

CUMCFB BOOK CLUB SELECTIONS for 2023-24

September 21-M & 26-E

The Prayer Box by Lisa Wingate — 4.6 stars, 400 pages. (Book 1 of 3 - A Carolina Chronicles) (Book 2-The Story Keeper and Book 3-The Sea Keeper's Daughters)

When Iola Anne Poole, an old-timer on Hatteras Island, passes away in her bed at ninety-one, the struggling young mother in her rental cottage, Tandi Jo Reese, finds herself charged with the task of cleaning out Iola's rambling Victorian house.

Running from a messy, dangerous past, Tandi never expects to find more than a temporary hiding place within Iola's walls, but everything changes with the discovery of eighty-one carefully decorated prayer boxes, one for each year, spanning from Iola's youth to her last days. Hidden in the boxes is the story of a lifetime, written on random bits of paper--the hopes and wishes, fears and thoughts of an unassuming but complex woman passing through the seasons of an extraordinary, unsung life filled with journeys of faith, observations on love, and one final lesson that could change everything.

October 19 &-M 24-E

Lessons in Chemistry by Bonnie Garmus – 4.6 stars, 400 pages

Chemist Elizabeth Zott is not your average woman. In fact, Elizabeth Zott would be the first to point out that there is no such thing as an average woman. But it's the early 1960s and her all-male team at Hastings Research Institute takes a very unscientific view of equality. Except for one: Calvin Evans; the lonely, brilliant, Nobel-prize nominated grudge-holder who falls in love with—of all things—her mind. True chemistry results.

But like science, life is unpredictable. Which is why a few years later Elizabeth Zott finds herself not only a single mother, but the reluctant star of America's most beloved cooking show *Supper at Six*. Elizabeth's unusual approach to cooking ("combine one tablespoon acetic acid with a pinch of sodium chloride") proves revolutionary. But as her following grows, not everyone is happy. Because as it turns out, Elizabeth Zott isn't just teaching women to cook. She's daring them to change the status quo.

Laugh-out-loud funny, shrewdly observant, and studded with a dazzling cast of supporting characters, *Lessons in Chemistry* is as original and vibrant as its protagonist.

November 16-M & 28-E

You've Been Chosen: Thriving through the Unexpected by Cynt Marshall (CEO, Dallas Mavericks) – 4.8 stars, 256 pages

Marshall grew up in a northern California housing project with a violent father who once broke her nose, but also with a strong, devoted mother who kept her family fed and focused, reminding them, "It's not where you live, but how you live." Heeding her mother's advice, Marshall excelled first at school and then in her professional life, overcoming overt and subtle racism to become, at forty, one of the first Black woman officers at AT&T, while also navigating both grief and joy as she started a family of her own. All that life experience prepared Marshall for the day when, at fifty-one, she was diagnosed with stage 3 colon cancer, just one lymph node from stage 4. Overnight, her life changed, but her commitment to serve others did not.

Cynt Marshall's deep faith and positivity will inspire and motivate you, and her story will help you see how all your experiences, even the hardest moments, can work together for something good, bringing you to positive places you'd have never experienced otherwise. She

shows you how to find your own “voice of power” and encourages you to remember—and believe—that you, too, have been equipped to walk your unique path with purpose. That you, too, have been chosen.

December 21-M & 19-E

(*UWF) Being Sheela: The Life Journey of an Immigration Lawyer by Aditi Rao – 4.4 stars, 260 pages

A young mother separated from her children for eight long years; a man facing deportation after being mistaken for a terrorist; a woman forced to endure domestic violence so she can retain her right to remain in her adopted country—these are just a few of the thousands immigration lawyer Sheela Murthy has helped in her long career as a philanthropist.

From her birth in India through law school at Harvard and starting one of the world’s most successful immigration law firms, the Murthy Law Firm, Aditi Rao explores the journey of a woman driven to help others overcome injustice, dispossession, and legal tangles so they may live a life of dignity in an increasingly challenging world. The book takes a close look at a few out of the countless cases that Sheela and her dynamic legal team have handled over twenty-five years in the face of rapidly changing American attitudes towards immigrants. Being Sheela is about the human side of a successful professional, an immigrant and woman of color, who has made it her purpose to strive for a better world.

January 18-M & 30-E

Our Woman in Moscow by Beatriz Williams - 4.4 stars, 464 pages

In the autumn of 1948, Iris Digby vanishes from her London home with her American diplomat husband and their two children. The world is shocked by the family’s sensational disappearance. Were they eliminated by the Soviet intelligence service? Or have the Digbys defected to Moscow with a trove of the West’s most vital secrets?

Four years later, Ruth Macallister receives a postcard from the twin sister she hasn’t seen since their catastrophic parting in Rome in the summer of 1940, as war engulfed the continent and Iris fell desperately in love with an enigmatic United States Embassy official named Sasha Digby. Within days, Ruth is on her way to Moscow, posing as the wife of counterintelligence agent Sumner Fox in a precarious plot to extract the Digbys from behind the Iron Curtain.

But the complex truth behind Iris’s marriage defies Ruth’s understanding, and as the sisters race toward safety, a dogged Soviet KGB officer forces them to make a heartbreaking choice between two irreconcilable loyalties.

February 15-M & 27-E

West with Giraffes by Linda Rutledge – 4.7 stars, 371 pages

Woodrow Wilson Nickel, age 105, feels his life ebbing away. But when he learns giraffes are going extinct, he finds himself recalling the unforgettable experience he cannot take to his grave. It’s 1938. The Great Depression lingers. Hitler is threatening Europe, and world-weary Americans long for wonder. They find it in two giraffes who miraculously survive a hurricane while crossing the Atlantic. What follows is a twelve-day road trip in a custom truck to deliver Southern California’s first giraffes to the San Diego Zoo. Behind the wheel is the young Dust Bowl rowdy Woodrow. Inspired by true events, the tale weaves real-life figures with fictional ones, including the world’s first female zoo director, a crusty old man with a past, a young female photographer with a secret, and assorted reprobates as spotty as the giraffes.

Part adventure, part historical saga, and part coming-of-age love story, *West with Giraffes* explores what it means to be changed by the grace of animals, the kindness of strangers, the passing of time, and a story told before it's too late.

March 21-M & 26-E

(*UWF) *The Daughter of Cana* by Angela Hunt– 4.6 stars, 384 pages (Book 1 of 4 – Jerusalem Road)

Thomas and Tasmin, twin siblings hired to oversee a wedding feast in Cana, worry when the host runs out of wine . . . until a guest tells Tasmin to have the servants fill the pitchers by the gate with water from the cistern. Reluctantly, she obeys and is amazed when rainwater turns into the finest wine ever tasted in Cana.

When Thomas impulsively decides to follow the teacher from Nazareth, he and Tasmin argue--since the twins have been together since the womb, Tasmin can't accept losing her brother to some magician-prophet. Aided by Jude, younger brother to Jesus of Nazareth, she decides to follow the Nazarene's group and do whatever she must to mend the fractured relationship and bring her brother home.

April 18-M & 30-E

***The It Girl* by Ruth Ware – 4.2 stars, 464 pages**

April Clarke-Cliveden was the first person Hannah Jones met at Oxford. Vivacious, bright, occasionally vicious, and the ultimate It girl, she quickly pulled Hannah into her dazzling orbit. Together, they developed a group of devoted and inseparable friends—Will, Hugh, Ryan, and Emily—during their first term. By the end of the year, April was dead.

Now, a decade later, Hannah and Will are expecting their first child, and the man convicted of killing April, former Oxford porter John Neville, has died in prison. Relieved to have finally put the past behind her, Hannah's world is rocked when a young journalist comes knocking and presents new evidence that Neville may have been innocent. As Hannah reconnects with old friends and delves deeper into the mystery of April's death, she realizes that the friends she thought she knew all have something to hide...including a murder.

May 16-M & 28-E

***A Murder of Crows* by Sarah Yarwood-Lovett– 4.1 Stars, 368 pages** (Book 1 of 6 in Dr. Nell Ward series)

Dr. Nell Ward is an ecologist, not a detective. But when she's the prime suspect in a murder, only her unique set of skills could help to clear her name...

In the sleepy village of Cookingdean, Dr. Nell Ward is busy working in the grounds of a local manor house. Whilst inspecting an old tunnel, she did not expect to overhear a murder. As the only person with any clues as to what happened, Nell soon finds herself in the middle of the investigation.

Desperate to clear her name Nell, along with her colleague Adam, set out solving the murder using their skills as ecologists to uncover details no one else would notice. But it soon becomes clear that playing Agatha Christie is much harder than it might, at first appear...

June 20-M & 25-E

Book of Lost Friends by Lisa Wingate – 4.5 stars, 416 pages

Bestselling author Lisa Wingate (*Before We Were Yours*) brings to life startling stories from actual “Lost Friends” advertisements that appeared in Southern newspapers after the Civil War, as newly freed slaves desperately searched for loved ones who had been sold away.

Louisiana, 1875: In the tumultuous era of Reconstruction, three young women set off as unwilling companions on a perilous quest: Hannie, a freed slave; Lavinia, the pampered heir to a now destitute plantation; and Juneau Jane, Lavinia’s Creole half-sister. Each carries private wounds and powerful secrets as they head for Texas, following roads rife with vigilantes and soldiers still fighting a war lost a decade before. For Lavinia and Juneau Jane, the journey is one of stolen inheritance and financial desperation, but for Hannie, torn from her mother and siblings before slavery’s end, the pilgrimage west reignites an agonizing question: Could her long-lost family still be out there? Beyond the swamps lie the limitless frontiers of Texas and, improbably, hope.

Louisiana, 1987: For first-year teacher Benedetta Silva, a subsidized job at a poor rural school seems like the ticket to canceling her hefty student debt—until she lands in a tiny, out-of-step Mississippi River town. Augustine, Louisiana, is suspicious of new ideas and new people, and Benny can scarcely comprehend the lives of her poverty-stricken students. But amid the gnarled live oaks and run-down plantation homes lie the century-old history of three young women, a long-ago journey, and a hidden book that could change everything.

July 18-M & 30-E

Horse by Geraldine Brooks – 4.6 stars, 416 pages

Kentucky, 1850. An enslaved groom named Jarret and a bay foal forge a bond of understanding that will carry the horse to record-setting victories across the South. When the nation erupts in civil war, an itinerant young artist who has made his name on paintings of the racehorse takes up arms for the Union. On a perilous night, he reunites with the stallion and his groom, very far from the glamor of any racetrack. New York City, 1954. Martha Jackson, a gallery owner celebrated for taking risks on edgy contemporary painters, becomes obsessed with a nineteenth-century equestrian oil painting of mysterious provenance. Washington, DC, 2019. Jess, a Smithsonian scientist from Australia, and Theo, a Nigerian-American art historian, find themselves unexpectedly connected through their shared interest in the horse—one studying the stallion’s bones for clues to his power and endurance, the other uncovering the lost history of the unsung Black horsemen who were critical to his racing success.

Based on the remarkable true story of the record-breaking thoroughbred Lexington, *Horse* is a novel of art and science, love and obsession, and our unfinished reckoning with racism.

August 15-M & 27-E

Killers of the Flower Moon by David Grann – 4.4 stars, 416 pages

In the 1920s, the richest people per capita in the world were members of the Osage Nation in Oklahoma. After oil was discovered beneath their land, the Osage rode in chauffeured automobiles, built mansions, and sent their children to study in Europe. Then, one by one, the Osage began to be killed off. The family of an Osage woman, Mollie Burkhart, became a prime target. One of her relatives was shot. Another was poisoned. And it was just the beginning, as

more and more Osage were dying under mysterious circumstances, and many of those who dared to investigate the killings were themselves murdered.

As the death toll rose, the newly created FBI took up the case, and the young director, J. Edgar Hoover, turned to a former Texas Ranger named Tom White to try to unravel the mystery. White put together an undercover team, including a Native American agent who infiltrated the region, and together with the Osage began to expose one of the most chilling conspiracies in American history. (Author took 5 years to research the book). The book is basis of a movie to be released in October 2023.

September 19-M & 24-E

Surviving Savannah by Patti Callahan – 4.5 stars, 432 pages

When Savannah history professor Everly Winthrop is asked to guest-curate a new museum collection focusing on artifacts recovered from the steamship Pulaski, she's shocked. The ship sank after a boiler explosion in 1838, and the wreckage was just discovered, 180 years later. Everly can't resist the opportunity to try to solve some of the mysteries and myths surrounding the devastating night of its sinking.

Everly's research leads her to the astounding history of a family of eleven who boarded the Pulaski together, and the extraordinary stories of two women from this family: a known survivor, Augusta Longstreet, and her niece, Lilly Forsyth, who was never found, along with her child. These aristocratic women were part of Savannah's society, but when the ship exploded, each was faced with difficult and heartbreaking decisions. This is a moving and powerful exploration of what women will do to endure in the face of tragedy, the role fate plays, and the myriad ways we survive the surviving.