

# OPLA Readers' Advisory Committee Best Bets List 2023

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# 002 ROSEN

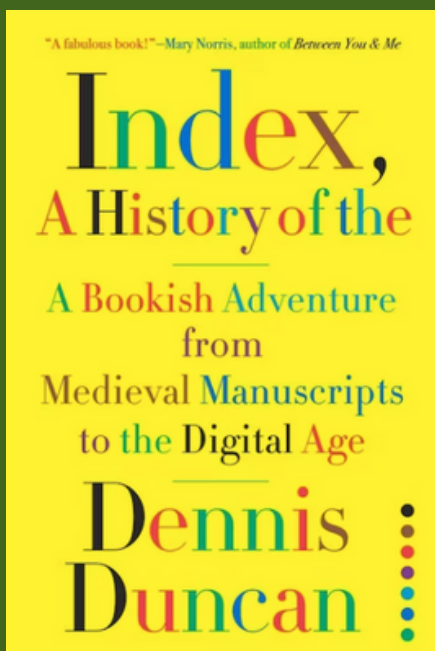
**Dark Archives: a librarian's investigation into the science and history of books bound in human skin by Megan Rosenbloom**

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In *Dark Archives*, Rosenbloom and her team of scientists and librarians visit the world's most famous libraries and museums to exhume the truth about some of their most infamous collections: books bound in human skin. Before you squeal, let me promise that it is not as macabre as the title suggests. This engrossing book does not touch on any occult subject, but it will give you an intellectual thrill by taking you through a series of thorough historical and scientific investigation into the reasons behind anthropodermic bibliopegy – the practice of binding books in human skin – and the truths are just as bizarre as they are fascinating. Rosenbloom explains a variety of current scientific techniques used to confirm these pieces, and the intricate details she includes about preservation and book binding give the book another layer of intriguing quality. A lot of the referenced techniques are foreign to a contemporary reader, but Rosenbloom's engaging writing makes the information easy to read.

If you are interested in venturing into the morbid unknown and exploring unique ways people around the world confront mortality, I recommend *From Here to Eternity: Traveling the World to Find the Good Death* by Caitlin Doughty. For bibliophiles, history buffs and fans of literary curiosia, I recommend *The Madman's Library: The Strangest Books, Manuscripts and Other Literary Curiosities from History* by Edward Brooke-Hitching.

Review by Madeleine



## 025.3 DUNCA

Index, A History of the: A Bookish Adventure from Medieval Manuscripts to the Digital Age by Dennis Duncan

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The best microhistories are those that make you fascinated about a subject you never considered twice. This one is an astonishingly fun romp through the evolution of that wonderful machine, the book index. Duncan comes across as one of those easily-adored professors who find weird and fascinating curios that will make you excited about the invention of page numbers, artistic depictions of spectacles, and Norman Mailer. His contagious enthusiasm, extensive knowledge, and witty asides make for a compelling exploration of book history that isn't only for academics and information science nerds. He relates the book index to our evolving culture of search indexes and algorithms and our eternal human desire to sort and find that which matters to us. For more marvelous microhistory on book culture, try *The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary* by Simon Winchester and *Once Upon a Tome: The Misadventures of a Rare Bookseller* by Oliver Darkshire.

Review by Michaela

THE SCHOOL OF LIFE

## RELATIONSHIPS



Learning to love

# 152.41 LEARN

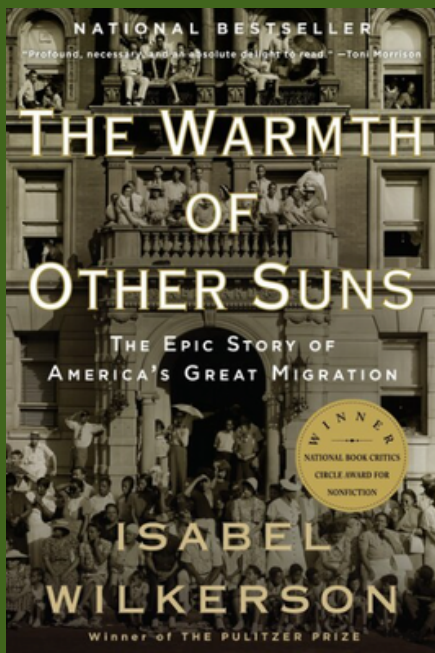
## Relationship: Learning to Love by The School of Life

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Written with honesty and wit, this book is a scintillating meditation on modern relationships. In a calm and reassuring tone, this book pulls apart some of the most seemingly innocent yet dangerous misconceptions of how one should think about, and more importantly, do, love. It shifts one's gaze from the singular focus on grandiose, elevated principles of love such as passion and telepathic instinct, and grounds the healthy foundation of a relationship in one's readiness to re-adjust our complacent expectations – informed by skewed Romantic ideals that are bound to set us up for failures in relationships - and budget time and energy for the intricacies of domestic matters. What I enjoyed the most about this book is the engaging writing and its ability to offer a highly intellectual analysis on a complicated issue in an approachable manner. This is the kind of book I would recommend to anyone who wants to experiment with philosophical literature that is concise, intellectually engaging, but also relevant to everyday life.

If you enjoyed the accessible, thought-provoking analysis on how love evolves and unfolds realistically over the course of one's lifetime in Learning to Love, I recommend The Sorrows of Love by The School of Life. For those who are keen on putting theories to the test and learn immediately actionable steps to improve their relationships, I suggest Eight Dates or The Love Prescription, both by John Gottman.

Review by Madeleine



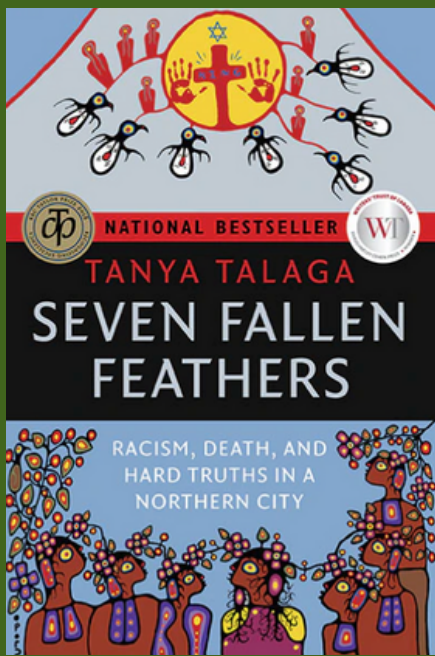
# 304.80973 WILKE

The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration by Isabel Wilkerson

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In *The Warmth of Other Suns*, Isabel Wilkerson examines the “Great Migration” of almost 6 million Black Americans from the Jim Crow South to the northern and western states, between 1915 and 1970. While Wilkerson makes sure to provide a “zoomed out” account of what the lives of Black Americans were like both in the South and the North, she personalizes these stories by focusing on the lives of three individuals who left the South at different points in time. The book is beautifully written and rich with detail, and it is clear that Wilkerson formed a close bond with the people that she interviewed. I knew nothing about the Great Migration before reading this book and I highly recommend it to anyone looking to learn more about the history of Black Americans. *Wandering in Strange Lands* by Morgan Jerkins and *Making Our Way Home* by Blair Imani are both books about The Great Migration.

Review by Sarah



# 305.897 TALAG

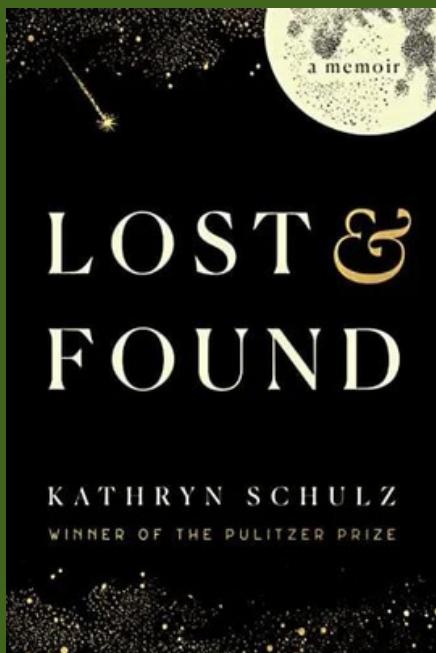
## Seven Fallen Feathers: Racism, Death, and Hard Truths in a Northern City by Tanya Talaga

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In an eleven year span, seven Indigenous high school students died in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Forced to leave home to obtain their high school education, hundreds of kilometres away from home, these young people faced racism, discrimination and ultimately death. Written in 2017, Tanya Talaga's book *Seven Fallen Feather*, offers a heartbreaking look at the systematic racism, poverty and powerlessness that led to this tragedy. Well written and meticulously researched, Talaga gives voice to and honours the lives of these seven young people.

Learn more about Indigenous perspectives with these nonfiction read *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* by Thomas King and *Highway of Tears : A True Story of Racism, Indifference and the Pursuit of Justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* by Jessic McDiarmid . Looking for fiction? Try *Indian Horse* by Richard Wagamese, *Five Little Indians* by Michelle Good and *The Theory of Crows* by David A. Robertson.

Review by Angela (Madeleine also loved!)



# 306.874 SCH

Lost & Found: A Memoir by Kathryn Schulz

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The emotional devastation of grief and the euphoria of love are married in Schulz' beautiful and intelligent memoir about losing her father and finding her wife. With a deft and philosophical array of references from science, literature, and personal experiences, Schulz crystallizes concepts of what it means to lose a person, and what it means to find one. Strong and immersive visual images place the reader in scenes throughout the book, a subtle yet cordial invitation to peek inside the life of the writer as she processes her grief and works out what it means to live on. An astute and tender book on grief with occasionally surprising insights and connections, similar to the wonderful book *H is for Hawk* by Helen Macdonald and highly recommended for fans of Rebecca Solnit, particularly *The Faraway Nearby* and *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*.

Review by Michaela

"The most precious hymn to resilience ... written with a beautiful attention to detail ... Wonderful"  
ADAM NICOLSON, winner of the 2018 Wainwright Prize

## Islands of Abandonment

Life in the  
Post-Human  
Landscape  
Cal Flynn



# 333.731 FLYN

## Islands of Abandonment: Nature Rebounding in the Post-Human Landscape by Cal Flynn

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In *Islands of Abandonment*, Flynn takes readers to a fascinating variety of remote locales around the world that humans have abandoned for various reasons: natural disaster, war, economic collapse, or disease. From these remnants of ruin, Flynn finds nature rejuvenating itself and even flourishing in the absence of humans. For those few inhabitants who remain in some of these derelict places, however, abandonment leaves a negative psychological impact, which accelerates the decay in these human induced “wastelands”. Through lush, compelling prose and the use of well-researched statistics, Flynn reiterates a crucial fact: rather than waiting for irreparable consequences to happen, mankind needs to exercise restraint to curb the ecological destruction, but also restraint in over-relying on human antidotes to reverse the damage. For readers who enjoy thought-provoking and hopeful nature writing, I recommend *Inheritors of the Earth* by Chris D. Thomas. For a sobering account of the ecological damage wrought by human activities in the name of progress – and how that progress may be the demise of mankind - I suggest *The Sixth Extinction* by Elizabeth Kolbert.

Review by Madeleine





# 333.75 SIMAR

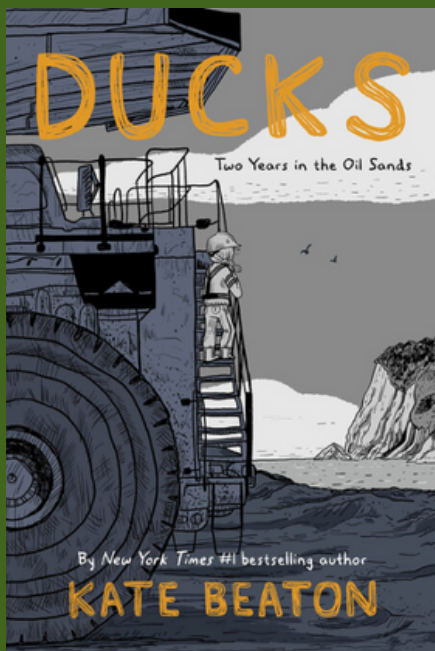
Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering The  
Wisdom of the Forest by Suzanne Simard

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Suzanne Simard tells a parallel tale of self discovery and navigating life while in the pursuit of understanding the complex interdependent world of trees. Simard combines just enough science with candor and humour to tell the story of her often difficult quest to save the forests she loves. Pitted against logging companies, Provincial Forest Policy makers and even fellow scientists, Simard steadfastly follows her heart, backed by science, to figure out how the complex web of forest ecosystems work.

Looking for more non-fiction books about Canada's old-growth Forests, try Big Lonely Doug by Harley Rustad or The Golden Spruce by John Valliant. Also try Greenwood by Michael Christie for a fascinating fictional spin on where modern forestry could leave us.

Review by Angela (Reagan also loved!)



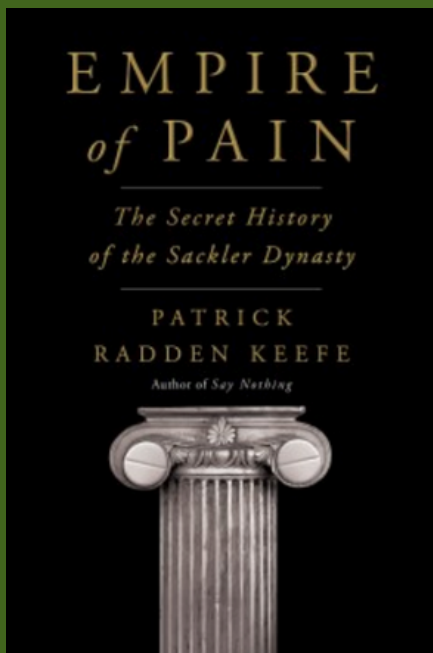
# 338.2728 BEATO

**Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands by Kate Beaton**

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Kate Beaton, known for her hilarious comic *Hark! A Vagrant* and her picture book *The Princess and the Pony* turns to memoir in *Ducks*, reflecting on her time as a new grad working in the oil sands in northern Alberta. Beaton explores the loneliness of leaving home, while also grappling with the vulnerability of being a woman isolated in a male-dominated field. The tension is maintained through the entire book, with a young Beaton pondering whether good people are ever really good or if it is just that they live in a place where they are expected to be. Haunting and heartbreaking. For another graphic novel memoir about a young artist trying to make sense of a painful period in his life, try *Blankets* by Craig Thompson.

Review by Jessica (Elizabeth/Reagan/Michaela also loved!)



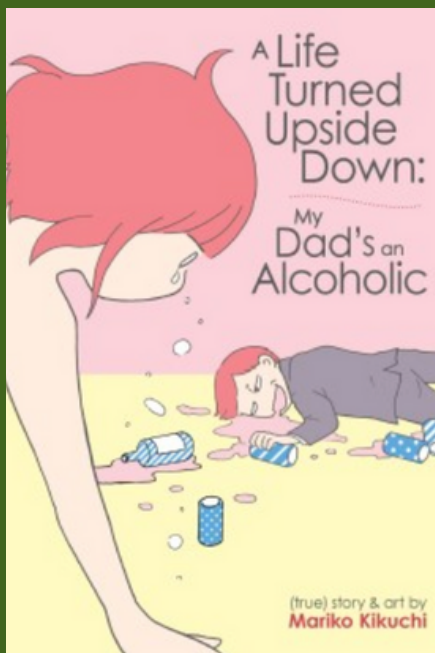
# 338.76161 KEEFE

## Empire of Pain: The Secret History of the Sackler Dynasty by Patrick Radden Keefe

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In 1996, a potent pain medication called OxyContin hit the market and was the catalyst for the opioid crisis which killed thousands of people world wide and ruined the lives of countless others. Purdue Pharma is the company responsible for the production of OxyContin and they are owned by the extremely wealthy and prominent Sackler Family. Empire of Pain traces the rise and “fall” of the Sackler Family, showing how their involvement in “ethical drugs” like Valium and Librium, paved the way for them to successfully market OxyContin. Radden makes sure to show that the Sacklers were not solely to blame for the opioid crisis as corrupt officials at every level of government turned a blind eye to what they were doing; the FDA official who approved Purdue Pharma’s claims that OxyContin was less addictive later went to work at Purdue Pharma with a starting salary of \$400,000. This book is incredibly well researched and I learned so much about the Sackler Family and the opioid crisis. There were times when I felt I was watching an episode of Succession, especially when reading about the infighting between members of the family or the lengths they went to intimidate their detractors (including Patrick Radden). Ryan Hampton’s Unsettled details Purdue Pharma’s bankruptcy and Dopesick on Disney+ is fictional show about the people affected by the opioid crisis.

Review by Sarah



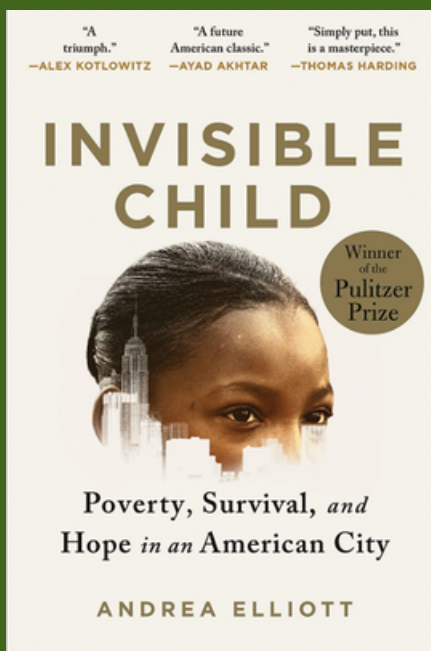
# 362.2923 KIKUC

## A Life Turned Upside Down: My Dad's an Alcoholic by Mariko Kikuchi

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Mariko Kikuchi's manga memoir offers an unflinching look into what it was like growing up with an alcoholic father and it chronicles the author's own journey to understanding her father's illness and how it impacted her. The memoir is quite dark; when Mariko is young, her mother dies by suicide and Mariko takes over parenting both her younger sister and her father. The trauma that Mariko experiences affects every aspect of her life: she is unable to maintain meaningful and healthy relationships, and she struggles to make a living. Despite all of this, the memoir ends on a somewhat uplifting note with Mariko on a path to healing and at peace with how she feels about her father. Both Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* and *I'm Glad My Mom Died* by Jeanette McCurdy are memoirs about relationships with difficult and sometimes abusive parents.

Review by Sarah (Reagan also recommends!)



# 362.77 ELLIO

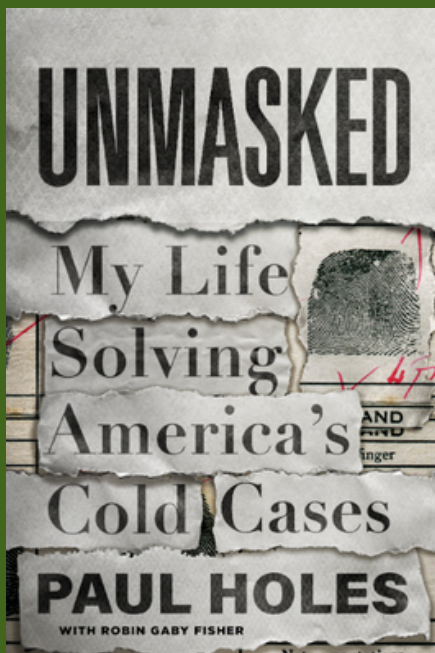
## Invisible Child: poverty, survival & hope in an American city by Andrea Elliott

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This is a riveting eight-year chronicle of the life of Dasani Coates, an impoverished but spirited girl from Brooklyn, and her resolute efforts to survive a turbulent childhood through intergenerational poverty, housing instability, parental drug addiction, as well as other problems too thick and heavy for any eleven-year-old. Despite being a hefty 600+ page account, the elegant prose and well-researched background information turn this book into an immersive experience for readers, providing a comprehensive and accessible view of the complexities of poverty that many others, like Dasani, struggle with everyday. As the book details how intersecting factors of discrimination plagued Dasani's ancestors and continue to exploit her family in the present day, be prepared to feel a spectrum of emotions, from sheer rage at a fundamentally flawed social system, to a sense of awe at the incredible power of human resilience and everything in between.

For fans of books that explore weighty social issues such as poverty and the housing crisis, I recommend *Evicted* by Matthew Desmond. If investigative reporting is something that interests you, Barbara Ehrenreich's *Had I Known* would be a suitable pick.

Review by Madeleine



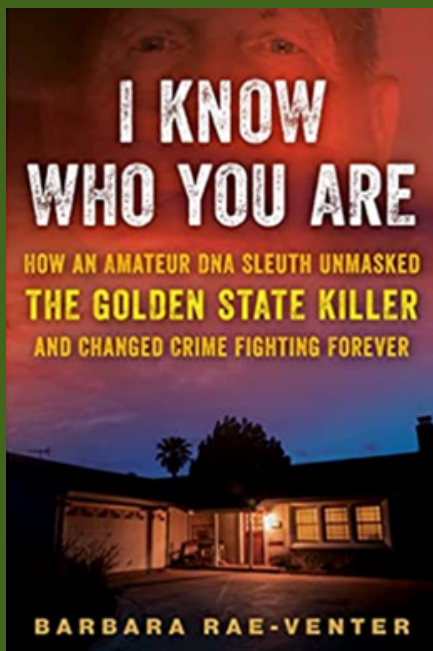
## 363.250973 HOLES

Unmasked: My Life Solving America's Cold Cases by Paul Holes

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Part memoir, part true-crime expose, Holes takes readers through his forensics career in Contra Costa County while also sharing deeply personal anecdotes and information about his family life. Holes doesn't shy away from admitting when he went around the rules or played office politics to get the job done. The technological advances made since the beginning of his career are amazing and he does a great job explaining in simple terms the DNA and genealogical techniques that solved many cases including the Golden State Killer case. Fans of true crime podcasts and books like *I'll Be Gone in the Dark* by Michelle McNamara won't want to miss this one.

Review by Kat



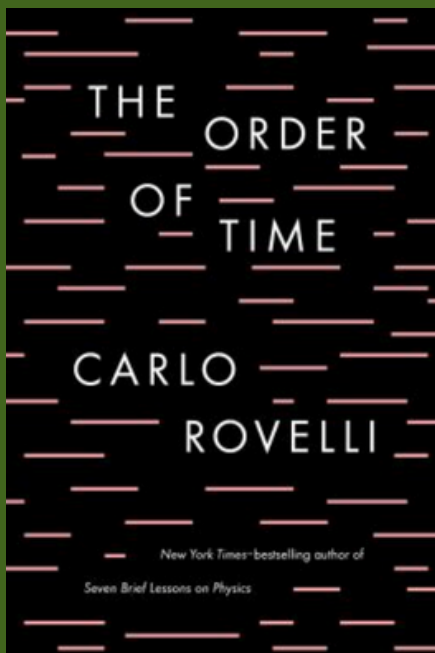
## 364.152 RAEVE

**I Know Who You Are: How an Amateur DNA Sleuth Unmasked the Golden State Killer and Changed Crime Fighting Forever by Barbara Rae-Venter**

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In *I Know Who You Are*, retired patent lawyer Barbara Rae-Venter details how she uses genealogy websites, like Ancestry, to connect adoptees with their birth parents and help police solve cold cases; most famously, she helped identify The Golden State Killer. While Rae-Venter does give some details about the cases she helps solve (TW for mentions of murder and sexual assault), the book's main focus is on how she solves those cases. She goes into great detail about what you need to look for when trying to find a DNA match, for example how you determine if a DNA match will come from the matrilineal or patrilineal line. I appreciated that Rae-Venter discussed the ethics of using DNA obtained from genealogy websites to solve crimes, even though she and I have different opinions (she is for it and I think it is a slippery slope). I highly recommend this book for readers who enjoyed *I'll Be Gone in the Dark* by Michelle McNamara. Readers looking for a book that discusses the ethics dna from genealogy websites should check out *The Forever Witness* by Edward Humes.

Review by Sarah



# 530.11 ROVEL

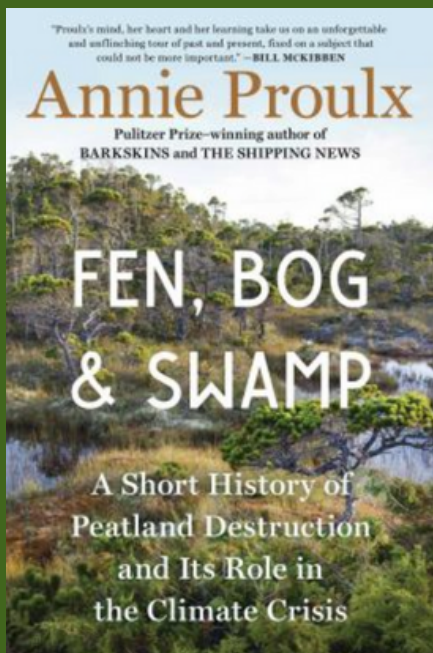
The Order of Time by Carlo Rovelli

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We think of time as something that takes place on a watch, but the watch is merely a record of change: a fantasy of the order of time. Rovelli is a mainstay on my bookshelves, a scientist whose delight in quantum physics and the mystery of time is equal parts charming and contagious. Don't worry about too much technical language as Rovelli is a wonderful guide. His playful and poetic engagement with advanced scientific and mathematical concepts renders the content both beautiful and accessible to the lay reader. Time may not be real, but it's worth carving out a few hours to read about its enigmatic nature. Fantastic in print and on audio. If you'd like to continue questioning your perception of reality with lyrical style and generous humanism, try *Probable Impossibilities: Musings on Beginnings and Endings* by Alan Lightman and *Black Hole Blues and Other Songs from Outer Space* by Janna Levin.

Review by Michaela





# 551.417 PROULX

## Fen, Bog, and Swamp: A Short History of Peatland Destruction and its Role in the Climate Crisis by Annie Proulx

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Wetlands play a vitally important role in preserving the environment by storing the carbon emissions that accelerate climate change. Peat, a complex substance of partially rotted and compressed plant material, builds up in spongy deposits over centuries. This can be cut through in days. Although less glamorous than rainforests, peatlands are home to a huge diversity of plant and animal species reliant on the specific conditions of these ecosystems for survival. Proulx calls our attention to the tragic destruction of wetlands in clear and sobering writing, but also celebrates their diversity and abundance and fosters hope in measures that have and can yet be taken. Learn more about environmentalism and nature's overlooked influences on our beautiful wild world with *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer and *Finding the Mother Tree* by Suzanne Simard.

Review by Michaela



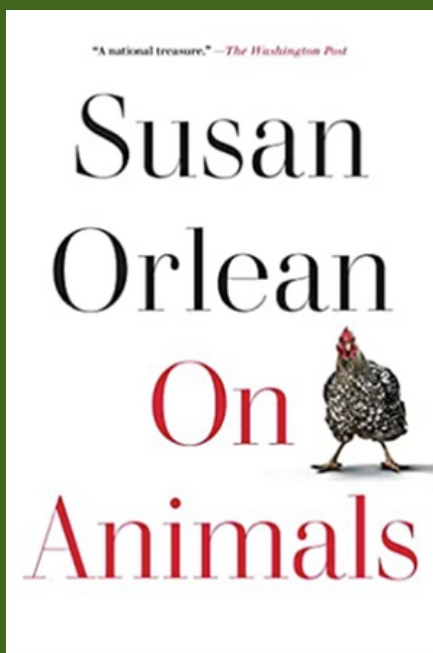
# 581.63209 JOSEP

## Held by the land: A Guide to Indigenous Plants for Wellness by Leigh Joseph

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Whether you are a plant enthusiast like me or just someone who enjoys a casual stroll in nature, *Held by the land: a guide to indigenous plants for wellness* is a visually beautiful botanical field guide filled with the added pleasure of storytelling, Skwxwú7mesh language and recipes. Unique from other how-to plant journals, this book's cultural teachings emphasize respectful and reciprocal relationships with plants native to North America, namely the Pacific Northwest. Step outside the usual individual-based wellness trends and consider your own interrelationship with nature and community. For folks who need an additional reminder that wellness can take many different forms, switch vibes and reach for your favourite adult beverage, put on your comfiest inside clothes, lay down and read Miska Rantanen's *Päntsdrunk (Kalsarikänni): The Finnish Path to Relaxation*. If you're looking for something a bit stronger, check out Michael Pollan's *Your Mind on Plants* and learn what happens when you plant, harvest and consume three psychoactive plants: opium, caffeine, and mescaline.

Review by Reagan



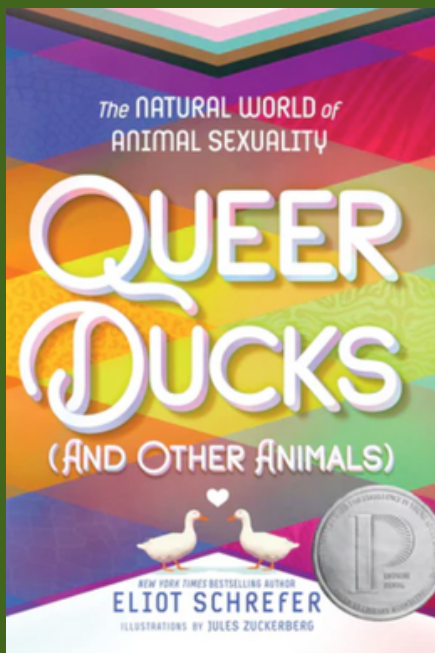
## 590 ORLEA

On Animals by Susan Orlean

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This collection of animal essays mostly from the New Yorker ranges from cute to bizarre to heartbreaking. The most poignant stories are when Orlean is writing about her own experiences on her hobby farm in New York but all the stories are memorable, as they are just so niche. This book opened my eyes to the world of pigeon racing, taxidermy competitions, and the strict world of animal actor regulations (all the maggots brought to set must be accounted for when they leave!). It's a special kind of book that you can dip in and out of and learn something memorable along the way. This would make a great recommendation for the animal lover in your life and would pair well with the more scientifically minded, but equally passionate, *Animal Wise* by Virginia Morell.

Review by Kat



## 591.562 SCHRE

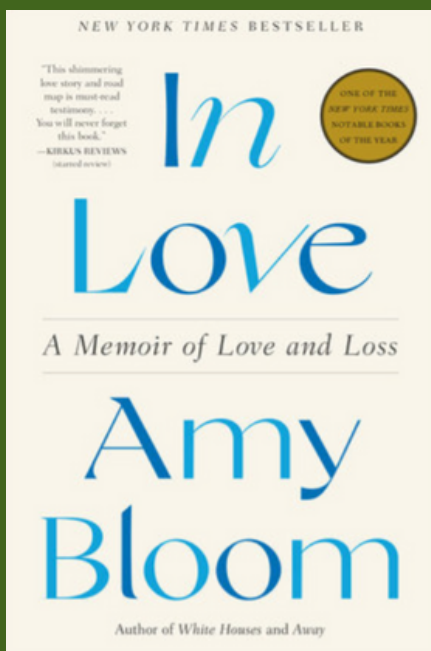
### Queer Ducks (and Other Animals): The Natural World of Animal Sexuality by Eliot Schrefer

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A well-researched and teen-friendly exploration of the gamut of queer behaviours observed in animals. Schrefer uses science, history, anthropology, and sociology to illustrate the diversity of sexual behavior in the animal world. This book made me laugh out loud with its relatable humour, tear up a little over Schrefer's childhood angst growing up queer all while scientifically explaining the not so different traits animals and humans share. Although I listened to the audiobook version, please take the time to flip through a hard copy for the illustrations.

Looking for YA realistic animal fiction try, by the same author **Endangered, Threatened, Rescued or Orphaned**. Looking for more books taking a humorous look at difficult topics, try the graphic memoir **Welcome to St. Hell: My Trans Teen Misadventure: A Graphic Novel** by Lewis Hancox.

Review by Angela



# 616.831 BLOOM

In Love: A Memoir of Love and Loss by Amy Bloom

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In Love : A Memoir of Love and Loss broke my heart and filled it with hope at the same time. Faced with the diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease, Brian, the love of Amy Bloom's life, decides to end his own life with dignity and peace before he loses who he is. The couple's exhaustive and often desperate quest eventually leads them to Dignitas, "an organization based in Switzerland that empowers a person to end their own life with dignity and peace." This book gives an inner look at how the couple navigates this difficult time with humour, compassion and love. Bring your tissues.

Other memoir's about dealing with death and grief, When Breath Becomes Air by Paul Kalanithi and The Year of Magical Thinking by Joan Didion.

Fictional depiction of the toll of Alzheimer's on the individual as well as their family try Still Alice by Lisa Genova.

Review by Angela



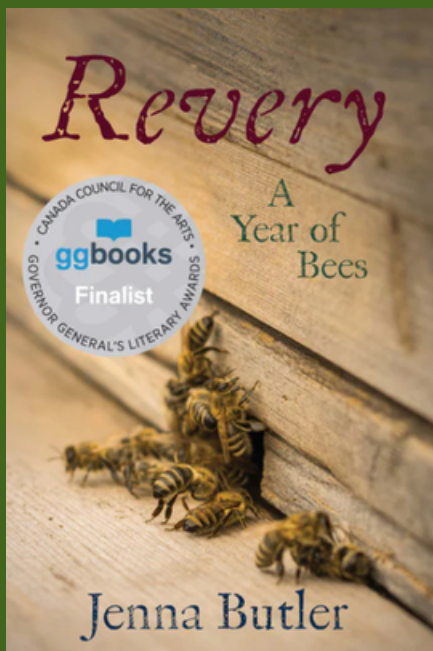
# 616.85882 SENSO

**Sensory: Life on the Spectrum** edited by Bex Ollerton

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This graphic novel anthology is made up of short comics by autistic creators. They range from autobiographical to educational, but all are deeply personal and unique. The art styles vary and it's a delight turning the page to a different art style and voice. As a neurotypical person, I found the comics boosted my empathy and understanding of people with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) and how I can best interact with and support them. Readers with autism will also benefit from the various tips and techniques creators have included to navigate their world. The benefit to this anthology is showing thirty perspectives on a disorder and while recognizable themes emerge, it is obvious there are many ways to experience autism. For another look at developmental disorders, try the manga essay anthology *My Brain is Different: Stories of ADHD and Other Developmental Disorders*, edited by Monzusu. For a deeper look at autism, *Unmaking Autism* by Devon Price released last year already has some promising reviews from autistic readers.

Review by Kat \*Reagan also recommends!



# 638.109 BUTLE

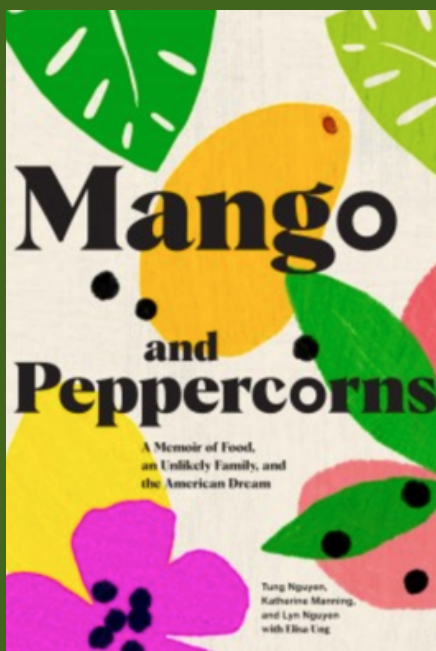
**Revery : A Year of Bees by Jenna Butler**

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In *Revery : A Year of Bees*, Jenna Butler tells her personal story of turning to beekeeping in an attempt to heal. Each chapter is a self contained essay covering the months of the beekeeping season, detailing Butler's experiences keeping bees on her off the grid organic farm in northern Alberta. Much of *Revery* is about healing, of the land we live on, the way we practice agriculture, the terrible tragedies of bee loss afflicting honey and wild bees alike, the lack of diversity in beekeeping, and Butler's own journey from trauma. Beautifully written, *Revery : A Year of Bees* is an intimate and compelling look at the cycle of bees, and what they have to teach us.

Intrigued by the world of Bees, try *Bees of the World* by Laurence Packer or *The Lives of Bees: The Untold Story of the Honey Bee in the Wild* by Thomas D. Seeley. Looking for fiction reads involving bees try *The Secret Lives of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd or *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* by Christy Lefteri.

Review by Angela



## 641. 59597 NGUYE

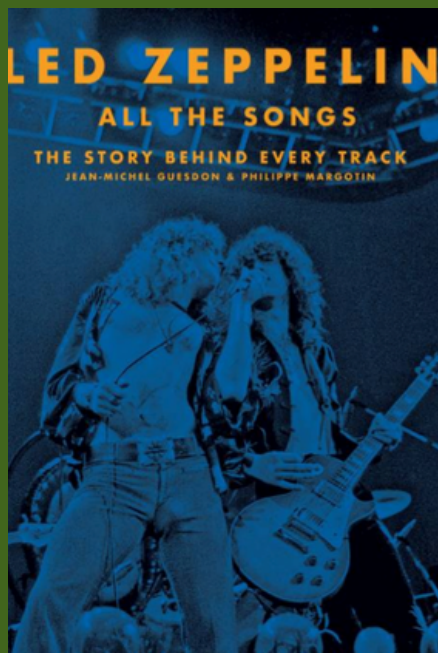
Mango and Peppercorns: A Memoir of Food, an Unlikely Family, and the American Dream by Tung Nguyen and Katherine Manning

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Mango and Peppercorns is a heartwarming multi-narrator food memoir about two women, from different backgrounds, who connect over a love of food. A pregnant Tung Nguyen fled Vietnam in 1975 and ended up in Miami where she met Kathy Manning; the two became friends and eventually opened Hy Vong, an award winning Vietnamese restaurant that garnered national acclaim. The inclusion of mouth watering recipes highlights how food transcends barriers and brings people together, regardless of language and background. For more media about people connecting over food I recommend Parts Unknown by Anthony Bourdain (available on YouTube) and From Scratch by Tembi Locke.

Review by Sarah





# 782.421 GUESD

Led Zeppelin, All the Songs: The Story Behind Every Track by Jean-Michel Guesdon and Phillippe Margotin

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An in-depth look at Led Zeppelin's music, covering technical details and the creation of each song, as well as back stories about the band. The All the Songs series will appeal to music trivia lovers, and covers other music greats like The Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Pink Floyd and more. For people who like song by song music study, but don't want to devote themselves to one particular band, try Marc Myers' Anatomy of a Song and Anatomy of 55 More Songs, oral histories for iconic music.

Review by Jessica



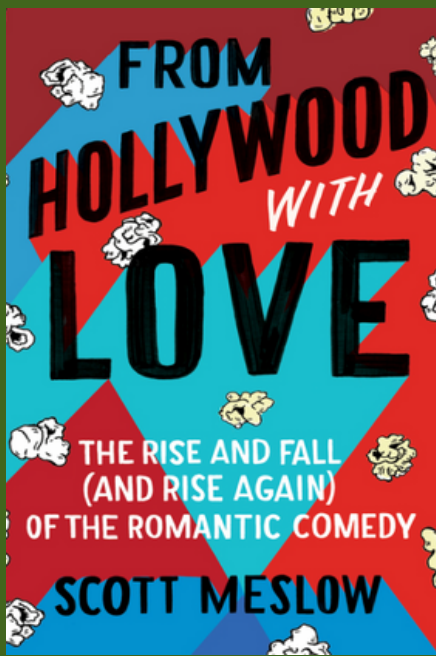
# 782.421 JOHNS

The Lives of Brian by Brian Johnson

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Brian Johnson, the lead singer of AC/DC, takes readers through his early life, looking at the people, places and music that helped shape him. Of his beginnings, he says "The soundtrack of my early childhood was the clatter of my mother's sewing machine, followed by the muffled sobs of her crying herself to sleep every night downstairs." While Johnson doesn't shy away from the more poignant moments of his youth, his stories more often than not will have you laughing out loud. For another music memoir that concentrates more on personal reflection than an account of wild tour moments, try Dave Grohl's *The Storyteller*, and for more reflections from rock icons on the process of making music try the podcast *Broken Record*.

Review by Jessica



## 791.436 MESLO

From Hollywood with Love: The Rise and Fall (and Rise Again) of the Romantic Comedy by Scott Meslow

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Taking a deep dive into rom-coms, Meslow tracks the genre's beginnings to its modern-day iterations. Chapters flip back and forth between studying an iconic rom-com and highlighting the career of the stars who impacted the genre most. Full of trivia, back stories and gossip (the original script for *Pretty Woman* ended how?!), *From Hollywood with Love* is a romp of a book. To learn more about the different tropes and history of the romance genre, check out the podcast *Fated Mates*, especially the “trailblazer” interviews with the romance writers who helped define the genre.

Review by Jessica

Five Decades of Stories from the  
Legendary Director of *Taxi*, *Cheers*,  
*Frasier*, *Friends*, *Will & Grace*, and More



**JAMES BURROWS**  
with EDDY FRIEDFELD  
Foreword by GLEN and LES CHARLES

# 791.45 BURRO

Directed by James Burrows: Five Decades of Stories from the Legendary Director of *Taxi*, *Cheers*, *Frasier*, *Friends*, *Will & Grace*, and More by James Burrows

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Done binging-watching modern television shows like “The Last of Us,” “Ted Lasso,” and “Daisy Jones and the Six”? Hit rewind and learn about the making of OG masterpieces like “Cheers,” “Frasier,” and “Friends.” In this book, legendary sitcom director, James Burrows, has fine-tuned his humble brag and tells us what made these nostalgic shows worthy of water cooler chats. Pair this read with Chuck Klosterman’s holistic exploration of The Nineties, featuring arguably the best cover art of this year. Klosterman takes us down a memory road lined with VHS rental stores, butterfly clips, and “Nevermind” softly playing in the background. My favourite 90’s television series is political drama *The West Wing* so I was elated to find *The West Wing Weekly* podcast, an analysis of each individual episode straight from the mouth of the actors who played our beloved, bleeding-heart liberals.

Review by Reagan



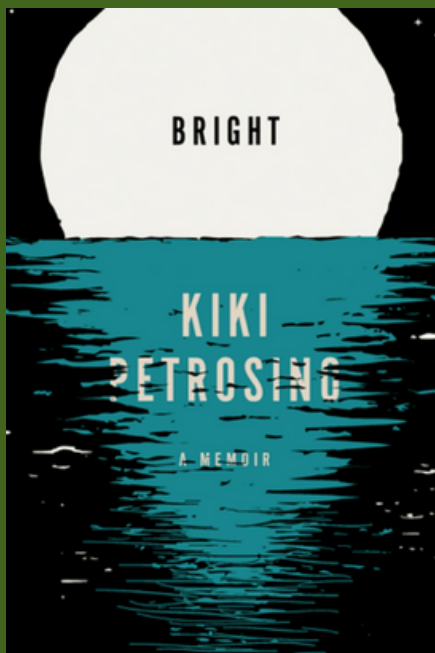
## 791.45028 NAYYA

Yes, My Accent is Real and Some Other Things I Haven't Told You by Kunal Nayyar

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2015 was a great time for comedic memoirs – Mindy Kaling, Felicia Day, Nick Offerman and Aziz Ansari all released books that year – so you’re forgiven if you missed Kunal Nayyar’s. However, with Nayyar now starring in *The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry*, an adaptation of the same book loved by library users everywhere, it’s time to take another look at his memoir. Nayyar’s memoir is smart, touching and of course, funny. He explores a lot about his Indian identity and his relationship with his family. The way he writes about his father particularly stands out as being genuine and full of heart. You won’t find many *Big Bang Theory* anecdotes here, as the focus is on life pre-celebrity, but the life leading up to that role is worth learning about, especially in the author-read audiobook. For other great celebrity memoirs you might have missed, try either of Mindy Kaling’s or Anna Kendrick’s *Scrappy Little Nobody*.

Review by Kat



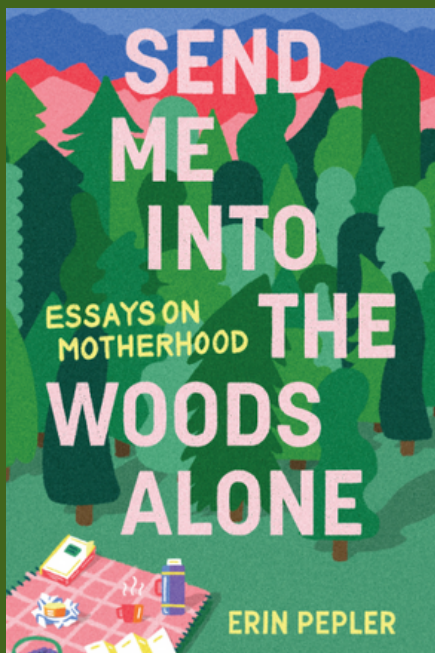
## 811.6 PETRO

### Bright: A Memoir by Kiki Petrosino

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Kiki Petrosino's first full-length essay collection is a short, lyrical tour through her experience as a mixed race American, born in Baltimore City to a black mother and an Italian father. After moving to a nearly all white suburban town in Pennsylvania, Petrosino describes heartbreaking scenes from her childhood. Still taking up space in my memory are the essays about her body being able to ruin a costume on loan simply by existing, the shield of protection a white grandfather's hand provides from taunts on the bus, and the power of a mother who colours not with the "flesh" crayon but emphasizes complexity by mixing colours. With references to fairy tales, Dante's "Inferno" and Thomas Jefferson, Petrosino interweaves multiple forms with impressive ease. Pay special attention to the fading stanza of the final essay, it's stunning. For folks looking to face down demons and feel goosebumps from a graphic memoir, check out "Blankets" by Craig Thompson. For another personal look at how Black women have internalized white supremacy, find Jessica Wilson's new book, "It's Always Been Ours: Rewriting the Story of Black Women's Bodies."

Review by Reagan



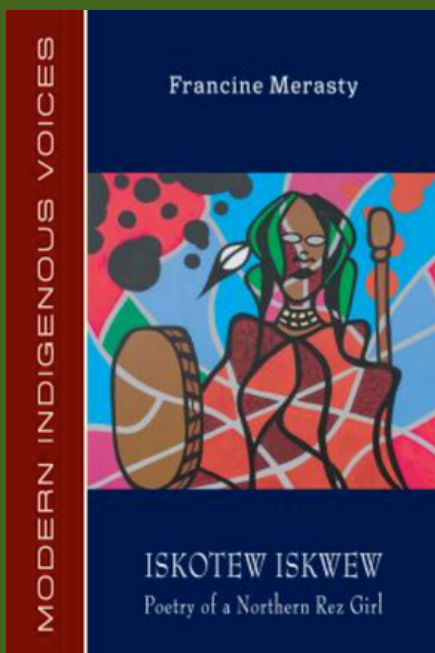
## 814.6 PEOPLE

Send Me Into The Woods Alone: Essays on Motherhood by Erin Pepler

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A companion for any-type of new mom, this collection of essays spans the time from birth to beating your kids at board games. Though short in length, this book is packed full of sincerity and hilarious quips that may bring you to giggly tears. I underlined passages in this book because I knew I would re-read it and share widely. From feeling guilty for singing Billie Eilish songs instead of lullabies, to desperately wanting to be a park dad who just needs to be seen to be perfect, to admitting that I too am really bad at imaginative play (“oh... we’re inside a fire truck now?”). This book made me feel seen. For men looking for their own counterpart, I recommend “Dad Bod: Portraits of Pop Culture Pappas” by Cian Cruise. Lastly, let me point you towards the practical parenting Queen and Professor of Economics at Brown University, Emily Oster. Oster has a full catalog of books from pregnancy to parenting school aged kiddos and will satisfy all your debunking needs.

Review by Reagan



# 819.16 MERAS

## Iskotew Iskwew : Poetry of a Northern Rez Girl by Francine Merasty

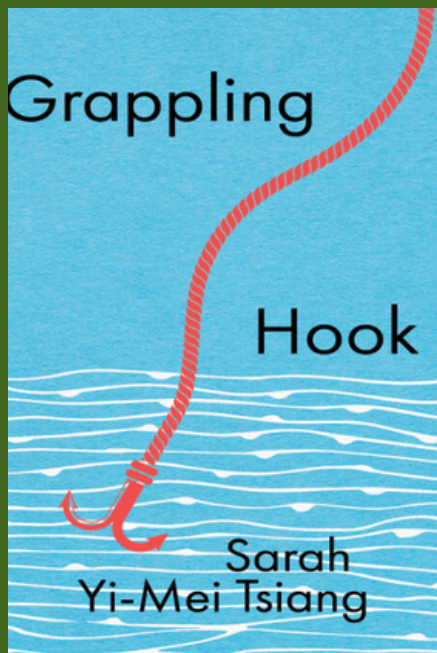
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2019 Indigenous Voices Awards winner Francine Merasty informs readers of her experiences growing up as an Indigenous woman on a reserve in northern Saskatchewan in this beautiful poetry collection, *Iskotew iskwew*. Written in an accessible, vernacular voice, these poems reminisce Merasty's childhood, her appreciation for nature and the traditional way of life that cemented her identity as a Cree woman. Simultaneously, Merasty grapples with the memories of being a residential school survivor, pervasive racism, and explores ways of moving forward to healing and coexisting with non-Indigenous people in a colonized but evolving nation. What I find most impressive is Merasty's ability to succinctly describe such vulnerable, important – and sometimes devastating – experiences. The rawness of her tone, accompanying the intensity of the experience described, make this book an engaging read.

For those who want to further understand the intergenerational trauma perpetuated through the residential school system, I would recommend Canada's parliamentary poet laureate Louise Bernice Halfe's *Burning in This Midnight Dream*. I suggest *Witness, I Am* by Gregory Scofield, or *A Really Good Brown Girl* by Marilyn Dumont, for readers who enjoy sharp and fearlessly wrought verses about establishing one's sense of self and honoring one's heritage against myriad institutional and cultural obstacles.

Review by Madeleine





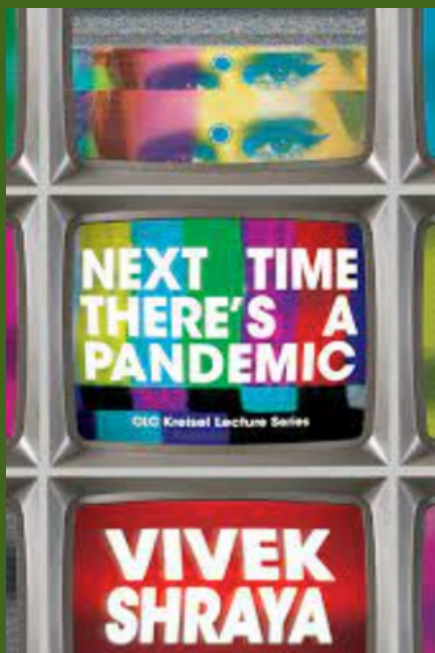
## 819.16 TSIA

Grappling Hook by Sarah Yi-Mei Tsiang

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The poetry in *Grappling Hook* is haunting, in the way only the best poetry can be. Yi-Mei Tsiang makes insightful observations about the pressures of raising children in a fear-inducing and at times violent world, with specific poems about #MeToo, white supremacy and police violence. For another read that contemplates modern societal pressures and their impacts on individuals and families, try *Ain't Burned All the Bright* by Jason Reynolds and Jason Griffin, a blend of words and images looking at police violence and the constant news cycle during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Review by Jessica



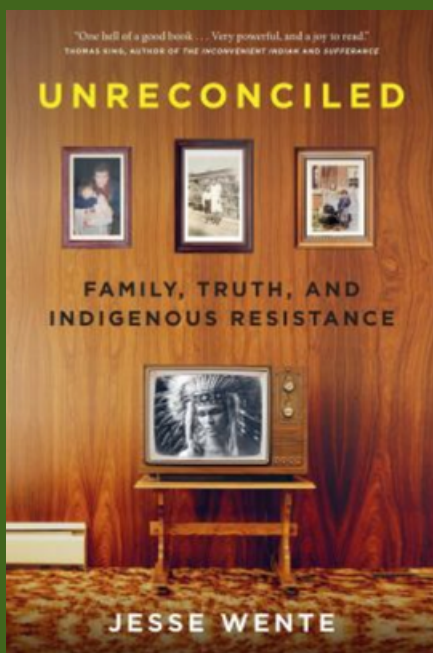
# 819.82 SHRAYA

Next Time There's a Pandemic by Vivek Shraya

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A poignant, searing, short read that will help you step outside your own experience of the COVID19 pandemic and reflect. Shraya's book details her personal experience as an artist and a trans woman of colour during the pandemic while also highlighting overlooked and undervalued societal problems. Consider the slogan "stay safe." How does it apply to folks who can't control how others treat them? What about people who are trapped in an unsafe living situation? How do people without a home fit into this sentiment? I wasn't emotionally stable enough for a full scale analysis of the pandemic yet, but this bite size, gut punch is getting me there. This book is also available on YouTube performed by Shraya herself as part of Canadian Literature Centre's Kreisel Lecture Series. For those looking for other digestible morsels of good information check out the series Object Lessons featuring books written by different authors about the hidden lives of ordinary things, from bookshelves to rust to high heels. Mostly microhistory sprinkled with personal narrative from each other, these books are great for party trivia.

Review by Reagan



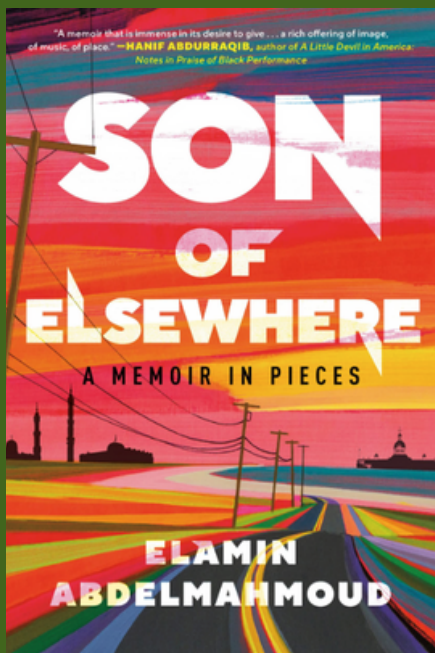
# 970.2 WENTE

## Unreconciled: Family, Truth, and Indigenous Resistance by Jesse Wente

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A wonderful memoir rooted in politics and identity that asks us to look towards “Truth” rather than the flawed concept of “Reconciliation” in the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the nation of Canada. Wente’s clear writing and companionable tone make it feel like he’s a friend you sat down with, whether he’s nerding out about movies or sharing moments of grief and outrage. While he lays bare experiences of racism in his personal life, in the media, and in the systems put into place by the Canadian government, he is also a self-confessed optimist. His hope in the future rings out above all: particularly the hope he has in the hard work that will be done to bring more Indigenous voices into cinema and storytelling. Delve into more personal accounts of truth, reconciliation, and identity with *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground* by Alicia Elliott and the documentary *Reel Injun*, which Wente appears in.

Review by Michaela



# 971.00492 ABDEL

Son of Elsewhere: A Memoir in Pieces by  
Elamin Abdelmahmoud

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Part Canadian history, part memoir, part pop-culture commentary, 'a memoir in pieces' is a fitting subtitle. Elamin writes with humour and grace about his immigration to Kingston, Ontario and his many strategies for fitting in - the most surprising one being WWF (when wrestling was still called that) fan fiction. Elamin also explores his Sudanese heritage and new Black Canadian identity, while also trying to figure out his identity as a son, a friend, a boyfriend. Throughout these many essays, Elamin's honesty and genuineness shine through. This is a collection of essays that you'll have a hard time putting down. For another Canadian memoir you'll have trouble putting down, try Bedroom Rapper by Rollie Pemperton.

Review by Kat