

Friends Read Book Club from October 9, 2025

We Begin at the End by Chris Whitaker

Right. Wrong. Life is lived somewhere in between.

Duchess Day Radley is a thirteen-year-old self-proclaimed outlaw. Rules are for other people. She is the fierce protector of her five-year-old brother, Robin, and the parent to her mother, Star, a single mom incapable of taking care of herself, let alone her two kids.

Walk has never left the coastal California town where he and Star grew up. He may have become the chief of police, but he's still trying to heal the old wound of having given the testimony that sent his best friend, Vincent King, to prison decades before. And he's in overdrive protecting Duchess and her brother.

Now, thirty years later, Vincent is being released. And Duchess and Walk must face the trouble that comes with his return. *We Begin at the End* is an extraordinary novel about two kinds of families—the ones we are born into and the ones we create.

The First Ladies by Christopher Murray and Marie Benedict

A novel about the extraordinary partnership between First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and civil rights activist Mary McLeod Bethune.

The daughter of formerly enslaved parents, Mary McLeod Bethune refuses to back down as white supremacists attempt to thwart her work. She marches on as an activist and an educator, and as her reputation grows she becomes a celebrity, revered by titans of business and recognized by U.S. Presidents. Eleanor Roosevelt herself is awestruck and eager to make her acquaintance. Initially drawn together because of their shared belief in women's rights and the power of education, Mary and Eleanor become fast friends confiding their secrets, hopes and dreams—and holding each other's hands through tragedy and triumph.

This is the story of two different, yet equally formidable, passionate, and committed women, and the way in which their singular friendship helped form the foundation for the modern civil rights movement.

Ninth House by Leigh Bardugo

Galaxy "Alex" Stern is the most unlikely member of Yale's freshman class. Raised in the Los Angeles hinterlands by a hippie mom, Alex dropped out of school early and into a world of shady drug dealer boyfriends, dead-end jobs, and much, much worse. By age twenty, in fact,

she is the sole survivor of a horrific, unsolved multiple homicide. Some might say she's thrown her life away. But at her hospital bed, Alex is offered a second chance: to attend one of the world's most elite universities on a full ride. What's the catch, and why her?

Still searching for answers to this herself, Alex arrives in New Haven tasked by her mysterious benefactors with monitoring the activities of Yale's secret societies. These eight windowless "tombs" are well-known to be haunts of the future rich and powerful, from high-ranking politicians to Wall Street and Hollywood's biggest players. But their occult activities are revealed to be more sinister and more extraordinary than any paranoid imagination might conceive.

Before We Were Yours by Lisa Wingate

Memphis, 1939. Twelve-year-old Rill Foss and her four younger siblings live a magical life aboard their family's Mississippi River shantyboat. But when their father must rush their mother to the hospital one stormy night, Rill is left in charge - until strangers arrive in force. Wrenched from all that is familiar and thrown into a Tennessee Children's Home Society orphanage, the Foss children are assured that they will soon be returned to their parents - but they quickly realize the dark truth. At the mercy of the facility's cruel director, Rill fights to keep her sisters and brother together in a world of danger and uncertainty.

Aiken, South Carolina, present day. Born into wealth and privilege, Avery Stafford seems to have it all: a successful career as a federal prosecutor, a handsome fiancé, and a lavish wedding on the horizon. But when Avery returns home to help her father weather a health crisis, a chance encounter leaves her with uncomfortable questions and compels her to take a journey through her family's long-hidden history, on a path that will ultimately lead either to devastation or to redemption.

Based on one of America's most notorious real-life scandals - in which Georgia Tann, director of a Memphis-based adoption organization, kidnapped and sold poor children to wealthy families all over the country

Kala by Colin Walsh

A gripping literary page-turner from a rising Irish talent in which former friends, estranged for twenty years, reckon with the terrifying events of the summer that changed their lives.

In the seaside village of Kinlough, on Ireland's west coast, three old friends meet for the first time in years. They—Helen, Joe and Mush—were part of an original group of six inseparable

teenagers in the summer of 2003, with motherless, reckless Kala Lanann at its white-hot center. But later that year, Kala disappeared without a trace. Now remains have been discovered in the woods—including a skull with a Polaroid photo tucked inside—and the town is both aghast and titillated at reopening this old wound.

In crackling vivid prose, *Kala* brilliantly examines the sometimes brutal costs of belonging, as well as the battle in the human heart between vengeance and

56 Days by Catherine Ryan Howard

No one knew they'd moved in together. Now one of them is dead. Could this be the perfect murder?

56 DAYS AGO

Ciara and Oliver meet in a supermarket queue in Dublin the same week Covid-19 reaches Irish shores.

35 DAYS AGO

When lockdown threatens to keep them apart, Oliver suggests that Ciara move in with him. She sees a unique opportunity for a new relationship to flourish without the pressure of scrutiny of family and friends. He sees it as an opportunity to hide who - and what - he really is.

TODAY

Detectives arrive at Oliver's apartment to discover a decomposing body inside.

Will they be able to determine what really happened, or has lockdown provided someone with the opportunity to commit the perfect crime?