

ELA IV—SUMMER READING ASSIGNMENT 2019

ELA IV Summer Reading Google Classroom Code: [kb4og7](#)

As you transfer from juniors to seniors you are expected to complete a summer reading assignment. You will choose at least one book from the list below to read independently.

Information about each of these books is available at [The National Endowment of the Arts: The Big Read](https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read) website at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read>. Each book has its own page where you can gather more information about the text, the author, historical and literary context and more. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs; you'll find lots more interesting information!

Summer Reading Assignment

PART I: Discussion Questions (Due Tuesday, September 3rd)

Download **The Reader's Resources (Reading Guide)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide. Your **typed** responses to these questions are **due the second week of school on Tuesday, September 3rd** (the Tuesday after Labor Day). Make sure that you **recycle the question** as a part of your answer. **Note:** Some of the discussion questions ask more than one question. Make sure you answer each thoroughly. **NOTE:** This is an INDEPENDENT PROJECT. Your responses should be your own.

PART II: Book Talk OR Book Trailer Assignment (Due Week of Tuesday, September 3rd)

OPTION 1: Give a **three-four-minute book talk** during the first week of school on your independent read.

- 1) Begin by offering a **brief introduction** of the book. Mention key information including significant historical/cultural context.
- 2) Discuss the **author's use of literary tools and techniques of language and storytelling to craft writing** including Narrative Elements and Literary Devices.
 - a. **Suggested Narrative Elements:** Discuss some or all of the following: setting, foreshadowing, characterization, theme, plot, conflict, and point of view.
 - b. **Suggested Literary Devices or Techniques—** Discuss some or all of the following: alliteration, personification, simile, metaphor, allusion, irony, and parallel structure, understatement, hyperbole, and onomatopoeia.

OPTION 2: Give a **three-four-minute book talk** during the first week of school on your independent read.

- 1) Begin by offering a **brief introduction** of the book. Mention key information including significant historical/cultural context.
- 2) Select **TWO** of the discussion questions from the Reader's Guide that you feel **BEST** addresses the most important aspect of the novel and share your responses.

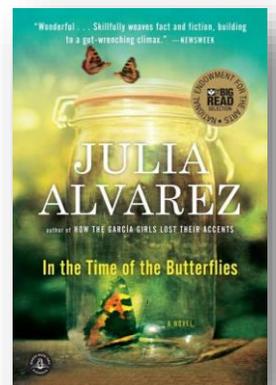
OPTION 3: Create a **1 to 2-minute book trailer** that artistically and thoroughly represents the theme, setting, conflict, tone, and characters of your chosen book. Search on-line for sample book trailers. Your trailer **must be entirely your own**. Be prepared to give a brief introduction to your book before you share your book trailer with the class.

In the Time of the Butterflies by Julia Alvarez (1994)

In the Time of the Butterflies by Julia Alvarez transports us to the Dominican Republic in the mid-twentieth century when the country struggled under the brutal dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. A work of historical fiction, the novel honors the lives of Patria, Minerva, and María Teresa Mirabal, who became icons of freedom and women's rights when they were assassinated in the autumn of 1960 for their role in the underground movement against Trujillo's regime.

Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/time-butterflies>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs!

Download **The Reader's Guide** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.



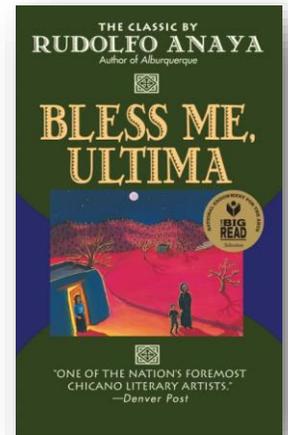
Bless Me, Ultima by Rudolfo Anaya (1972)

The summer before Antonio Juan Márez y Luna turns seven years old, an old woman comes to live with his family in Guadalupe, New Mexico. This woman—called La Grande or Ultima—is a *curandera*, a traditional healer feared by many and mysterious to all. With her knowledge of medicinal plants and adoration for the *llano* (open plains), she uses her magic to aid the community.

Because she served as his midwife, Ultima has a special connection to Antonio. As she teaches him, their bond deepens. Antonio witnesses several tragic events that profoundly shake his understanding of his history and his future. After the murder of Lupito, a soldier recently returned from World War II, Antonio begins to consider sin, death, and the afterlife in earnest.

Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/bless-me-ultima>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs!

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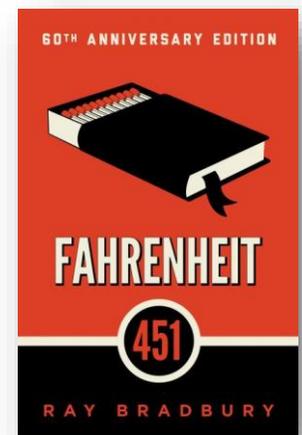


Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury (1953)

Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* is a gripping story is a visionary parable of a society gone awry, in which firemen burn books and the state suppresses learning. The novel focuses on Guy Montag, a fireman who, in the first section, we discover is a professional book burner, expected to start fires instead of putting them out. For years he has done his job obediently and well, and finds a "special pleasure" in burning books (p.1). Then one day, he is called upon to burn the books of a Mrs. Hudson, who prefers to die rather than leave her library. Furtively, Montag pockets some of her books, haunted by the idea that a life without books might not be worth living after all.

Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/fahrenheit-451>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs!

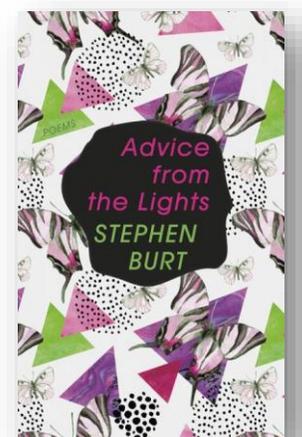
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Advice from the Lights by Stephanie Burt (2017)

"Because I can't ever appear / as I would like to appear, / I once tried to make it so you couldn't see me at all." –from "Roly-Poly Bug" in *Advice from the Lights*

Opening Stephanie Burt's *Advice from the Lights* is like opening a time capsule from a 1980s American childhood. On any given page, you might find a kid wishing to be Spock from *Star Trek*; playing Pac-Man, mini-golf, or Atari; wearing Mary Janes, Doc Martens, or jelly shoes; or being broken up with over a cordless phone. Underlying these staple childhood items, though, is a kid struggling to "fit in" and come to terms with an assigned gender identity. The collection includes memories of being raised as a boy, but wishing she was a girl. Other poems—poems with the name "Stephanie" in the title—imagine what her life would have been like if she had been raised a girl. Meanwhile, a seemingly random assortment of items—a hermit crab, kites, a pair of ferrets—pop up occasionally to introduce themselves and share the struggles of their respective existences. Together, the poems reveal glimpses of the curator's intimate thoughts and desires, realities and fantasies. The collection is teeming with talking objects, plants, and animals grappling with the bodies and the circumstances they each inhabit.



Information about this collection of poetry is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/advice-from-the-lights>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs!

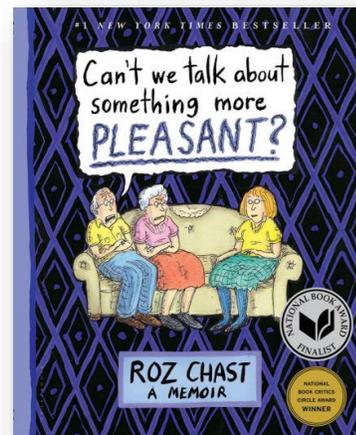
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***Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* by Roz Chast (2014)**

Between their one-bad-thing-after-another lives and the Depression, World War II, and the Holocaust, in which they'd both lost family...who could blame them for not wanting to talk about death?" – Roz Chast in *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?*

Roz Chast's parents were in their mid-90s, living in the same run-down Brooklyn apartment they'd been in for 48 years and where Chast grew up, when her mother's physical health and father's mental state necessitated a change. "Gut-wrenching and laugh-out-loud funny" (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel), Chast's memoir, *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?*, is a mix of four-color cartoons, family photos, sketches, found documents, and narrative storytelling that chronicles the conflicting emotions, memories, and practical challenges of her parents' last years and passing.

Information about this memoir is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/cant-we-talk-about-something-more-pleasant>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.

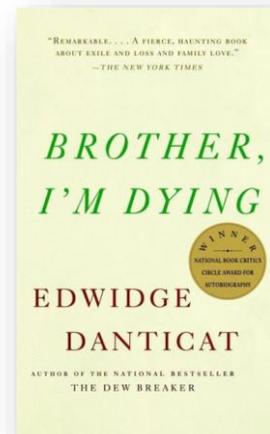


***Brother, I'm Dying* by Edwidge Danticat (2007)**

Brother, I'm Dying, is the true-life story of Edwidge Danticat's father, Mira, and his brother, Joseph. Born in the Haitian countryside, both brothers move to the big city of Port-au-Prince to work and raise families. Many years later, after Edwidge's father marries and begins a family, he decides to immigrate to the United States, while her Uncle Joseph—a community leader and pastor—chooses to remain in Haiti with his congregation. Edwidge, only two years old at the time of her father's departure, is left in the care of her Uncle Joseph and his wife, Tante Denise. Joseph and Edwidge develop a close relationship over the next several years. Edwidge spends most of her free time with her uncle, and after he suffers severe damage to his vocal chords, she acts as his interpreter.

Ten years later, Edwidge rejoins her parents in the U.S. and must adjust to an unfamiliar world in Brooklyn, where she struggles to balance her new life with memories of the vibrant home and beloved uncle she left behind in Haiti.

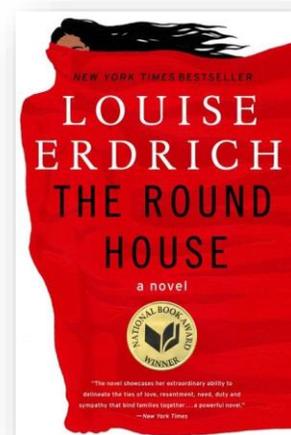
Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/brother-im-dying>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.



***The Round House* by Louise Erdrich (2012)**

Joe Coutts is 13 years old in 1988, living a carefree life on the Ojibwe reservation in North Dakota, when his family is shattered by a brutal attack against his mother that leaves her a shell of her former self. In the weeks following the attack, his mother mostly refuses to eat and won't leave her bedroom. Joe and his father, a tribal judge, don't know how to help her recover, nor can Joe's father untangle the web of jurisdictional legalities to bring the perpetrator to justice. As Joe, now older, looks back on that time of anger and confusion, we come to understand how a young boy might view the events and decide to take matters into his own hands. Louise Erdrich's novel *The Round House* (Harper, 2012) "opens out to become a detective story and a coming-of-age story, a story about how Joe is initiated into the sadnesses and disillusionments of grown-up life and the somber realities of his people's history" (The New York Times).

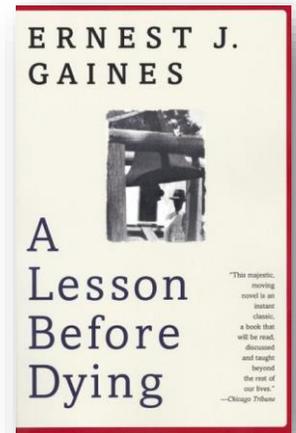
Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/the-round-house>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.



A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest J. Gaines (1993)

Ernest J. Gaines's *A Lesson Before Dying* (1993) poses one of the most universal questions literature can ask: Knowing we're going to die, how should we live? It's the story of an uneducated young black man named Jefferson, accused of the murder of a white storekeeper, and Grant Wiggins, a college-educated native son of Louisiana, who teaches at a plantation school. In a little more than 250 pages, these two men named for presidents discover a friendship that transforms at least two lives.

Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/a-lesson-before-dying>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! Download [The Reader's Guide](#) and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.

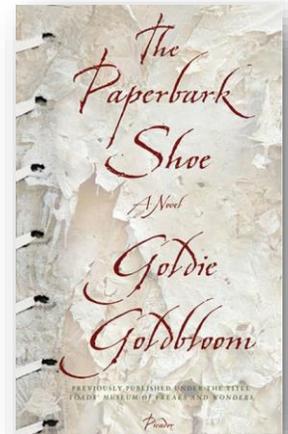


The Paperbark Shoe by Goldie Goldbloom (2009)

"I have been called some terrible names in this life, but now I only hear his voice in the mouths of my tormentors, saying, 'You are beautiful.'" – from *The Paperbark Shoe*

It's 1943 and Virginia "Gin" Toad—a 30-year-old pianist from the city of Perth, Western Australia—is trying her best to make a new life in the rural farming town of Wyalkatchem out in the vast and silent Australian bush. While World War II rages in Europe, Gin and her small, odd husband Agrippas Toad ("Toad") receive two of the many Italian prisoners of war sent to Australia during that time to provide much needed farm labor. Antonio and John settle in over several months. They build their own lodging, feed the calves and harvest the wheat, sing and tell stories of back home, entertain Gin and Toad's two children, and bring joy to Gin and Toad in unexpected ways. In stark contrast to her distrusting neighbors and a dark past, Gin finds herself feeling love and desire for the first time. But it can't last. Secrets and their accompanying feelings of shame and guilt and longing begin to surface as the reality of war comes back to invade and unravel their isolated lives.

Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/the-paperbark-shoe>. There is no Reader's Guide for this novel, but **Discussion Questions** are available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/the-paperbark-shoe>.

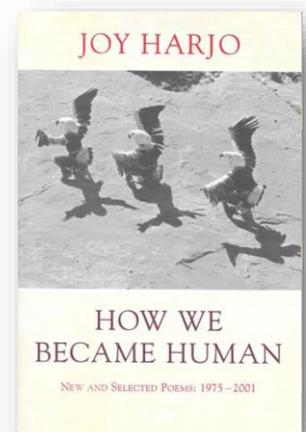


How We Became Human by Joy Harjo (2004)

"Don't worry about what a poem means. Do you ask what a song means before you listen? Just listen." — Joy Harjo

To open Joy Harjo's *How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems 1975-2001* (W.W. Norton, 2002) is to be immersed in the power of nature, spirituality, memory, violence, and the splintered history of America's indigenous peoples. To read her poetry is to get drawn into the rhythms, sounds, and stories of Harjo's Creek heritage. The collection offers a glimpse into the first quarter-century of Harjo's career, and includes an introduction about the circumstances at play in her life when she wrote the poems. Drawing together "the brutalities of contemporary reservation life with the beauty and sensibility of Native American culture and mythology," writes *Publishers Weekly*, the book shows "the remarkable progression of a writer determined to reconnect with her past and make sense of her present."

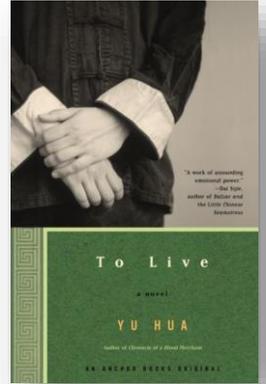
Information about this collection of poetry is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/how-we-became-human>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! Download [The Reader's Guide](#) and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.



To Live by Yu Hua (1993)

"When I write there is a constant voice in my ears. Sometimes I hear laughter, sometimes I hear sobs, sometimes I hear sighs, sometimes I hear myself." — Yu Hua in *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*

Although it was initially banned in China, the internationally award-winning epic novel *To Live*, which was first published in 1993, is now considered to be one of the country's most influential books, with millions of copies in print. Called a "Chinese Book of Job" by the author Wang Ping, it tells the poignant story of a man's transformation from a mean, selfish wastrel to a devoted husband and father trying desperately to keep his family alive during the worst famine in Chinese history and a time of dramatic political and social change. Spanning four decades of modern Chinese history and written in stripped-down prose with a sensitivity to the dialogue and details of everyday life, the novel is tragic and filled with pain, but it is also a tale of endurance, humility, beauty, love, and ultimate redemption.

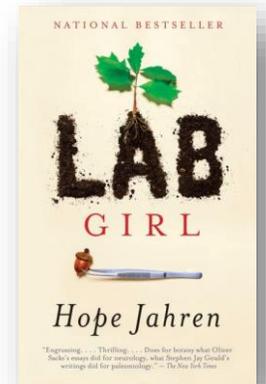


Information about this novel is available <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/to-live>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.

Lab Girl by Hope Jahren (2016)

"Science has taught me that everything is more complicated than we first assume, and that being able to derive happiness from discovery is a recipe for a beautiful life"—from *Lab Girl* (p. 29)

Lab Girl is a nature lover's story about digging in dirt and discovering new things about old growth. It's a scientist's story about running experiments and waiting and wondering and asking for funds and fending off doubt. It's a Midwesterner's story of moving south and east and west and noticing the differences. It's a girl's story about growing up to be what she wants to be. And it's a woman's story about fighting stereotypes, sacrificing, feeling vulnerable, trusting in friendship, getting sick, getting help, finding love, and writing it all down. "I used to pray to be made stronger," Jahren writes in *Lab Girl*. "Now I pray to be made grateful" (p. 256).

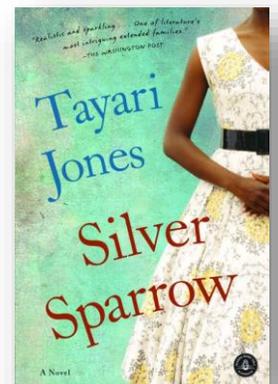


Information about this novel is available <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/lab-girl>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.

Silver Sparrow by Tayari Jones (2011)

"My father, James Witherspoon is a bigamist," is the opening line of *Silver Sparrow*, a novel written by Tayari Jones that unveils a breathtaking story about a man's deception, a family's complicity, and the two teenage girls caught in the middle.

Set in a middle-class neighborhood in Atlanta during the 1980s, the novel revolves around James Witherspoon's families—the public one and the secret one. When Witherspoon's daughters from each family meet, they form a friendship, but only one of them knows they are sisters. It is a relationship destined to explode when secrets are revealed and illusions shattered. As Jones explores the backstories of her rich and flawed characters, she also reveals the joy, and the destruction, they brought to each other's lives.



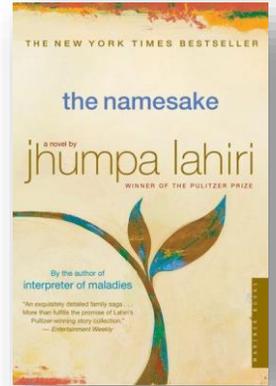
Information about this novel is available <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/silver-sparrow>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.

The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri (2003)

A father and mother, a son and daughter: two generations of a typical Bengali–American family, poised uneasily atop the complex and confounding fault lines common to the immigrant experience. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* deftly demonstrates how the familiar struggles between new and old, assimilation and cultural preservation, striving toward the future and longing for the past, play out in one particular set of foreign-born parents and their American-born children.

Information about this novel is available <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/the-namesake>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs!

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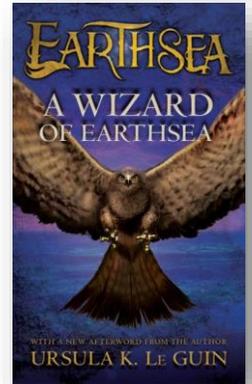


A Wizard of Earthsea by Ursula K. Le Guin (1968)

Ursula K. Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968) is arguably the most widely admired American fantasy novel of the past fifty years. The book's elegant diction, geographical sweep, and mounting suspense are quite irresistible. Earthsea—composed of an archipelago of many islands—is a land of the imagination, like Oz, Faerie, or the dream-like realm of our unconscious. Earthsea may not be a "real" world but it is one that our souls recognize as meaningful and "true." Actions there possess an epic grandeur, a mythic resonance that we associate with romance and fairy tale.

Songs, poems, runes, spells—words matter a great deal in Earthsea, especially those in the "Old Speech" now spoken only by dragons and wizards. To work a spell one must know an object or person's "true name," which is nothing less than that object or person's fundamental essence. In Earthsea, to know a person's true name is to gain power over him or her. "A mage," we are told, "can control only what is near him, what he can name exactly and wholly."

Information about this book is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/a-wizard-of-earthsea>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.



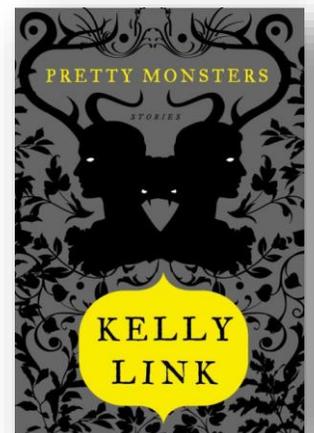
Pretty Monsters by Kelly Link (2008)

"Her stories are about more than strangeness, more than the fantastic—they're about inclusion, diversity, and acceptance of alternate world views." — Lit Hub

Though all but one of the ten magical and macabre stories in Kelly Link's collection *Pretty Monsters* were written for young adults, several of them first appeared in publications for adults, garnering Link a cross-generational fan base. The heroes of the stories are mostly teenagers in familiar settings grappling with angst and alienation, awkwardness and awakening desires. That they are also grappling with unexpected monsters, ghosts, wizards, gods, aliens, dueling librarians, pirate-magicians, shapeshifters, possibly carnivorous sofas, and undead babysitters should give readers a hint to keep their expectations in check. *Pretty Monsters* is part-haunted house, part-fun house, part-safe house, and part-something that doesn't resemble a house at all.

Information about this novel is available <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/pretty-monsters>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs!

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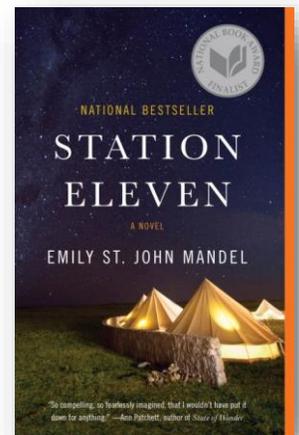


Station Eleven by Emily St. John Mandel (2014)

"I wanted to write a love letter to the world we find ourselves in." — Emily St. John Mandel in an interview with *Bustle*

The post-apocalyptic novel has grown popular enough to warrant its own genre, and one could argue that *Station Eleven* fits well within that category. Published by Knopf in 2014, it tells the story of a small band of actors and musicians 20 years after a flu pandemic has wiped out 99% of the Earth's population. Like other books in the genre, it highlights the fragility of our existence, our violent nature, and our capacity to survive despite the inevitable hardships of starvation, loneliness, and chaos. But this is where the similarities taper off, for the story Emily St. John Mandel chooses to tell is not one of horror and mayhem that even she admits would befall the survivors in the immediate aftermath of a complete societal collapse. *Station Eleven* describes a world of hope, of people coping with nostalgia and loss, both in the present and the future, of the power of art and relationships to fulfill us, sustain us, and nurture us back to our best selves.

Information about this novel is <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/station-eleven>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.



Hustle by David Tomas Martinez (2014)

"Often, the most ordinary fears obscure the most / obvious truths." – from "Motion and Rest" in *Hustle*

David Tomas Martinez's poems in *Hustle* unflinchingly examine the experiences of his youth—his activity in a gang, the complicated dynamics of his family life, his time in a shipyard and in the navy, and eventually, his discovery of poetry. From the littered freeways, canyons, and backyards of his San Diego childhood to the tree-canopied, uprooted concrete streets of Houston—where he later moves—*Hustle* shows us a young Martinez negotiating life at the brink of manhood, and later looking back. "Part of my goal in writing this book, which was based chiefly on my experiences, was to allow some of the people I grew up with, many who have been silenced by societal and internal forces, to have a voice" he told *32 Poems*.

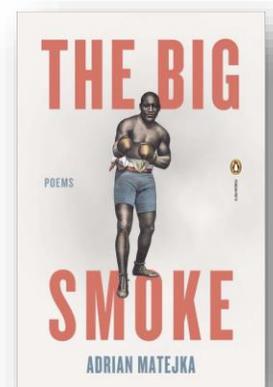
Information about this collection of poetry is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/hustle>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.



The Big Smoke by Adrian Matejka (2013)

Legendary prizefighter Jack Johnson—the first African American to claim the title of world heavyweight champion—"comes so boldly to life" in *The Big Smoke* "one almost wants to duck" (*Boston Globe*). This third collection of poetry by award-winning poet and Indiana University professor Adrian Matejka has "the lean, long jab and agile step of a boxer" (National Book Foundation). Winner of the Anisfield-Wolf Prize and finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award, *The Big Smoke* explores the fighter's journey from poverty to one of the most coveted titles in sports through the voices of Johnson and the women who knew him best. It's a "rich, sometimes disturbing portrait of a fascinating, flawed, and complex man" (*Washington Post*) who "is troubled by his own demons but determined to win the 'fight of the century'" (National Book Foundation).

Information about this collection of poetry is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/big-smoke>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.

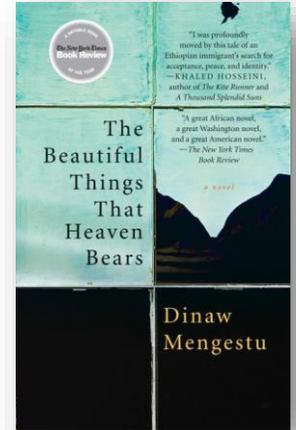


The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears by Dinaw Mengestu (2007)

The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears alternates between the present and the past to tell the story of a lonely Ethiopian shopkeeper in a D.C. neighborhood undergoing gentrification. "After seventeen years here, I am certain of at least one thing: the liberal idea of America is at its best in advertising." — Sepha Stephanos in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*

In this novel, Dinaw Mengestu describes the pain of exile, when one is violently uprooted from his or her homeland. Having fled the Ethiopian Red Terror of the late 1970s to live and work in Washington, DC, Sepha Stephanos is acutely aware of the loneliness, sadness, and dislocation that accompany his pursuit to find a quiet refuge from the ghosts of his old life. Seventeen years have passed since Stephanos immigrated to Washington, where he began working as a hotel valet and met his two companions, also African immigrants, "Joe from the Congo" and "Ken the Kenyan."

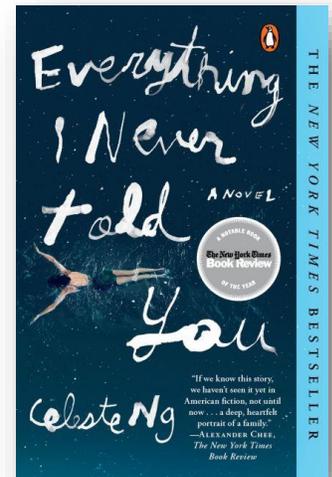
Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/the-beautiful-things-that-heaven-bears>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.



Everything I Never Told You by Celeste Ng (2014)

In a small town in Ohio in 1977, the oldest daughter and favorite child of a biracial couple — her mother is white, her father is Chinese-American — is found drowned in a lake. As her parents and siblings struggle to solve the mystery of her death, a web of family secrets emerge to reveal how fragile the relationships between husband and wife, parent and child, and brother and sister can be when ambitions are thwarted, societal pressures mount, and fears and desires are kept buried. Celeste Ng's debut novel *Everything I Never Told You* (Penguin Press, 2014) alternates between past and present and is told from the various perspectives of each grieving member of the family, all of whom come to realize in their own way how little they knew about the people they thought they knew best.

Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/everything-i-never-told-you>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.

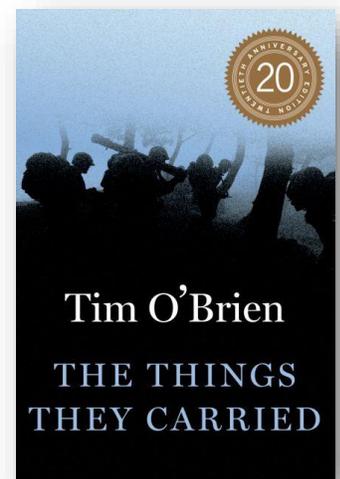


The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien (1990)

Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990) is considered one of the finest books about the Vietnam War. Far from a combat story of pride and glory, it is a compassionate tale of the American soldier, brimming with raw honesty and thoughtful reflection.

The book's narrator follows a platoon of infantrymen through the jungles of Vietnam. We see them trudge through the muck of a constant downpour, get hit by sniper fire, pull body parts out of a tree, laugh while they tell their stories to each other, and fall silent when faced with making sense of it all—both in the moment and twenty years later.

Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/the-things-they-carried>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.

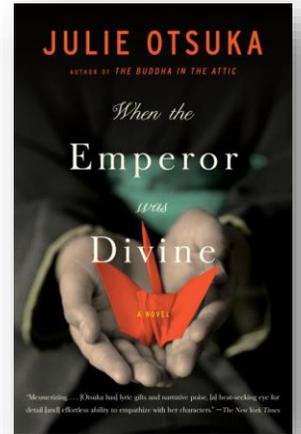


When the Emperor Was Divine by Julie Otsuka (2002)

It all began with a sign. Posted on telephone poles, park benches, community centers, and a Woolworth's, Executive Order No. 9066—issued by President Franklin D. Roosevelt—sought to prevent “espionage and sabotage” by citizens of Japanese descent in the wake of the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor. Japanese Americans were arrested, rounded up, and transported to detention centers across the United States, where in some cases they were held for several years.

Otsuka's novel unfolds in five different but interconnected narrative perspectives, and moves hauntingly through the family's internment experience in the voices of the mother, daughter, son, and father. The woman and her children recount, in sober detail, the daily events of their journey to—and time in—Topaz, where besides the internees, their barracks, and the soldiers, there was “only the wind and the dust and the hot burning sand.”

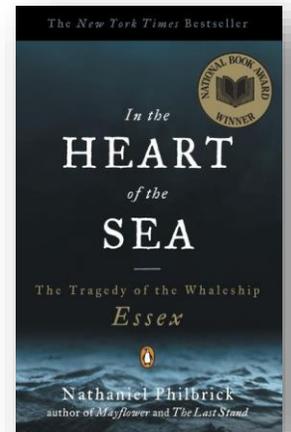
Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/when-the-emperor-was-divine>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.



In the Heart of the Sea by Nathaniel Philbrick (2000)

Nathaniel Philbrick's *In the Heart of the Sea* is “one of the most chilling books I have ever read,” writes Sebastian Junger, author of *The Perfect Storm*. Winner of the National Book Award for Nonfiction and on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 40 weeks, this “spellbinding” (*Time*) “page turner” (*New York Times*) tells the true story of the 19th-century whaleship *Essex* out of Nantucket that got rammed by one of the largest whales anyone had ever seen, the whale that inspired Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. But the story doesn't end there. The ship sank, sending the crewmembers adrift for months as they faced storms, starvation, and disease. Award-winning author of more than ten books, Philbrick “has created an eerie thriller from a centuries old tale... Scrupulously researched and eloquently written, *In the Heart of the Sea* is a masterpiece of maritime history,” writes the *New York Times*. “It gets into your bones.”

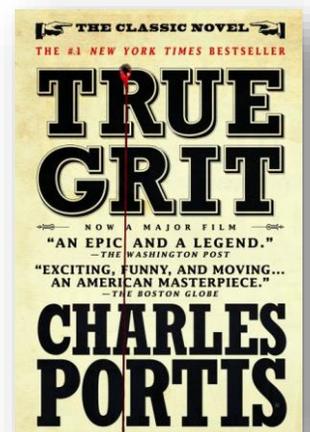
Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/in-the-heart-of-the-sea>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.



True Grit by Charles Portis (1968)

In the first line of *True Grit*, Charles Portis introduces the reader to the engaging voice of Mattie Ross, narrating from old age the great adventure of her life: “People do not give it credence that a fourteen-year-old girl could leave home and go off in the wintertime to avenge her father's blood but it did not seem so strange then, although I will say it did not happen every day.” In language straightforward but strongly her own, full of feeling but unsentimental, she goes on to relate the tale of her search for her father's murderer, “a coward going by the name of Tom Chaney,” during a hard winter across the “Choctaw Nation” in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. To aid her in her quest, she seeks a man with a quality she calls “true grit” and thinks she finds him in Rooster Cogburn, a shabby and overweight but affable federal marshal. Also seeking Chaney, for other crimes, is LaBoeuf, a proud, young Texas Ranger, who enters into a sometimes uneasy partnership with the pair.

Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/true-grit>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.

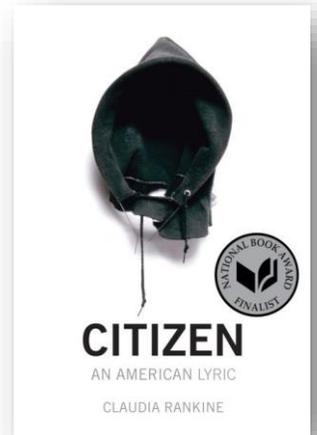


Citizen: An American Lyric by Claudia Rankine (2014)

"I love language because when it succeeds, for me, it doesn't just tell me something. It enacts something." — Claudia Rankine in *Guernica*

Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*, won the National Book Critics Circle Award in poetry, and was also a finalist for the award in criticism, the first time in the history of those awards that a book was named a finalist in more than one category. *Citizen* is a genre-bending work of art combining lyric prose with internal monologues, visual art, slogans, photographs, quotes, a screen grab from YouTube, and film scripts. It is a touchstone for talking candidly about racism. And it is a time capsule of contemporary headlines and key figures, with references to, among other things, Hurricane Katrina, the tennis champion Serena Williams, the 2006 World Cup, and the fatal shooting of Florida resident Trayvon Martin.

Information about this collection is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/citizen-an-american-lyric>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.

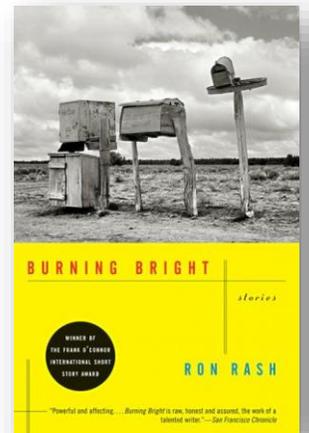


Burning Bright by Ron Rash (2010)

"The characters in *Burning Bright* are flawed ... but they're not monsters, even when their actions lack compassion or are downright criminal. The worst you can say about them is 'They're trying.'" — *Pop Matters*

Though the 12 stories in *Burning Bright* cover a wide swath of time from the Civil War to the present day, collectively they tell a story about Appalachia. And though they take us along the winding roads to the old homesteads and subdivisions of the American South, where "the region is a character in and of itself" and "myths and legends and history permeate every story" (*BookPage*), they also pulse with universal human emotions. The collection lets us glimpse the lives of farmers and office workers, soldiers and war widows, pawnbrokers and old bar musicians, all struggling to exist in the world.

Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/burning-bright>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.

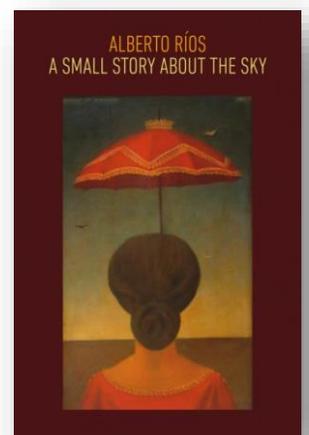


A Small Story About the Sky by Alberto Ríos (2015)

"We give because someone gave to us. / We give because nobody gave to us." — from Alberto Ríos' poem "When Giving Is All We Have" in *A Small Story About the Sky*

Sprinkled with hints of magic realism and deeply rooted in the desert landscape of the Southwest, *A Small Story About the Sky* is Alberto Ríos' 13th book of poems. It is as much a celebration of the everyday—drinking a morning coffee, feeding birds, going to the market—as it is a philosophical exploration of the things that do not exist but are very much real: ghosts from dust caught in the projector at a movie theater, the journey down the drain of washed away detritus while showering, the lines that separate us. The pages are filled with honeymoons and fiestas, fences and mirrors, beetles and crows, remedies and prayers, modern observances and ancient whispers, and a misheard weatherman predicting "rain and a chance of lizards."

Information about this collection of poetry is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/small-story-about-sky>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.

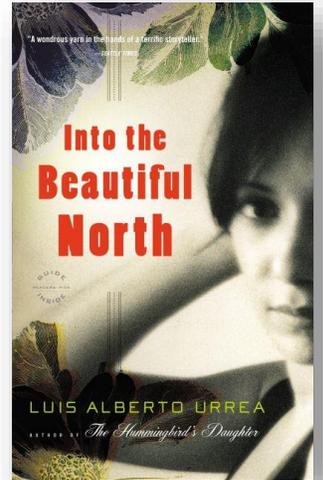


Into the Beautiful North by Luis Alberto Urrea (2009)

Into the Beautiful North is a quest novel in the grand tradition, though there are no medieval knights, magic rings, or light sabers within its pages. Author Luis Alberto Urrea sets the novel in the present day, in the highly charged world of the U.S.-Mexico border region.

Nayeli, an energetic and idealistic girl of nineteen, is coming of age in a Mexican village, more than 1,000 miles from the border. She and her friends spend their days working at low-wage jobs and surfing the Internet for videos of their favorite bands and movie stars, dreaming of a wider world they have little hope of knowing.

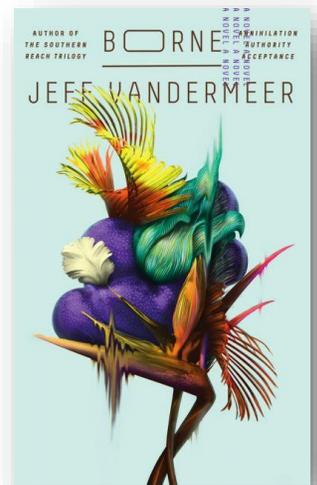
Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/into-the-beautiful-north>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.



Borne by Jeff VanderMeer (2017)

In an unnamed city of rubble and ruin stands a building once owned by a biotech company from which hybrid creatures have escaped and are now fighting for survival. They must compete for resources with the remaining humans who came to the city as a last resort, fleeing a decimated homeland, or were brought to the Company before it went defunct. All these living things roam the streets, scavenging for food while trying to remain hidden from Mord, a massive, murderous, flying bear. Among them is a young woman named Rachel who one day is inexplicably drawn to a small green living blob that she carries back to the home she shares with her lover, Wick. She names her new charge "Borne" and nurtures him as he grows in size and evolves into a being she both loves and fears. The novel *Borne* by Jeff VanderMeer "begins innocently enough: girl meets strange plantlike creature," writes *Esquire*. But "this is Walden gone horribly wrong."

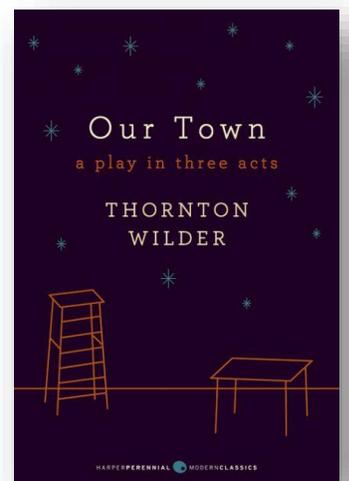
Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/borne>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.



Our Town by Thornton Wilder (1938)

At first glance, his play *Our Town* appears to be a simple, innocuous portrait of life in the small New Hampshire town of Grover's Corners. But as time passes in the three acts—an ordinary day, a wedding, a death—the play builds to a soaring exploration of human existence: its boundless trials, joys, questions, certainties. This play "is one of the great democratic products of American literature. It gives you the sense that the same profound and horrible truths hold true whether you're a sophisticate in Paris or a farmer in Grover's Corners" (acclaimed writer Tom Perrotta in the *Atlantic*).

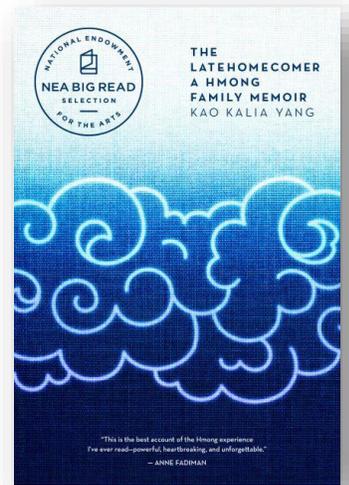
Information about this play is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/our-town>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.



The Latehomecomer by Kao Kalia Yang (2008)

Kao Kalia Yang's *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir* (Coffee House Press, 2008) is the first memoir written by a Hmong-American to be published with national distribution. Driven to tell her family's story—and the story of the Hmong people—Yang wrote it as a "love letter" to her grandmother whose spirit held her family together through their imprisonment in Laos, their harrowing escape into Thailand's Ban Vinai Refugee Camp, their immigration to Minnesota when Yang was only six years old, and their transition to a hard life in America. "Yang has performed an important service in bringing readers the stories of a people whose history has been shamefully neglected" (*Kirkus Reviews*).

Information about this memoir is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/latehomecomer>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.

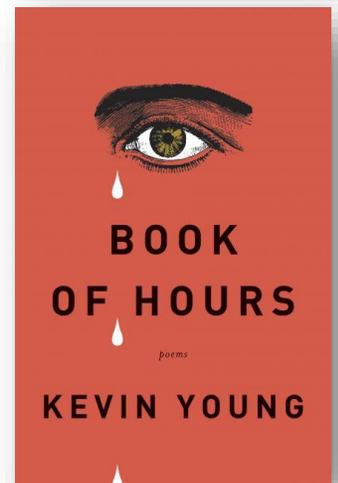


Book of Hours by Kevin Young (2014)

In *Book of Hours*, Kevin Young chronicles and links two profound life experiences: the death of his father and the birth of his son. Named one of the "ten essential poetry titles for 2014" by *Library Journal*, the book's themes are universally resonant, its poems at once intimate and relatable.

Structured like a diary or a daybook—the title *Book of Hours* alludes to a book of daily prayer—Young says he set out to capture the "literal meaning of hours and days and moments in the process of grief and joy" (National Public Radio). In his direct, affecting poems, Young shares the most personal observations and details of his sorrow, the particular ways in which the intensity of death and birth colors how he sees the world and his everyday routines. These are feelings "you can recognize from a distance, even in the happiest of times" (*The Stranger*).

Information about this poetry is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/book-of-hours>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.



Ways of Going Home by Alejandro Zambra (2013)

Called "Latin America's new literary star" (*The New Yorker*), Alejandro Zambra is a popular writer in his native Chile. Born two years after the coup that brought down President Salvador Allende and installed Augusto Pinochet, Zambra writes from the perspective of a generation that was learning to read and write as their parents were becoming victims of, or accomplices to, brutal human rights violations. *Ways of Going Home* explores this theme by switching between the story of a young boy growing up in the Pinochet years and the story of the writer who is writing the boy's story.

Information about this novel is available at <https://www.arts.gov/national-initiatives/nea-big-read/ways-of-going-home>. Be sure to check out the Multimedia and Community Stories Tabs! **Download [The Reader's Guide](#)** and answer the **Discussion Questions** toward the back of the guide.

