**Fiction:**

**The Bees by Laline Paull** – Admirably imaginative and a bit reminiscent of *Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, the book is written from the perspective of Flora 717, a bee sanitation worker in her orchard bee hive; she is a member of the lowest caste where work and sacrifice, as well as deference to the Queen are essential. But Flora is different; she acquires skills and attributes outside of her caste, as well as the courage to rebel against the traditional, ingrained system in order for the bee colony to survive. *Davonne's pick*

**Calling Me Home by Julie Kibler:** I was grabbed from the first few pages into a compelling world of forbidden love and unusual friendships. Ninety-year-old Miss Isabelle enlists her hairdresser to drive her from East Texas to Cincinnati, Ohio to a funeral. As they traverse the miles, she reveals her youthful secret. Dorrie has her own crisis, and thankfully, she is helped by the older woman’s experience. This is an insightful look at race relations from WWII to the present. While we have come a long way from Miss Isabelle’s Kentucky in 1939, there is still work for all of us to do. Kibler’s debut novel is cleverly plotted with plenty of surprises along the way to keep the reader thoroughly engaged. *Judith’s pick.*

**Dreams of Joy by Linda See** – In another work of historical fiction, the author continues the epic story which began with *Shanghai Girls.* Abandoning her family and their wishes, Joy flees Los Angeles in 1957 to plunge into the uncertainties of Mao’s New China. Fearing for her daughter’s safety and longing to bring her home, Pearl follows Joy; but as they reunite, political, social and personal events overtake them and they must struggle to survive. Like its predecessors, See’s *Dreams of Joy* combines compelling characters caught up in historical turmoil, along with a fascinating glimpse into Chinese culture. *Davonne’s pick*

**The Monsters of Templeton by Lauren Groff:** I wouldn’t have thought of this as a typical “feel-good” book, but every time I think of it I find myself smiling. Willie Upton’s life is falling apart after a disastrous affair with her married archaeology professor, so she goes home to Templeton only to find that her former-hippie mom had lied to her about the identity of her father. Her search through ancestral documents turns up some wild and crazy skeletons in the family closet. Connections to her best friend, Clarissa in San Francisco, old high school pal, Zeke, a group of runners, and hippie-turned-born-again-Baptist Vivienne, keep the story alive and anchored in the present day. The entire narrative is followed by an endearing ghost, while our monster, “Glimmey”, pops her head up often enough for us to know that this is definitely not a horror story. *Julie’s pick*

**Shotgun Lovesongs by Nickolas Butler, 2014:** This beautifully written story of the friendship of four young men coming of age is absorbing and touching. Set in a small town in Wisconsin, we learn about the boys as they reach adulthood and become adults. Each friend has his own story and each is part of a shared story. Each has ties that bind him to his hometown and dreams that take him away. This book made me think about community and the kind of place we all wish would welcome us home in America. The audio version is well cast and a joy to listen to. –*Linda’s pick* Achingly beautiful prose. Stunning depiction of male friendship. *Judith’s pick, too.*
Silkworm by Robert Galbraith: Second in the Cormoran Strike series, Silkworm does not disappoint. In fact, it is even better than the first – Cuckoo’s Calling. The pace is better – chapters are shorter in spots, and the character development continues excellently. Strike is called on to find a missing person – a husband who has been gone for ten days when his wife finally seeks help. The unraveling of this request leads to his discovering the man murdered in a horrific way, and then the mission changes into finding the murderer. Galbraith, aka J.K. Rowling, is on a roll now with this genre; she has wonderful characters in Cormoran Strike, and his sidekick Robin. I read Cuckoo’s Calling when I heard that Silkworm was going to be published; I’d recommend reading them in order. Judith’s pick

Stone Mattress by Margaret Atwood -- I find much of Atwood's fiction and all of her short story collections -- such as Cat’s Eye, Wilderness Tips, Good Bones -- irreverent and engaging. Atwood's new short story collection, Stone Mattress, continues this tradition as Atwood uses clear-eyed wit to dissect life, death, aging and the interactions between women and men on this stone mattress we call earth. Davonne's pick

A Visit from the Goon Squad by Jennifer Egan: This is a book about memory and kinship, time and narrative, continuity and disconnection, in which relationships shift and recombine. Egan has created a network of characters and places that is both as solid and as open ended as life itself. It is written as a series of chapters featuring interlocking characters at different points in their lives. Each chapter has a unique voice and mood. The individual voices combine to a create a wonderful whole. This book is difficult to summarize but it is delightful to read. Sarah’s pick

Non-Fiction:

Sh*t My Dad Says by Justin Halpern: If you are offended by profanity, don’t read this book. However, if you are ready for several hearty laughs, and constant smiling as you read, check it out, or better yet download the audio version from Up North Digital Collection, and listen to it. Read by voice actor, Sean Schemmel, Sam Halpern, the dad, comes alive for you. Parental advice has never been truer or uttered more straightforwardly. Justin Halpern, the son, weaves a brilliantly funny, touching coming-of-age memoir around the best of his father’s “pearls of wisdom”. Judith’s pick

Smoke Gets in Your Eyes & Other Lessons from the Crematory by Caitlin Doughty
This memoir is heartfelt, self-deprecating, and ironic. Doughty's writing style makes this otherwise taboo topic both approachable and interesting. Doughty argues that our fear of dying warps our culture and society, and she calls for better ways of dealing with death (and our dead). Sarah’s pick

Tipping Sacred Cows: The Uplifting Story of Spilt Milk and Finding Your Own Spiritual Path in a Hectic Crazy World...by Betsy Chasse: Betsy spills a lot of milk...most of it right in your lap. She doesn’t stop there, it gets everywhere... This book could scare you. I mean who likes a mess to clean up. The “milk” comes in many flavors - the clutter in your life, the constant chatter of ego, spiritual collisions, lies, divorce, love, self-loathing, personal growth, self-image, laziness, success, failure - like I said, a lot of milk is spilt. The tool she shares to help with the cleanup is “detachment”—which is the “rag” that you can start cleaning up the mess with, which leads to the life you’re capable of living! The masks, disguises...and “sacred cows” you’ve been holding on to …feeding all your life... fall away. You then can see spirituality and reality (one in the same) make up an infinite pasture of grace and connectedness that is this life...this universe...everything. Betsy was behind the movie “What the “Bleep” Do We Know?” which tipped a few of my “sacred cows” over...this book continues that journey helping to move the cattle herd out of the way of life’s gift of the present - the now, not the cow. Dwain’s pick

Unretirement: How Baby Boomers Are Changing The Way We think About Work, Community, and the Good Life by Chris Farrell: Being part of this generation, and now at the age my parents had retired, I find myself feeling the need to throw out that old vision, for both financial and intellectual reasons. This is the book for those of us dealing with the issue of redefining what the decade of our sixties will look like. In addition, Farrell has unearthed some great research to debunk many of our fears about there being no more Social Security for Millennials and that Babyboomers who keep working are stealing jobs from the younger generation. He puts things in a fine perspective valuable for both Millenial and Boomer readers. Judith’s Pick

A Wolf Called Romeo by Nick Jans: This is the remarkable story of a wolf who returned again and again to interact with the people and dogs of Juneau, Alaska, living on the edges of their community, engaging in an improbable, awe-inspiring interspecies dance. This big black wolf became the friend of humans and dogs who in turn, served as his pack. He was not a menace, but unfortunately, he became famous. For six years he offered himself, freely, and helped increase our understanding of wolves (a long misunderstood species) until a loathsome poacher’s bullet ended his life. Fascinating account of life in Alaska, and the debate about the value of wolves. Judith’s pick.