

Let's Talk About It Themes

The American Frontier: A Pulitzer Prize Centennial Series

Cultural, diplomatic, economic, military, political, and social factors, or a combination of these features, frequently drive history. This series reflects the influence of individuals on the historical process during the development of the American West.

The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region by Richard White

Across the Wide Missouri by Bernard DeVoto

The Way West by A. B. Guthrie, Jr.

Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir by Linnie Marsh Wolfe

The Son by Phillip Meyer

American Icons: The American Presidency, 1789-1815

Americans have long viewed the founding fathers and mothers as icons of history. Through biography, history, and novels, this theme reveals the true American Presidency. This theme was developed with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington by Richard Brookhiser

American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson by Joseph J. Ellis

Scandal monger by William Safire

Adams vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800 by John Ferling

Dolley: A Novel of Dolley Madison in Love and War by Rita Mae Brown

Being Ethnic, Becoming American: Struggles, Successes, Symbols

In a nation of people with different ethnicities, it's as important to understand other cultures as it is our own. An ethnic identity can sometimes be at odds with being an American. This series explores the rewards and obstacles of being ethnic and becoming American.

Bless Me, Ultima by Rudolfo Anaya

Go Tell It on the Mountain by James Baldwin

The Way to Rainy Mountain by N. Scott Momaday

Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts by Maxine Hong Kingston

Civil Rights and Equality: A Pulitzer Prize Centennial Series

The current moment in our culture requires that we look hard at our ideals and history and the extent to which we have—and have not—ensured the enactment and protection of civil rights within our society.

The Known World by Edward P. Jones

Native Guard by Natasha Tretheway

The Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age by Kevin Boyle

The Plague of Doves by Louise Erdrich

Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity by Katherine Boo

Coming and Going in Oklahoma Indian Country

This theme, created by author Joy Harjo, offers short stories, memoir, poetry, and personal essays written by contemporary native authors. These personal stories invite us to consider the ways in which indigenous peoples have continued to shape the distinctive history and culture of this land that we call Oklahoma.

Cheyenne Madonna by Eddie Chuculate

Crazy Brave by Joy Harjo

Leaving Holes by Joe Dale Tate Nevaquayah

The Woman Who Watches Over the World: A Native Memoir by Linda Hogan

Choctalking on Other Realities by LeAnne Howe

Coming of Age in America

This sampling of initiation stories portrays young adults facing adult problems and the change that occurs from their confrontations.

The Silver DeSoto by Patty Lou Floyd

The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger

The Heart is a Lonely Hunter by Carson McCullers

The Last Picture Show by Larry McMurtry

The Cowboy

Readings on the historical cowboy include reminiscences from “real” cowboys and fictional depictions—from Owen Wister’s romantic idealization to Larry McMurtry’s sometimes humorous realism.

Cowboy Life: Reconstructing an American Myth edited by William W. Savage, Jr.

The Virginian by Owen Wister

The Log of a Cowboy by Andy Adams

Monte Walsh by Jack Schaefer

Lonesome Dove by Larry McMurtry

Crime and Comedy: The Lighter Side of Murder and Misdemeanor

“Crime and Comedy” explores the growing trend in comic crime fiction through books that feature both unlikely investigators as well as perpetrators.

The Code of the Woosters by P. G. Wodehouse

The Burglar Who Traded Ted Williams by Lawrence Block

Native Tongue by Carl Hiaasen

Cozy: A Stanley Hastings Mystery by Parnell Hall

One for the Money by Janet Evanovich

Crime and Punishment

Is justice served by the law? Readings include fiction, true crime analysis, and a science fiction portrayal of a future resembling today's teenage gangs.

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee
In Cold Blood by Truman Capote
A Clockwork Orange by Anthony Burgess
A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest J. Gaines

The Dynamics of Dysfunction: To Laugh or Cry or Both

Just because we are born into a set of family members doesn't mean that we will like them, respect them, or even get along with them. The novels in this series can make readers cry or laugh or both. They show us problematic family relationships and how family members survive and even thrive amongst them.

Joe by Larry Brown
As I Lay Dying by William Faulkner
This is Where I Leave You by Jonathan Tropper
My Last Days as Roy Rogers by Pat Cunningham Devoto
The Sleepy Hollow Family Almanac by Kris D'Agostino

Friendship

Explore the subject of friendship and its power to enrich and sustain our lives.

Jacob Have I Loved by Katherine Paterson
The Chosen by Chaim Potok
The Color Purple by Alice Walker
Turtle Diary by Russell Hoban
Recovering: A Journal by May Sarton

The Gilded Age

America experienced a new affluence between the Civil War and World War I, a period described as "the Gilded Age." Despite the affluence for some, widespread political and business corruption created great hardships for the working class. Read these authors' responses to social change during this complex era.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain
The Red Badge of Courage by Stephen Crane
The Awakening by Kate Chopin
The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. DuBois
The Call of the Wild by Jack London

Hope Amidst Hardship

No one gets through this life without some pain along the way. What we don't always know is that we are not alone in that pain. When we read about people who experience hardship and

persevere, we find hope. Sometimes this hope comes from deep within us. Sometimes it comes from others in unexpected ways.

The Glass Castle by Jeannette Walls
Wonder by R. J. Palacio
Where the Heart Is by Billie Letts
The Secret Life of Bees by Sue Monk Kidd
Tuesdays with Morrie by Mitch Albom

Immigration Stories in Contemporary Literature: Suspended Between Borders

Desire for a better life compels many to emigrate from their original home, and yet the drama of leaving one's homeland is fraught with danger and uncertainty. This theme challenges us to reflect on our own ideas about global immigration, by considering the similarities and differences between immigrants and those who are already citizens. In what ways do these immigration stories share different narratives and yet resemble each other?

Brother, I'm Dying by Edwidge Danticat
The Beekeeper of Aleppo by Christy Lefteri
Native Speaker by Chang-Rae Lee
The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears by Dinaw Mengestu
Enrique's Journey by Sonia Nazario

Journey Stories

Beginning with the grandfather of all journey stories, Homer's *Odyssey*, this theme takes readers on a variety of travels across the United States and around the world.

The Odyssey by Homer
On the Road by Jack Kerouac
Travels with Charley by John Steinbeck
Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance by Robert M. Pirsig
The Life of Pi by Yann Martel

Living with Limits

The promise of possibility within one's life can illuminate paths to follow and offer hope. But what happens when each of us realizes factors can call into question this optimistic perspective, when each of us comes up against obstacles within our personal heritage or life events in our culture? This series explores how we live within the limits we find in our individual reality.

When Breath Becomes Air by Paul Kalanithi
Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut
Gilead by Marilynne Robinson
Jump and Other Stories by Nadine Gordimer
The Underground Railroad by Colson Whitehead

Making Sense of the American Civil War

From the moment Americans found themselves pulled into a civil war of unimaginable scale and consequence, they tried desperately to make sense of what was happening to them. The readings selected give us a glimpse of the vast sweep and profound breadth of Americans' war among and against themselves.

March by Geraldine Brooks

America's War edited by Edward L. Ayers

Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam by James M. McPherson

Many Trails, Many Tribes: Images of American Indians in Fiction

American Indians have captured the imagination of authors and readers alike. This series traces American Indians as fictional characters, from the stereotypes of James Fenimore Cooper to the complex individuals portrayed by Linda Hogan and Barbara Kingsolver.

The Last of the Mohicans by James Fenimore Cooper

Okla Hannali by R. A. Lafferty

Mean Spirit by Linda Hogan

House Made of Dawn by N. Scott Momaday

Pigs in Heaven by Barbara Kingsolver

Memory, Memorials, and Painful Pasts: A More Perfect Union theme

Historical sites and the memorials we place on them can bring communities together or tear them apart. Often those with the greatest ability to do both are sites where tragic or painful events have taken place. Through works of both non-fiction and fiction, this theme explores cases in which the public memory of painful pasts has had profound impacts on communities in the present.

The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory by Edward Linenthal

The Submission by Amy Waldman

How the Word is Passed by Clint Smith

Down Along With That Devil's Bones by Connor Towne O'Neil

The Memory Monster by Yishai Sarid

Most American: A United We Stand Theme

In the title essay of her collection *Most American: Notes from a Wounded Place*, series curator Rilla Askew posits that Oklahoma, although often obscured in the national narrative, is, in fact, the most American of places. Our state's history, our simultaneous woundedness and hope, reflect the whole of the American paradox. This series seeks to foster cross-cultural understanding, empathy, and community resilience by introducing readers to works that recognize the myriad ways we are they, and they are us..

Most American: Notes from a Wounded Place by Rilla Askew

The Roads of My Relations by Devon A. Mihesuah

Citizens Creek by Lalita Tademy
American Ending by Mary Kay Zuravleff

Much Depends on Dinner

Nearly every aspect of our lives affects what we eat: politics, religion, economics, geography, culture and ethnicity, aesthetics, health and personal taste. As a species, we have elevated many of our basic needs to an expression of who we are, what we believe, how we interact with our environments, and how we communicate and express ourselves. Food is no exception.

The Last Chinese Chef by Nicole Mones
The Tummy Trilogy by Calvin Trillin
In Defense of Food by Michael Pollan
A Homemade Life by Molly Wizenberg
Secrets of the Tsil Café by Thomas Fox Averill

Mysterious Fears and Ghastly Longings

One of the most popular forms of fiction today, the Gothic or horror novel, deliberately induces a pleasurable shiver of fear, fulfilled here in classic nineteenth-century and contemporary examples of the genre.

Please Note: This theme is meant to be covered in four sessions with two books per session.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson/*The Dark Half* by Stephen King
Frankenstein by Mary Shelley/*Mutation* by Robin Cook
Dracula by Bram Stoker/*Salem's Lot* by Stephen King
Northanger Abbey by Jane Austen/*The Mistress of Mellyn* by Victoria Holt

Myth and Literature

Beginning with Bill Moyers' interviews with Joseph Campbell, who discusses the relevance of myths from many cultures, this series shows how authors use existing mythologies and create new ones to explain our world.

The Power of Myth by Joseph Campbell
Black Elk Speaks by John G. Neihardt
A Passage to India by E. M. Forster
The Summer Before the Dark by Doris Lessing
The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Native American Identity From Past to Present: A More Perfect Union theme

Literature and popular media are littered with stereotypical and fantastical images and stories of Native American people, often painting them as people living in a mystical past or as a pure but vanishing race who remain on reservations, far removed from the rest of American society. This theme challenges this narrative by presenting Native American identity through the lens of Native writers and Native experiences. These writers speak to the complexities of Native

identity: including mixed identity; colonial traumas, such as removal; living in urban spaces; and the way the past informs the present for Native American people, families, and tribal nations.

Firekeeper's Daughter by Angeline Boulley (Ojibwe)

There There by Tommy Orange (Cheyenne and Arapaho)

The Removed by Brandon Hobson (Cherokee)

Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir by Deborah Miranda (Esselen and Chumash)

The Round House by Louise Erdrich (Chippewa)

Native American Writers of the Plains

Contemporary Native American writers first gained national attention when N. Scott Momaday won the Pulitzer Prize for *House Made of Dawn* in 1969. Since then, writers from many tribes have told their stories through popular novels. In this series, four Native American novelists tell the stories of tribes that continue to live in the Great Plains.

Fools Crow by James Welch

Mean Spirit by Linda Hogan

The Bingo Palace by Louise Erdrich

Medicine River by Thomas King

Of Shadows and Light: Stories of African American Resilience- A More Perfect Union Theme

This series on the modern African American experience explores the theme of resilience in the struggle against marginalization and exclusion that have historically shaped Black life. Collectively, these works not only give insight into the endeavor of trying to find a sense of place and belonging within American society, but also challenge us to reflect upon the meaning of the democratic ideals that bind Americans together.

A Matter of Black and White by Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher

Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates

Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston

Citizen: An American Lyric by Claudia Rankine

The Cross and the Lynching Tree by James Cone

The Oklahoma Experience: Looking for Home

Sometimes the search for home is not only for a place on the landscape, but also for the peace of mind that comes from a sense of belonging.

The White Man's Road by Benjamin Capps

Sundown by John Joseph Mathews

Walking on Borrowed Land by William A. Owens

Bound for Glory by Woody Guthrie

The Oklahoma Experience: Re-Visions

Five contemporary Oklahoma authors present their visions of the Oklahoma experience through realism and without sentimentality.

Pushing the Bear by Diane Glancy
Fire in Beulah by Rilla Askew
Red Dirt: Growing Up Okie by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz
Shell Shaker by LeAnne Howe
The Honk and Holler Opening Soon by Billie Letts

The Oklahoma Experience: The Thirties

The decade of the 1930s remains the most misunderstood in Oklahoma history. This series approaches the historical problems of this trying period.

Will Rogers: His Wife's Story by Betty Rogers
The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck
Roughneck by Jim Thompson
The Silver DeSoto by Patty Lou Floyd

Oklahoma Private Investigations

The best crime and mystery novels are situated in “place.” As you will see from these varied plots, mystery and investigation stories find a ready home in Oklahoma and provide a window on the character of the state.

The Old Buzzard Had It Coming by Donis Casey
Letter from Home by Carolyn Hart
Capitol Offense by William Bernhardt
Twisted Perception by Bob Avey
The American Café by Sara Sue Hoklotubbe

Piecing the Quilt, Stirring the Stew: Ethnic American Women's Voices

Two common metaphors that describe America's ethnic diversity, the patchwork quilt and the melting pot, suggest women's experiences as represented in this series.

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros
The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan
A Leak in the Heart by Faye Moskowitz
Blanche on the Lam by Barbara Neely
Arabian Jazz by Diana Abu-Jaber

Play Ball: The American Sport Meets the American Dream

Bart Giamatti, former Commissioner of Baseball, once called America's sense of baseball “an enduring public trust”—and the richness, breadth, and depth of literature written about the sport reflect just that. Through the territory of the diamond on which the human dramas in this series are played, a great deal is accomplished in showing us how to live our lives authentically.

Miko Kings: An Indian Baseball Story by LeAnne Howe
Shoeless Joe by W. P. Kinsella

The Boys of Summer by Roger Kahn
Bang the Drum Slowly by Mark Harris
Wait Til Next Year by Doris Kearns Goodwin

Private Investigations: Hard-Boiled and Soft-Hearted Heroes

The hard-boiled detective story is uniquely American. This series begins with Raymond Chandler, who perfected and defined the genre, samples three more contemporary authors, and concludes with a quirky, tongue-in-cheek take on the detective story by Kinky Friedman.

The Big Sleep and *The Long Goodbye* by Raymond Chandler
Death in a Tenured Position by Amanda Cross
The Ghostway by Tony Hillerman
Killing Orders by Sara Paretsky

Problems with Progress: the Human Place in Ecosystems

The notion of progress is often assumed to be inherently positive, but progress can present various challenges and have negative effects for us, individually, and collectively as a society. This theme includes authors who value, and situate, the human place within various ecosystems.

A River Runs Through It by Norman Maclean
Pilgrim at Tinker Creek by Annie Dillard
A Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold
Let There Be Night: Testimony on Behalf of the Dark by Paul Bogard
Goodbye to a River by John Graves

Sovereign Worlds

This theme presents views on American Indian sovereignty, from the perspective of American Indian tribes and individuals, and illustrates the contributions made by American Indians to global culture.

Custer Died for Your Sins by Vine Deloria, Jr.
After Columbus: The Smithsonian Chronicle of North American Indians by Herman J. Viola
Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World by Jack Weatherford
Love Medicine by Louise Erdrich
The Indian Lawyer by James Welch

Speculative Women, Future Bodies

Science Fiction has allowed many women to re-imagine their place in society, as a hypothetical future can challenge universal 'truths' about gender, race, and sexuality. This theme traces many such futures through pivotal works from the 70's to more modern works that continue to confront our collective past.

The Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula Le Guin
The Female Man by Joanna Russ

The Parable of the Sower by Octavia Butler
Binti by Nnedi Okorafor
Ms. Marvel, Vol.1: No Normal by G. Willow Wilson

Travel: New Ways of Seeing

The books in this series include a variety of tensions even if many of us resonate with the transformative potential of travel, an unexpected kind of illumination achieved through pilgrimage, a realization about race and culture in a larger context than the parochial views of our region and our nation.

Blue Highways: A Journey into America by William Least Heat-Moon
Daisy Miller: A Study by Henry James/*A Small Place* by Jamaica Kincaid
Less by Andrew Sean Greer
America for Beginners by Leah Franqui
Nickel Boys by Colson Whitehead

Wade in the Water

This series cultivates conversations about the importance of water, our ways of interacting with water, the issues and challenges we face in relation to water, and how we can relate to water in sustainable and resilient ways so that human and ecological flourishing might continue throughout our world.

A Long Walk to Water by Linda Sue Park
Green Grass, Running Water by Thomas King
The Activist by Alec Connon
Forty Signs of Rain by Kim Stanley Robinson
The Water Knife by Paolo Bacigalupi

War, Not-War, and Peace: A Pulitzer Prize Centennial Series

Too often, “peace” is simply the absence of active war. This series explores both the active elements of war as well as the long-lived legacies of war, in those periods optimistically called “peace.”

The Things They Carried by Tim O’Brien
Empire of the Summer Moon by S. C. Gwynne
Maus by Art Spiegelman
Neon Vernacular by Yusef Komunyakaa
All the Light We Cannot See by Anthony Doerr

The Way We Were, The Way We Are: Seasons in the Contemporary American Family

Through a variety of literary genres, we see the importance of memory and change in defining American families during the twentieth century.

The House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind by Ivan Doig

A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry
The Glass Menagerie by Tennessee Williams
Ordinary People by Judith Guest
Points of View: An Anthology of Short Stories edited by James Moffett and Kenneth McElheny
During the Reign of the Queen of Persia by Joan Chase

What America Reads: Myth Making in Popular Fiction

What makes us respond so powerfully to certain novels that we make them bestsellers? In these novels, we find characters who achieve mythic status—Uncle Tom, Scarlett O’Hara, Shane—and many capture a significant historical era.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe
Gone with the Wind by Margaret Mitchell
Shane by Jack Schaefer
From Here to Eternity by James Jones
A Tan and Sandy Silence by John D. MacDonald

Where We Come Together: A United We Stand Theme

Even in the midst of divisions within our culture, we often come together with others unlike ourselves. In the shared spaces of work, school, and other public settings we have interactions—some tense, some pleasant, some neutral—that help us learn more about one another and our shared goals and values as residents of these very diverse, but united, states. This series explores some of the American spaces where we come together, assessing through history, imaginative writing, and images how our interactions inform our sense of who we are, individually and collectively.

A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America by Ronald Takaki
Work: A Story of Experience by Louisa May Alcott
Darkroom: A Memoir in Black & White by Lila Quintero Weaver
The Other Americans by Laila Lalami
Interior Chinatown by Charles Yu

Working to Survive: Surviving to Work

Is work a blessing or a curse? To many, it can be both. The books in this series focus on the way work mixes with the quest for human dignity, the psychology of honest work and the existential meaning of individual life itself.

The Jungle by Upton Sinclair
The Help by Kathryn Stockett
Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America by Barbara Ehrenreich
Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street by Herman Melville
The Cliff Walk: A Job Lost and a Life Found by Don J. Snyder

The Worst Hard Time Revisited: Oklahoma in the Dust Bowl Years

Through history, novels, letters, and poetry, readers learn how ordinary people coped with extraordinary circumstances.

The Worst Hard Time by Timothy Egan

Letters from the Dust Bowl by Caroline Henderson edited by Alvin O. Turner

Now in November by Josephine W. Johnson

Whose Names Are Unknown by Sanora Babb

Out of the Dust by Karen Hesse

Writing Worlds

Is an anthropologist an objective observer of culture and a novelist an imaginative inventor? Do we, in reality, invent our world? This theme explores how we observe and participate in our own cultures.

Into the Heart by Kenneth Good

The Storyteller by Mario Vargas Llosa

Everything that Rises Must Converge by Flannery O'Connor

A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain by Robert Olin Butler

An American Childhood by Annie Dillard

Young Adult Crossover Fiction: Crumbling Borders between Adolescents and Adults

The adults writing these novels focus on young adults grappling with the quest of coming to terms with their roots and identity, of learning to distinguish between authenticity and artifice, and of finding a place for themselves within the framework of life. The stories are thought-provoking and expose some of the difficult challenges faced by young adults.

After the First Death by Robert Cormier

Monster by Walter Dean Myers

True Believer by Virginia Ewer Wolff

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

Annie John by Jamaica Kincaid