



## Discussion Project 2021 Featured Summer Reads

Public libraries also have the option of choosing [featured readings](#) with books offered on loan through Maine State Library.

### 1. Partner picks!

#### Children's Book

- *We Are Water Protectors* – Carole Lindstrom, illustrated by Michaela Goade

#### Publisher's blurb:

"Inspired by the many Indigenous-led movements across North America, *We Are Water Protectors* issues an urgent rallying cry to safeguard the Earth's water from harm and corruption—a bold and lyrical picture book written by Carole Lindstrom and vibrantly illustrated by Michaela Goade."

#### Picked by Samara Cole Doyon, author of *Magnificent Homespun Brown*.

"I was so deeply moved by this story and the artwork, and I was overjoyed to hear it won the well-deserved recognition of the Caldecott. Lindstrom and Goade made history by sharing an important truth with the world, and I'm so grateful that they did."

#### Novels

- *A Gentleman in Moscow* – Amor Towles

#### From O, The Oprah Magazine:

"Perhaps the *ultimate* quarantine read . . . *A Gentleman in Moscow* is about the importance of community; the distance of a kind act; and resilience. It's a manual for getting through the days to come."

#### Picked by Jennifer Lance, librarian at Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School:

"A lyrical account of Count Alexander Rostov after he is sentenced to house arrest at the Metropol Hotel by the new Soviet government following the Revolution of 1917. Erudite and courtly, Count Rostov "masters his circumstances so that they don't master him", showing an elegant adaptability

that saves his life as well as his soul. The Metropol is a hotel that has always catered to the rich, powerful, and aristocratic. In his new situation, Rostov lives in the attic and leaves behind the perks of his earlier life, while retaining his decency, charm, and joie de vivre. A wonderful and uplifting example of how to survive and even thrive under terrible circumstances, an antidote for pandemic isolation.”

- *A Woman Is No Man* – Etaf Rum

**Review by Diana Abu-Jaber, Washington Post:**

“What is a woman’s life worth? This question echoes across countries and generations through Etaf Rum’s intense debut novel. . . . The narrative draws links between economic desperation and discord in the home [and] also touches on the legacy of violence passed down from the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. . . .”

**Picked by Jennifer Lance, librarian at Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School:**

“The juxtaposition of two Palestinian-Americans, a mother and daughter, who are caught between the traditional role of women in their culture and their desire for freedom and happiness. In 1990, 17-year-old Isra is given in marriage and finds herself relocating to Brooklyn from Palestine, dispossessed of all that she knows -except for the devout Muslim view that she is to quietly stay at home, serve the men and her mother-in-law, and have (hopefully) male babies. Moving forward to 2008, Deya at 18 is the oldest of Isra’s four girls, and she is also expected to conform to an arranged marriage, with no possibility of college, career, or romance. But Deya is determined to rebel, and thus finds that there is a secret shrouding the circumstances of her parents’ deaths.”

**French-language Novel**

- *L’Enfant Noir* – Camara Laye

**Publisher’s blurb:**

Un livre intemporel qui s'est imposé comme un classique de notre temps. L'enfant noir grandit dans un village de Haute-Guinée où le merveilleux côtoie quotidiennement la réalité. Son père, forgeron, travaille l'or au rythme de la harpe des griots et des incantations aux génies du feu et du vent. Respectée de tous, sa mère jouit de mystérieux pouvoirs sur les êtres et les choses. Elle sait détourner les sortilèges et tenir à l'écart les crocodiles du fleuve Niger. Aîné de la famille, le petit garçon est destiné à prendre la relève de son père à l'atelier et, surtout, à perpétuer l'esprit de sa caste au sein du village. Mais son puissant désir d'apprendre l'entraînera inéluctablement vers d'autres horizons, loin des traditions et des coutumes de son peuple.

**Picked by Virginie Zainabu Akimana, instructor at Portland Adult Education:**

“The book’s author is Camara Laye from Guinea. The book is biographical and it was his first work published in 1853. . . . I think the book would help people to have a clear picture of an African child and compare it with a life lived by other children born and raised elsewhere. It also reflects the theme of migration and many others. I came across this book when I was in High School but it seemed so liked that my colleagues at college used to analyze it in their French Literature classes.”

## Young-Adult Novels:

- *Long Way Down* – Jason Reynolds

### **Publisher's blurb:**

"Will's older brother, Shawn, has been shot. Dead.

Will feels a sadness so great, he can't explain it. But in his neighborhood, there are THE RULES ...

Jason Reynolds's Newbery Honor, Printz Honor, and Coretta Scott King Honor-winning, #1 *New York Times* bestselling novel *Long Way Down* is now also a gripping, galvanizing graphic novel, with haunting artwork by Danica Novgorodoff."

### **Picked by James Ford, Community Support Coordinator for Lewiston Public Schools:**

"You can read it in less than 4 hours! *Long Way Down* is a unique free-verse poetry book. The story has one main setting: an elevator. In this elevator, Will, the main character, is greeted by ghosts who knew his older brother Shawn. Questions that come to mind after reading the book: 1) What are the 'Rules'? 'Things weren't made to be broken.' What does that mean today? 2) The last words in the book are a question. How do you think Will answers this question? Where do you think Will is five years after the end of the book? 3) Represent voices and perspectives that have been systematically or routinely neglected? It does!"

- *Pet* – Akwaeke Emezi

### **Kirkus Reviews, Starred Review:**

"This soaring novel shoots for the stars and explodes the sky with its bold brilliance."

### **Picked by Harper Chance, teen librarian at the Lewiston Public Library:**

"*Pet* is a stirring story about the ways that we deal with safety and accountability in our communities, and the importance of listening to the voices of our youth and answering their hard questions. *Pet* takes place in the serene town of Lucille, where teenage Jam lives in a world supposedly purged of evil. In this idealized future, Jam's generation is raised to believe that the social problems of the past have been eradicated and bad people - known as "monsters" - are no more, run out by the revolutionary "angels." This seemingly idyllic life is interrupted by Pet, a strange creature who arrives in Lucille to hunt a hidden monster. In addition to its larger themes of justice and community, *Pet* also navigates the narrative of a young trans main character smoothly and naturally, and provides great representation of a young person dealing with different ways of handling sensory processing, expression, and communication. *Pet* leaves readers reeling with the possibilities of a transformative future." {Content warning for (non-explicit) discussions of childhood sexual assault.}

## Non-fiction

- *What You Have Heard is True: A Memoir of Witness and Resistance* – Carolyn Forché

**Publisher's blurb:**

"*What You Have Heard is True* is a devastating, lyrical, and visionary memoir about a young woman's brave choice to engage with horror in order to help others. Written by one of the most gifted poets of her generation, this is the story of a woman's radical act of empathy, and her fateful encounter with an intriguing man who changes the course of her life."

**Picked by Kate Miles, journalist, science writer, and contributing editor for *Down East Magazine*.**

"This past year has challenged so many of us and for so very many different reasons. Some of us feel displaced and isolated. Others of us have felt profound grief or real anxiety wondering what the future may hold. That kind of dislocation can make us question everything from our ethical systems and our social responsibilities to who we are in the face of diversity. *What You Have Heard is True* explores all of these issues and more. Carolyn Forché, an award-winning poet, chronicles her time in El Salvador at the dawn of that country's civil war. She recounts her unexpected relationships with resistance fighters and her own awakening to social justice and advocacy in a work that is imbued with lyricism, insight, and brave candor. A finalist for the 2019 National Book award, Forché's is a nonfiction book with so many rich layers, and the opportunities it presents for nuanced discussion are boundless."

**Poetry**

- *In the Pockets of Small Gods* – Anis Mojgani

**Publisher's blurb:**

"Anis Mojgani's latest collection of poetry explores what we do with grief, long after the initial sadness has faded from our daily lives: how we learn to carry it without holding it, how our joy and our pain touch, and at times need one another. Mojgani swings between the surreal imagery and direct vulnerability he is known for, all while giving the poems a direct frankness, softening whatever the weight may be. A book of leaves and petals as opposed to a book of stones, it encapsulates the human experience in a way that is both deeply personal and astoundingly universal."

**Picked by Maya Williams, poet, performer, and facilitator:**

"Anis Mojgani's *In the Pockets of Small Gods* is a poetry collection about grief after the death of a friend by suicide and after a divorce. I love it because it still manages to talk about non-linear healing and joy."

**3) Partner poet**

- *Who's your Daddy?* – Arisa White

Arisa White is an assistant professor of English and Creative Writing at Colby College and author of several poetry collections, which have been nominated for an NAACP Image Award, Lambda Literary Award, California Book Award, and Wheatley Book Award.

She works with MHC as a Discussion Project facilitator and is currently a speaker in our *World in Your Library* program.

**Publisher's blurb for *Who's your Daddy?*:**

"A lyrical, genre-bending coming-of-age tale featuring a queer, Black, Guyanese American woman who, while seeking to define her own place in the world, negotiates an estranged relationship with her father."

#### **4) Telling Room Joint Feature**

- *A New Land: 30 Groundbreaking Poems by Youth Poets* – Introduction by Amanda Gorman, Presidential Inaugural Poet and United States Youth Poet Laureate

**Review by Gary Lawless in Amjamba Africa:**

"The wonderful poets in *A New Land: 30 Groundbreaking Poems by Youth Poets* share their worlds with us, and in doing so make our worlds larger, richer, more diverse, more informed, more human. Reading these poems will put you on a path to citizenship of the heart. The book is beautifully strengthened with artwork throughout, by Alicia Brilliant. Their poem 'Astriferous' ends the collection, closing with the quote: '*It's good to see you, old friend. How about we speak again?*'"

#### **5) Big Question 2019**

- *Underbug: An Obsessive Tale of Termites and Technology* – Lisa Margonelli

**Lisa Margonelli** is a journalist and author who grew up in Dover-Foxcroft, Maine, on a back-to-the-land farm. She lives in Maine and works as deputy editor at [Zocalo Public Square](#), an Arizona State University magazine of ideas that is based in LA.

She gave the opening presentation at 2019's Big Question on 'How should life be?' ... according to termites.

**Review of *Underbug* by Lucy Cooke in The New York Times:**

"This isn't just a brilliant book about bugs. For almost a decade, Margonelli scrutinized the scientists and their work with the same forensic gaze they themselves applied to the insects. The result is a rare longitudinal insight into the slippery nature of scientific progress. ... Margonelli's masterly book is a timely, thought-provoking exploration of what it means to be human, as much as what it means to be termite, and a penetrating look at the moral challenges of our ongoing technological revolution."

#### **6) Read ME**

- *Milltown: Reckoning with What Remains* - Kerri Arsenault

**From Gerry Boyle:**

“My first newspaper job was with the *Rumford Falls Times*, the weekly newspaper in Rumford, Maine, where I worked for a few months 40 years ago. Just a page into *Mill Town* the experience of living and working in that extraordinary western Maine community came rushing back. Rumford and its downwind sister town, Mexico, are complicated places, a blend of fierce independence juxtaposed with the reality of a one-employer town. With a native’s experience and an outsider’s perspective, Arsenault explores mill town culture and the human cost of its irreplaceable prosperity. I read the book in very few sittings, feeling that with every page I was gaining new understanding of the community and the people who live. This mill town had an outsized influence on me, including serving as the setting for my first mystery novel, *Deadline*. That book was translated into a half-dozen languages as readers across the world found life lessons in a crime novel set in this startling place. *Mill Town* delivers insights that go far beyond its geographic bounds. It’s an important book.”

- *Mainely Power* - Matt Cost

**From Gerry Boyle:**

“It sometimes strikes me that as we look far and wide for suspense that will captivate us for the duration of a novel or a Netflix series we should look in our own backyard. Fact is, the ingredients of a good crime story—compelling characters, authentic setting, a twisty plot, and a liberal sprinkle of fun—are in our midst. Matt Cost knows this and he offers us new literary acquaintances who lead us around a tweaked version of a place we know well. What better place for a private detective than Brunswick, and what better day job for that detective than a mystery bookstore? In *Mainely Power* things get very complicated very fast. I settled in with the colorful cast of this midcoast tale and felt that pang that good crime fiction gives you—you bear down on the resolution with the reservation that part of you doesn’t want the story to end. And if it does, you hope there’s a bookstore in Brunswick where you can find Goff Langdon and a cup of coffee and go over the story yet again.”