
Notable Books

The 2014 Selection of Titles

RUSA Notable Books Council

RUSA Notable Books Council contributing members are William Kelly—Chair (Cuyahoga County Public Library), Terry Beck (Sno-Isle Libraries- WA), Victoria Caplinger (NovelList), Sharon Castleberry (DeSoto Public Library), Stacey Hayman (Rocky River Public Library), Sarah Jaffa (Kitsap Regional Library), Liz Kirchoff (Barrington Area Library), Julie Ann Murphy (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), Katharine Phenix—Vice-Chair (Anythink Libraries), Jason A. Reuscher (The Pennsylvania State University Libraries), Sara Taffae (Independent), Mary Callaghan “Cal” Zunt (Cleveland Public Library).

The Notable Books Council, a group of readers’ advisory experts within the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA), a division of the American Library Association, has announced its selections for the 2014 Notable Books List.

Since 1944, the goal of the Notable Books Council has been to make available to the nation’s readers a list of about twenty-five very good, very readable, and at times very important fiction, nonfiction, and poetry books for the adult reader. A book may be selected for inclusion on the Notable Books List if it possesses exceptional literary merit, expands the horizons of human knowledge, makes a specialized body of knowledge accessible to the nonspecialist, has the potential to contribute significantly to the solution of a contemporary problem, or presents a unique concept.

FICTION

Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Knopf. (978-0-30727108-2). The nuances and challenges of race, emigration, and cultural identification are explored through the lives of two Nigerian lovers.

Life After Life by Kate Atkinson. Reagan Arthur. (978-0-31617648-4). What would happen if death were just a new beginning?

Claire of the Sea Light by Edwidge Danticat. Knopf. (978-0-30727179-2). A bittersweet fable of modern Haiti told in luminous prose.

Too Bright to Hear Too Loud to See by Juliann Garey. Soho Press. (978-1-61695129-0). The fragmented and unsettling perspective of a man grappling with mental illness.

Enon by Paul Harding. Random House. (978-1-40006943-9). A father struggles with the accidental death of his fifteen year-old daughter. Grief on paper.

Unchangeable Spots of Leopards by Kristopher Jansma. Viking. (978-0-67002600-5). Around the world with a charmingly unreliable narrator in this coming-of-age tale.

The Dinner by Herman Koch. Hogarth. (978-0-77043785-5). If they sat next to us in a restaurant, we would do well to simply study our forks.

Constellation of Vital Phenomena by Anthony Marra. Hogarth. (978-0-77043640-7). An affirmation of life amid the chaos of war-torn Chechnya.

The Woman Upstairs by Claire Messud. Knopf. (978-0-30759690-1). A taut psychological drama of slow-burning anger.

Tale for the Time Being by Ruth Ozeki. Viking. (978-0-67002663-0). Tokyo meets Sunnyvale and British Columbia through a purple gel pen, a tsunami, and a Hello Kitty lunchbox with a side of quantum physics.

The Goldfinch by Donna Tartt. Little Brown. (978-0-31605543-7). A terrorist bomb blows apart a thirteen-year-old boy's world.

NONFICTION

Lawrence in Arabia: War, Deceit, Imperial Folly and the Making of the Modern Middle East by Scott Anderson. Doubleday. (978-0-81121875-7). A biography of place viewed through some of its most enigmatic and iconic historical figures.

Year Zero: A History of 1945 by Ian Baruma. Penguin. (978-1-59420436-4). A fresh look at the aftermath of World War II challenges the traditional, heroic narrative.

On Paper: The Everything of Its Two-Thousand Year History by Nicholas Basbanes. Knopf. (978-0-30726642-2). The most valuable, useful, pervasive invention after the wheel and before the computer.

To the End of June: The Intimate Life of American Foster Care by Cris Beam. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. (978-0-15101412-5). When every person and social system you've trusted has let you down, can there be happy endings for anyone involved?

The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics by Daniel James Brown. Viking. (978-0-67002581-7). Eight oarsman and their coxswain struggle to overcome the choppy waters and the hardships of the Great Depression in their pursuit of glory.

Five Days at Memorial: Life and Death in a Storm-Ravaged Hospital by Sheri Fink. Crown. (978-0-30771896-9). After Hurricane Katrina, systematic failures lead to morally ambiguous decisions.

The Riddle of the Labyrinth: the Quest to Crack an Ancient Code by Margalit Fox. Harper Collins. (978-0-06222883-3). Unsung classicist Alice Kober's research provides the key to unlock "Linear B," a 3,500 year-old language.

On the Map: A Mind-Expanding Exploration of the Way the World Looks by Simon Garfield. Gotham Books. (978-1-59240779-8). Wherever you go, you are here.

Johnny Cash: The Life by Robert Hilburn. Little, Brown. (978-0-31619475-4). The Man in Black in full color.

The Skies Belong to Us: Love and Terror in the Golden Age of Hijacking by Brendan I. Koerner. Crown. (978-0-30788610-1). High-flying tale of twisted romance and seventies politics.

Animal Wise: The Thoughts and Emotions of our Fellow Creatures by Virginia Morell. Crown. (978-0-30746144-5). No critters were harmed in the making of this book.

Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Safety by Eric Schlosser. Penguin. (978-1-59420227-8). An expose of dropped wrenches and lost bombs. Whoops!

Faraway Nearby by Rebecca Solnit. Viking. (978-0-67002596-1). Apricots and Alzheimer's come together in a meditation on how lives are created and sustained through story.

POETRY

The Ogre's Wife: Poems by Ron Koertge. Red Hen. (978-1-59709723-9). Odd, eclectic, and magical verse.

Hum by Jamaal May. Alice James. (978-1-93858402-2). Detroit cityscapes resonate with the pulse of machinery and silence.