**Book Club Kits—An Annotated List**

*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie

Fourteen-year-old Junior is a cartoonist and bookworm with a violent but protective best friend Rowdy. Soon after they start freshman year, Junior boldly transfers from a school on the Spokane reservation to one in a tiny white town 22 miles away. Despite his parents’ frequent lack of gas money, racism at school and many crushing deaths at home, he manages the year. Rowdy rejects him, feeling betrayed, and their competing basketball teams take on mammoth symbolic proportions. The reservation's poverty and desolate alcoholism offer early mortality and broken dreams, but Junior's knowledge that he must leave is rooted in love and respect for his family and the Spokane tribe.

*The Art of Racing in the Rain* by Garth Stein

Enzo knows he is different from other dogs: a philosopher with a nearly human soul (and an obsession with opposable thumbs), he has educated himself by watching television and by listening closely to the words of his master, Denny Swift, an up-and-coming race car driver. On the night before his death, Enzo takes stock of his life, recalling all that he and his family have been through, hoping, in his next life, to return as a human.

*Blindness* by José Saramago

Reminiscent of Albert Camus's *The Plague*, this provocative allegorical novel by noted Portuguese writer Saramago deals with a contagious "white" blindness that spreads very quickly in a large city. Among a small group of people grappling with the horror and chaos, one woman has been spared; she is the reader’s eyewitness. In an environment ripe with philosophical implications, only the most fundamental of human needs endures.

*The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics* by Daniel Brown

The Boys in the Boat describes how a group of working class youths from the University of Washington rowing team emerged from obscurity to defeat a field of elite international rivals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Sports fans who love a good "Cinderella story" will cheer this fast-paced, emotionally charged account of the players’ and coaches struggles set against stark Depression-era realities.

*Breath: A Lifetime in the Rhythm of an Iron Lung: A Memoir* by Martha Mason

It’s staggering to conceive of a moment in an 11-year-old girl’s life when she is informed by her doctor that she will never recover from the effects of the polio that left her suddenly paralyzed from the neck down and that she won’t likely live much longer. Mason writes eloquently and without a tinge of self-pity of her long, nightmarish journey from September 1948, when her beloved 13-year-old brother, Gaston, died of polio and she contracted it soon after; confined to an iron lung, she rarely left it for the next 61 years, while living in their rural Lattimore, N.C., home so that her devoted mother could care for her. Yet Mason was determined to transcend the limitations of her inert body: she always wanted to be a writer, and, with her indomitable Job-like mother’s help, finished not only high school with honors but college at Wake Forest, where she participated in the cause of racial equality and was invited to join Phi Beta Kappa. Mason writes breezily of her life before the polio, when she was a carefree, competitive, bike-riding girl in Southern cotton-growing country.
**The Cellist of Sarajevo by Steven Galloway**

Galloway delivers a tense and haunting novel following four people trying to survive war-torn Sarajevo. After a mortar attack kills 22 people waiting in line to buy bread, an unnamed cellist vows to play at the point of impact for 22 days. Meanwhile, Arrow, a young woman sniper, picks off soldiers; Kenan makes a dangerous trek to get water for his family; and Dragan, who sent his wife and son out of the city at the start of the war, works at a bakery and trades bread in exchange for shelter. Arrow’s assigned to protect the cellist, but when she’s eventually ordered to commit a different kind of killing, she must decide who she is and why she kills. Dragan believes he can protect himself through isolation, but that changes when he runs into a friend of his wife’s attempting to cross a street targeted by snipers. Kenan is repeatedly challenged by his fear and a cantankerous neighbor. All the while, the cellist continues to play.

**The Distance Between Us: A Memoir by Reyna Grande**

In her first nonfiction book, novelist Grande delves into her family's cycle of separation and reunification. Raised in poverty so severe that spaghetti reminded her of the tapeworms endemic to children in her Mexican hometown, the author is her family’s only college graduate and writer, whose honors include an American Book Award and International Latino Book Award. Though she was too young to remember her father when he entered the United States illegally seeking money to improve life for his family, she idolized him from afar. However, she also blamed him for taking away her mother after he sent for her when the author was not yet 5 years old. Though she emulated her sister, she ultimately answered to herself, and both siblings constantly sought affirmation of their parents' love, whether they were present or not. When one caused disappointment, the siblings focused their hopes on the other.

**Every Last One: A Novel by Anna Quindlen**

Mary Beth Latham is first and foremost a mother, whose three teenaged children come first, before her career as a landscape gardener, or even her life as the wife of a doctor. Caring for her family and preserving their everyday life is paramount. And so, when one of her sons, Max, becomes depressed, Mary Beth becomes focused on him, and is blindsided by a shocking act of violence.

**Final Harvest: Poems by Emily Dickinson, edited by Thomas H. Johnson**

In 1955 Thomas H. Johnson edited the three volume presentation of The Poems of Emily Dickinson which included variant readings and a substantial critical text, and it was published by the Harvard University Press. Five years later, his one volume edition of her complete poetry appeared. Now, in Final Harvest, he has chosen 575 poems of the 1776 which constitute the sum total of her work, and he has selected not only the best known, but also those which are particularly pertinent to her life and illustrate and illuminate some special quality. Mr. Johnson has also written a new introduction for this edition.

**The Five People You Meet in Heaven by Mitch Albom**

Albom tells the story of Eddie, "an old man with a barrel chest." But for us, Eddie's story "begins at the end, with Eddie dying in the sun"--at Ruby Pier, an amusement park by the sea, where he spent most days, for despite his advanced years, he worked as a maintenance man on the rides. He dies on his eighty-third birthday trying to save a little girl from an accident. Eddie wakes up in heaven, where he is informed that "there are five people you meet in heaven. Each...was in your life for a reason. You may not have known the reason at the time, and that is what heaven is for. For understanding your life on earth." And, not
surprisingly, this is what the novel is about: Eddie coming to appreciate his 83 years of mortal life; the novel's "point" is that apparently insignificant lives do indeed have their own special kind of significance.

**The Help by Kathryn Stockett**
Jackson, Mississippi, in the early 1960s is a city of tradition. Silver is used at bridge-club luncheons, pieces polished to perfection by black maids who “yes, ma’am,” and “no, ma’am,” to the young white ladies who order the days. This is the world Eugenia “Skeeter” Phelan enters when she graduates from Ole Miss and returns to the family plantation, but it is a world that, to her, seems ripe for change. As she observes her friend Elizabeth rudely interact with Aibileen, the gentle black woman who is practically raising Elizabeth’s two-year-old daughter, Mae Mobley, Skeeter latches on to the idea of writing the story of such fraught domestic relations from the help’s point of view. With the reluctant assistance of Aibileen’s feisty friend, Minny, Skeeter manages to interview a dozen of the city’s maids, and the book, when it is finally published, rocks Jackson’s world in unimaginable ways.

**The Heretic’s Daughter by Kathleen Kent**
Sarah Carrier was just nine years old when she and her three older brothers also were arrested for witchcraft, spending months imprisoned under horrific conditions while following their mother’s dictum of admitting the charges against them to escape death. But Martha gave her life maintaining her innocence in the face of lying accusations that were fueled by her sharp tongue, her family’s unknowingly bringing smallpox to Andover from their home in Billerica, family disputes (including tensions between a mother and her preadolescent daughter), and grudges between neighbors—all at a time when any negative event was thought to be the work of the devil in human form.

**The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks by Rebecca Skloot**
Her name was Henrietta Lacks, but scientists know her as HeLa. She was a poor Southern tobacco farmer, yet her cells—taken without her knowledge—became one of the most important tools in medicine. The first "immortal" human cells grown in culture, they are still alive today, though she has been dead for more than sixty years. HeLa cells were vital for developing the polio vaccine; uncovered secrets of cancer and viruses; helped lead to in vitro fertilization, cloning, and gene mapping; and have been bought and sold by the billions. Yet Henrietta Lacks is buried in an unmarked grave. Her family did not learn of her “immortality” until more than twenty years after her death, when scientists began using her husband and children in research without informed consent. The story of the Lacks family is inextricably connected to the dark history of experimentation on African Americans, the birth of bioethics, and the legal battles over whether we control the stuff we are made of—From publisher description.

**Into the Free by Julie Cantrell**
Millie Reynolds and her mother live in a ramshackle cabin in Depression-era Mississippi, occasionally receiving unwelcome visits from the violent family patriarch, Jack. With her only friend, Sloth, dead and gone, Millie struggles to find any happiness with a “nothing mama” and a ruthless father. Only the passing caravans of gypsies offer her any semblance of belonging. But when unlucky events engulf her, she discovers some surprising secrets that eventually help her hope in God’s love.

**The Invisible Wall: A Love Story that Broke Barriers by Harry Bernstein**
When Bernstein, who is in his 90s, was a boy, his older sister, Lily, was in love with Arthur. This would not
have been a problem except that Arthur was Christian and Lily was Jewish, and in their pre-Great War mill
town in northern England, an invisible wall ran down their street, separating them. Neighbors rarely crossed
those few cobblestoned feet. In winter, the Jews built a snow slide on their side and the Christians built one
on theirs. There was not much other frivolity in those hard times. Home was not a happy place for Harry, his
mother, and his five brothers and sisters when his mean, alcoholic father was there. When 12-year-old Lily
won a scholarship to grammar school, her father dragged her by the hair to work with him. Harry’s mother
started a shop in her front room to make ends meet, selling slightly damaged fruit and providing a place for
socializing and gossip. She always hoped for better, having Harry write letters to their relatives in America,
beseeching them on a regular basis to send passage for her family, and then, finally, only for Lily when
the lovers were discovered. Barriers were finally broken as Lily refused to give up either Arthur or her
mother.

King Peggy: An American Secretary, Her Royal Destiny, and the Inspiring Story of How She
Changed an African Village by Peggielene Bartels
Bartels was working as a secretary in the Ghanaian Embassy when she received a phone call that would
change her life. The king of Otuam, a small coastal town of 7,000 people, had passed away, and the tribal
elders had elected her as his replacement. Thus begins this winning tale of epic proportions, full of intrigue,
royal court plotting, cases of mistaken identity and whispered words from beyond the grave. Upon arrival,
King Peggy—who left Ghana three decades earlier and has since become an American citizen—found an uphill
battle and vowed to tackle the issues plaguing her community: domestic violence, poverty and lack of access
to clean water, health care and education.

The Lace Reader by Brunonia Barry
Towner Whitney, a dazed young woman descended from a long line of mind readers and fortune tellers, has
survived numerous traumas and returned to her hometown of Salem, Mass., to recover. Any tranquility in
her life is short-lived when her beloved great-aunt Eva drowns under circumstances suggesting foul play.
Towner’s suspicions are taken with a grain of salt given her history of hallucinatory visions and self-harm. The
mystery enmeshes local cop John Rafferty, who had left the pressures of big city police work for a quieter life
in Salem and now finds himself falling for the enigmatic Towner as he mourns Eva and delves into the history
of the eccentric Whitney clan.

The Leisure Seeker by Michael Zadoorian
At 80-something, Ella Robina is dying. Rather than spend her last moments in treatment for terminal cancer,
she kidnaps her husband and takes off in their RV for one last grand adventure down Route 66 to Disneyland.
Naturally, her kids (and her doctors) demand that she return home to Detroit, especially since her husband,
John, has Alzheimer’s. But Ella knows what she wants, and as the two navigate their way down the road, they
share memories of their life together, interspersed with Ella’s ever-feisty one-liners.

The Listener: A Novel by Shira Nayman
In 1947, Dr. Henry Harrison, the director of the New York City–area insane asylum Shadowbrook, begins
treating Bertram Reiner, a German-born biochemistry Ph.D. who fought for the U.S. during WWII and claims
to have committed himself to hide from his brother, a former Nazi. Shortly after receiving a letter claiming to
be from Bertram’s brother’s wife, Henry sees a trespasser on the Shadowbrook grounds and begins to think
Bertram might be telling the truth. Henry is also struggling with his own ghosts: he’s haunted by the memory
of a young female patient whose tragic death caused Henry to start using opium; his marriage is failing; and he's increasingly attracted to a nurse.

*_Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children* by Ransom Riggs

On the brink of his sixteenth birthday, something terrible happens to Jacob—something so terrible that it splits his life into two parts: Before and After. Before, he was an ordinary young man with a peculiar but doting grandfather. After, he discovers he isn’t so ordinary after all. Nor are the “peculiar children” he meets at Miss Peregrine’s home. Riggs’ debut uses the framework of a horror novel to tell a more far-reaching tale with symbolic overtones of the Holocaust.

*_Moloka’i* by Alan Brennert

Brennert’s sweeping debut novel tracks the grim struggle of a Hawaiian woman who contracts leprosy as a child in Honolulu during the 1890s and is deported to the island of Moloka’i, where she grows to adulthood at the quarantined settlement of Kalaupapa. Rachel Kalama is the plucky, seven-year-old heroine whose family is devastated when first her uncle Pono and then she develop leprous sores and are quarantined with the disease. While Rachel’s symptoms remain mild during her youth, she watches others her age dying from the disease in near total isolation from family and friends. Rachel finds happiness when she meets Kenji Utagawa, a fellow leprosy victim whose illness brings shame on his Japanese family. After a tender courtship, Rachel and Kenji marry and have a daughter, but the birth of their healthy baby brings as much grief as joy, when they must give her up for adoption to prevent infection. The couple cope with the loss of their daughter and settle into a productive working life until Kenji tries to stop a quarantined U.S. soldier from beating up his girlfriend and is tragically killed in the subsequent fight.

*_Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro

Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth were once classmates at Hailsham, a private school in the English countryside with a most unusual student body: human clones created solely to serve as organ donors. “You were brought into this world for a purpose,” advised Miss Lucy, one of Hailsham’s guardians, “and your futures, all of them, have been decided.” The tightly knit trio experienced love, loss, and betrayal as they pondered their destinies (to become “carers” for other donors and, eventually, donors themselves). The novel is narrated by Kathy, now 31 and a “carer,” who recalls how Hailsham students were “told and not told” about their precarious circumstances.

*_Of Love and Other Demons* by Gabriel Garcia Márquez

In a Latin American port city during colonial times, a young girl named Sierva Maria de Todos los Angeles—the only child of the ineffectual Marquis de Casalduero—is bitten by a rabid dog. Her father, who has shown no interest in the child, begins a crusade to save her life, eventually committing her to the Convent of Santa Clara when the bishop persuades him that his daughter is possessed by demons. In fact, Sierva Maria has shown no signs of being infected by rabies or by demons; she is simply being punished for being different. Having been raised by the family’s slaves, she knows their languages and wears their Santeria necklaces; she is perceived by the effete European Americans around her as “not of this world.” Only the priest who has reluctantly accepted the job as her exorcist believes she is neither sick nor possessed but terrified after being inexplicably "interred alive" among the superstitious nuns.
One Day by David Nicholls
The episodic story takes place during a single day each year for two decades in the lives of Dex and Em. Dexter, the louche public school boy, and Emma, the brainy Yorkshire lass, meet the day they graduate from university in 1988 and run circles around one another for the next 20 years. Dex becomes a TV presenter whose life of sex, booze, and drugs spins out of control, while Em dully slogs her way through awful jobs before becoming the author of young adult books. They each take other lovers and spouses, but they cannot really live without each other.

The Red Tent by Antia Diamant
A minor character from the book of Genesis tells her life story in this vivid evocation of the world of Old Testament women. The only surviving daughter of Jacob and Leah, Dinah occupies a far different world from the flocks and business deals of her brothers. She learns from her Aunt Rachel the mysteries of midwifery and from her other aunts the art of homemaking. Most important, Dinah learns and preserves the stories and traditions of her family, which she shares with the reader in touchingly intimate detail. Familiar passages from the Bible come alive as Dinah fills in what the Bible leaves out concerning Jacob’s courtship of Rachel and Leah, her own ill-fated sojourn in the city of Sechem and her half-brother Joseph’s rise to fame and fortune in Egypt.

The Rest of Her Life by Laura Moriarty
Kara Churchill, 18, is driving with a friend and talking on her phone when she blows through a stop sign and strikes a classmate, killing her instantly. Kara retreats into herself, baffling and upsetting her mother, Leigh, who can’t find a way to reach her. Leigh’s own mother abandoned Leigh at age 16 when she abruptly took off for California to live her own life, and Leigh’s sister has moved from one bad relationship to another, so there are reasons Leigh has difficulties relating to her privileged, popular daughter. Moriarty avoids the twists readers expect—an outraged community and a lurid trial—to focus instead on the internal workings of the Churchill family and their shock and grief in the days following the girl’s death. Leigh in particular wonders how her daughter will move on beyond the accident that will haunt her for the remainder of her days.

Room by Emma Donoghue
Five-year-old Jack has never known anything of life beyond Room, the 11-square-foot space he shares with his mother. Jack has learned to read, count, and process an imaginary world Outside through television. At night he sleeps in a wardrobe in case Old Nick comes to visit, bringing supplies and frightening intrusion. Worried about his curiosity and her own desperation, his mother reveals to Jack that the Outside is real and that they must escape. She tells him that she was kidnapped by Old Nick and has been held secluded in Room for seven years. Jack is brave enough to carry out their plan, and the two of them are compelled to adjust to life Outside, with its bright lights and noise and people touching. What is reconnection for his mother is discovery for Jack, who is soon overwhelmed by the changes in his mother and a world coming at him fast and furiously.

The Round House by Louise Erdich
The son of a tribal judge, Bazil, and a tribal enrollment specialist, Geraldine, Joe Coutts is an attentively loved and lucky boy—until his mother is brutally beaten and raped. Erdrich’s profound intimacy with her characters electrifies this stunning and devastating tale of hate crimes and vengeance, her latest immersion in the Ojibwe and white community she has been writing about for more than two decades. As Joe and his
father try to help Geraldine heal and figure out who attacked her and why, Erdrich dissects the harsh realities of an imperiled yet vital culture and unjust laws. Through Joe’s hilarious and unnerving encounters with his ex-stripper aunt, bawdy grandmothers, and a marine turned Catholic priest; Joe’s dangerous escapades with his loyal friends; and the spellbinding stories told by his grandfather, Mooshum, a favorite recurring character, Erdrich covers a vast spectrum of history, cruel loss, and bracing realizations.

**The Shadow of the Wind** by Carlos Ruiz Zafón

In post-World War II Barcelona, young Daniel is taken by his bookseller father to the Cemetery of Forgotten Books, a massive sanctuary where books are guarded from oblivion. Told to choose one book to protect, he selects *The Shadow of the Wind*, by Julian Carax. He reads it, loves it, and soon learns it is both very valuable and very much in danger because someone is determinedly burning every copy of every book written by the obscure Carax. Daniel’s initiation into the mysteries of adulthood is given the same weight as the mystery of the book-burner.

**The Shawl: A Story and a Novella** by Cynthia Ozick

Containing two related short stories, this collection hauntingly recounts one woman’s experiences in a German concentration camp, and the manner in which they later affect her. In the story *The Shawl*, Rosa manages to hide her daughter from the Nazi’s in the concentration camp. Before long, however, tragedy strikes. The story entitled *Rosa* picks up the title character’s life thirty years later, as she is trying to make a new life for herself in the United States.

**Sixtyfive Roses: A Sister’s Memoir** by Heather Summerhayes Cariou

Heather Summerhayes was six when her four-year-old sister Pam was diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis and given only months to live. “Sixtyfive roses” was the way Pam pronounced the name of the disease that forever altered the lives of her siblings and parents, who in turn helped alter the community’s response to the disease by founding the Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. With the help of the CF Foundation, research and new treatments, the fight to save Pam’s life lasted for years, until her death at the age of twenty-six. This beautifully written memoir offers a compassionate yet unflinching eyewitness account of the hope, pain, and courage of a family in crisis as it falls apart and outs itself together again and again, to emerge stronger and more loving. The heart of the story explores the relationship between the two sisters: one devastatingly ill, the other healthy but burdened with guilt, as they journey through childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood.

**Song Yet Sung** by James McBride

Liz Spocott, a beautiful young runaway slave, suffers a nasty head wound just before being nabbed by a posse of slave catchers. She falls into a coma, and, when she awakes, she can see the future—from the near-future to Martin Luther King to hip-hop—in her dreams. Liz’s visions help her and her fellow slaves escape, but soon there are new dangers on her trail: Patty Cannon and her brutal gang of slave catchers, and a competing slave catcher, nicknamed “The Gimp,” who has a surprising streak of morality. Liz has some friends, including an older woman who teaches her “The Code” that guides runaways; a handsome young slave; and a wild inhabitant of the woods and swamps. Kidnappings, gunfights and chases ensue as Liz drifts in and out of her visions, which serve as a thoughtful meditation on the nature of freedom and offer sharp social commentary on contemporary America.
**The Story Sisters: A Novel** by Alice Hoffman

Elv, Claire, and Meg are the Story Sisters, and each has a fate she must meet alone. One on a country road, one in the streets of Paris, and one in the corridors of her own imagination. At once a coming-of-age tale, a family saga, and a love story of erotic longing, The Story Sisters sifts through the miraculous and the mundane as the girls become women and their choices haunt them, change them, and finally redeem them.

**The Sweet Potato Queens’ Book of Love** by Jill Conner Brown

Unlike other beauty queens, the Jackson, Miss., Sweet Potato Queens are self-crowned, rule for life (there's no "former" tag for these gals) and are real women, figure flaws and all. This buoyantly funny guide to life and love is a hoot from the get-go as ringleader Browne offers queenly observations on life’s most pressing issues. Some topics may seem trivial, such as tanning, making the most of big hair and delighting in "big, sturdy, serviceable, substantial Russian immigrant underwear" for pregnant women (it's so "indescribably comfy" that "you may never go back"), but they are expertly mined for laughs. Non-cooks may reconsider when reading the hilariously artery-clogging recipes in the chapter "What to Eat When Tragedy Strikes," highlighting the four main food groups (sweet, salty, fried and au gratin) and suitable for both therapeutic and recreational eating.

**Tanglewood Plantation** by Jocelyn Miller

Chicagoan Summer Woodfield, is in for the surprise of her life when she inherits the family estate in Georgia. Not only is the antebellum plantation a dilapidated relic, but comes complete with a haunting cast of characters--characters long dead! Convinced by the estate lawyer to fulfill the requirements of her inheritance, she reluctantly sets up house in the haunted mansion. An investigative trip into the attic leads to the discovery of mid-19th century love letters written by the son of the overseer to Evaline, a mulatto slave on the plantation. Summer is drawn to the mystery of Evaline, and taunted by a thumbprint purposely placed on one of the letters by its author. When she touches the thumbprint, she is whisked back in time to the Civil War, not as the mistress of the manor, but as a slave--a servant to her own ancestors! Trapped in a time warp, she experiences the horror of the Civil War as a slave, while the secret of her inheritance is exposed, awakening a forbidden love story lost in the annals of time.

**Their Eyes Were Watching God** by Zora Neale Hurston

The novel follows the fortunes of Janie Crawford, a woman living in the black town of Eaton, Florida. One person the citizens of Eaton are inclined to judge is Janie Crawford, who has married three men and been tried for the murder of one of them. Janie feels no compulsion to justify herself to the town, but she does explain herself to her friend, Phoeby, with the implicit understanding that Phoeby can "tell 'em what Ah say if you wants to. Dat's just de same as me 'cause mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf."

**The Things They Carried: A Work of Fiction** by Tim O'Brien

A series of stories about the Vietnam experience, based on the author’s recollections. The tales, ranging from a paragraph to 20 or so pages, reveal one truth after another. Sometimes the author tells the same story from different points of view, revealing the lingering, sometimes consuming, effect war leaves on the soul. In the end, readers are left with a mental and emotional sphere of mirrors, each reflecting a speck of truth about the things men carry into and out of war.
We Need to Talk About Kevin by Lionel Shriver
In a series of brutally introspective missives to her husband, Franklin, from whom she is separated, Eva tries to come to grips with the fact that their 17-year-old son, Kevin, has killed seven students and two adults with his crossbow. Guiltily she recalls how, as a successful writer, she was terrified of having a child. Was it for revenge, then, that from the moment of his birth Kevin was the archetypal difficult child, screaming for hours, refusing to nurse, driving away countless nannies, and intuitively learning to "divide and conquer" his parents? When their daughter, loving and patient Celia, is born, Eva feels vindicated; but as the gap between her view of Kevin as a "Machiavellian miscreant" and Franklin's efforts to explain away their son's aberrant behavior grows wider, they find themselves facing divorce.

The Witch of Portobello: A Novel by Paulo Coelho
Athena Khalil foresees civil war in her hometown, Beirut; moves to London; and finds ecstasy dancing to Siberian percussion beats. After traveling to Transylvania to meet her birth mother, a Gypsy, for the first time, she begins a spiritual quest of learning through teaching and off-the-cuff rituals to break routine. By dancing against the beat, Athena conjures Hagia Sofia, an alternate part of her who can speak with ghosts and see auroras, and she prophesies for a growing audience.