s pick

Longbourn by Jo Baker: Lacking the army of servants that make life reasonable for them in a place like Darcy’s Pemberley, the folks who inhabit Longbourn’s “downstairs” are even more interesting. Their 18 hour workdays are full of a variety of chores, all of them hard, and often disgusting. This is a view never mentioned in the Longbourn of Austin’s Pride and Prejudice. Baker has excellently imagined a group of characters that are realistic and interesting. We learn the secrets of Mrs. Hill, Mister Bennett, and the mysterious footman, James, who slowly becomes the love interest of the maid and narrator, Sarah. For those who enjoy historical fiction this is a powerful read, even if you’re not an Austin fan. Judith’s pick

The Ocean at the End of the Lane by Neil Gaiman: This is a very unique book. There’s plenty of magic and mystery. The prose is fluid and poetic which is fitting for a book set in a seaside mansion. The story has complexity, and the hero and heroine are intriguing characters. The writing is so fluid that it seems to be reflecting as if in a funhouse mirror. This collection of stories is evocative, funny, beautiful, and sad. Sarah’s pick

The Land of Unlikeness by Davonne Powell: Two novellas set in rural Michigan, the first entitled The Land of Unlikeness and the second, The River Swimmer. The first story’s character Clive, an aging art professor, struggles with his sense of self as he faces the prospects of retirement and considers his failures as an artist, while revisiting his boyhood home in rural Michigan. The River Swimmer explores the coming of age experiences/adventures of Thad, a 17 year-old young man who loves swimming in just about any body of water remotely conceivable, especially rivers. Although periodically it was difficult for me to relate to the characters, I did appreciate the Michigan connection and the premise of plunging into nature and experiencing spiritual healing. Davonne’s pick

A Week in Winter by Maeve Binchy: A book that seems written for a snowy afternoon in front of the fireplace, perhaps with a cat on your lap. Published posthumously, this novel radiates the warmth and charm the author was known for, and seems a fitting tribute to her beloved Ireland. After living 20 years in America and pretending she's been widowed by an American husband she never actually married, Chicky Starr returns to her hometown of Stoneybridge to turn an elderly spinster's run-down cliff-side mansion into an inn. Binchy weaves together the lives of her characters in a way that their narratives overlap and intersect even before they meet one another during their stay at Stone House. A delightful book by a much loved writer. Beth’s Pick
**The Weird Sisters** by Eleanor Brown centers on the Andreas sisters, Rosalind, Bianca, and Cordelia, who were named by their father, a Shakespeare professor at a small college in Ohio. Ros, the oldest, stays close to home following her father into academia. Bean, the middle child, leaves for an exciting life in New York City. Cordy, the youngest, drifts across the country. Life isn't turning out to be what the sisters expected, so each decides to return home, ostensibly to help their parents through their mother’s cancer treatment. But each of the sisters is facing a personal crisis as well, and I enjoyed reading about how they were able to open up to each other and find the support they needed. *Beth’s Pick*

**Wonder** by RJ Palacio. *Wonder*, as was noted in several reviews, is itself a wonder -- well-written with interesting and believable characters. The main character and narrator, 10-year-old August Pullman, who has a rare facial deformity, was previously home-schooled and attends public school for the first time in 5th grade. Auggie experiences a wide range of reactions -- kindnesses and cruelties -- from classmates, teachers, and others in the school system. Supported by a thoughtful, loving family, he impacts the world of everyone he encounters. *Davonne’s pick*

**Non-Fiction**

*Animals Make Us Human: Creating the Best Life for Animals* by Temple Grandin 636.083: Gran The author dispels common misconceptions about the behaviors of different types of animals, completely changing my ideas of the animal world and how humans interact with animals, and animals with each other. Grandin is a keen observer of animal (and human) behavior, and a great advocate for exercising thoughtful compassion for all living creatures. The story of the author, who is autistic, is well-executed in the DVD movie *Temple Grandin*. *Davonne's pick*

**Hyperbole and a Half: Unfortunate Situations, Flawed Coping Mechanisms, Mayhem, and Other Things That Happened** by Allie Brosh: Every time Allie Brosh posts something new on her blog *Hyperbole and a Half*, I read it the first chance I get. Needless to say, I was looking forward to her first book. It features new content, as well as classics from the website. This book is touching, absurd, and darkly comic. Brosh has a unique voice, leaping wit, and an ability to capture complex emotions with her illustrations. Brosh's artwork may look simple, but her comics are anything but. *Sarah’s pick*

**Sister Mother Husband Dog, (etc.)** by Delia Ephron: Who knew Nora Ephron wrote many of her screen plays in collaboration with her sister? I didn’t. But turns out Delia Ephron has had as successful a writing career as her more famous older sister. They collaborated on many projects, including *Sleepless in Seattle* and *You’ve Got Mail*. With a polished ironic tone that is delightful, Ephron mines the complex relationships between sisters, in addition to the subjects of loss, artistic collaboration, and the tough world of screenplay writing in a series of short essays that are very engaging. *Judith’s pick*

**Wretched Writing: A Compendium of Crimes Against the English Language** by Ross Petras and Kathryn Petras: A celebration of the worst writing imaginable, *Wretched Writing* includes inadvertently filthy book titles, ridiculously overwrought passages from novels, bombastic and confusing speeches, moronic oxymorons, hyperactive hyperbole, horribly inappropriate imagery, mangled clichés, muddled metaphors, and unintended double entendres. I found this book to be rather amusing. At times, I even suffered from loud outbursts of laughter. *Sarah’s pick*

**Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth** by Reza Aslan. 232.901 Asla -- An intriguing and well-researched look at the life and world of the historical Jesus. The author challenges the image of Jesus as the peaceful, turn-the-other-cheek, true son of God often depicted in modern Christianity, and portrays a Jesus who was immersed in Jewish culture and rebellious against Roman authority. Also of interest is an overview about the shaping of the Christian church, and a concise introduction to the history of early Palestine. *Davonne's pick*