

READERS ON THE HILL
READING SCHEDULE – 2011

January 3, 2011

Kristin Hannah: **WINTER GARDEN**

Can a woman ever really know herself if she doesn't know her mother? *Winter Garden* is a powerful, heartbreaking novel that illuminates the intricate mother-daughter bond and explores the enduring links between the present and the past. Meredith and Nina Whitson are as different as sisters can be. One stayed at home to raise her children and manage the family apple orchard; the other followed a dream and traveled the world to become a famous photojournalist. But when their beloved father falls ill, Meredith and Nina find themselves together again, standing alongside their cold, disapproving mother, Anya, who even now, offers no comfort to her daughters. Alternating between the past and present, Meredith and Nina will finally hear the singular, harrowing story of their mother's life, and what they learn is a secret so terrible and terrifying that it will shake the very foundation of their family.

February 7, 2011

Ann Weisgarber: **THE PERSONAL HISTORY OF RACHEL DUPREE**

In exchange for a wedding ring, Rachel, hired help in an early-twentieth-century Chicago boardinghouse, agrees to give Isaac, the boardinghouse owner's son, her share of 160 acres from the Homestead Act, and together they stake a claim in the forebodingly beautiful South Dakota Badlands. But after fourteen years and an especially brutal summer in this unforgiving land, the cattle bellow with thirst, and supplies are dwindling. Pregnant, and struggling to feed her family, Rachel is isolated by more than just geography. She is determined to give her surviving children the life they deserve, but she knows that her husband will never leave his ranch: land means a measure of equality with the white man, and Isaac DuPree is not about to give it up just because times are hard. Somehow Rachel must find the strength to stake another, altogether different claim-for herself, and for her children. This novel tells the little-known story of African American pioneers and gives voice to an extraordinary heroine who embodies the strength and spirit that built America.

March 7, 2011

Brando Skyhorse: **THE MADONNAS OF ECHO PARK**

This novel takes us into the unseen world of Los Angeles, following the men and women who cook the meals, clean the homes, and struggle to lose their ethnic identity in the pursuit of the American dream. When a dozen or so girls and mothers gather on an Echo Park street corner to act out a scene from a Madonna music video, they find themselves caught in the crossfire of a drive-by shooting. In the aftermath, Aurora Esperanza grows distant from her mother, Felicia, who as a housekeeper in the Hollywood Hills establishes a unique relationship with a detached housewife. The Esperanzas' shifting lives connect with those of various members of their neighborhood in the land that all Mexican Americans dream of, "the land that belongs to us again."

April 4, 2011

Robert Goolrick: **A RELIABLE WIFE**

He placed a notice in a Chicago paper, an advertisement for "a reliable wife." She responded, saying that she was "a simple, honest woman." She was, of course, anything but honest, and the only simple thing about her was her single-minded determination to marry this man and then kill him, slowly and carefully, leaving her a wealthy widow, able to take care of the one she truly loved. What Catherine Land did not realize was that the enigmatic and lonely Ralph Truitt had a plan of his own. And what neither anticipated was that they would fall so completely in love. Filled with unforgettable characters, and shimmering with color and atmosphere, this novel is an enthralling tale of love and madness, of longing and murder.

May 2, 2011

Julie Gregory: **SICKENED: THE TRUE STORY OF A LOST CHILDHOOD**

From early childhood, Julie Gregory was continually X-rayed, medicated, and operated on—in the vain pursuit of an illness that was created in her mother's mind. Munchausen by proxy (MBP) is the world's most hidden and dangerous form of child abuse, in which the caretaker—almost always the mother—invents or induces symptoms in her child because she craves the attention of medical professionals. Many MBP children die, but Julie Gregory not only survived, she escaped the powerful orbit of her mother's madness and rebuilt her identity as a vibrant, healthy young woman. The realization that the sickness lay in her mother, not in herself, would not come to Julie until adulthood. But when it did, it would strike like lightning. Through her painful metamorphosis, she discovered the courage to save her own life—and, ultimately, the life of the girl her mother had found to replace her. *Sickened* is a remarkable memoir that takes us to new places in the human heart and spirit. It is an unforgettable story, unforgettably told.

June 6, 2011

Margot Mifflin: **THE BLUE TATTOO: THE LIFE OF OLIVE OATMAN**

In 1851, Olive Oatman was a thirteen-year old pioneer traveling west toward Zion, with her Mormon family. Within a decade, she was a white Indian with a chin tattoo, caught between cultures. *The Blue Tattoo* tells the harrowing story of this forgotten heroine of frontier America. Orphaned when her family was brutally killed by Yavapai Indians, Olive Oatman lived as a slave to her captors for a year before being traded to the Mohave, who tattooed her face and raised her as their own. She was fully assimilated and perfectly happy when, at nineteen, she was ransomed back to white society. She became an instant celebrity, but the price of fame was high and the pain of her ruptured childhood lasted a lifetime. Based on historical records, including letters and diaries of Oatman's friends and relatives, *The Blue Tattoo* is the first book to examine her life from her childhood in Illinois—including the massacre, her captivity, and her return to white society—to her later years as a wealthy banker's wife in Texas. Olive Oatman's blue tattoo was a cultural symbol that evoked both the imprint of her Mohave past and the lingering scars of westward expansion. It also served as a reminder of her deepest secret, fully explored here for the first time: she never wanted to go home.

July 4, 2011

Jonathan Swift: **GULLIVER'S TRAVELS**

Considered the greatest satire ever written in English, *Gulliver's Travels* chronicles the fantastic voyages of Lemuel Gulliver, principally to four marvelous realms: Lilliput, where the people are six inches tall; Brobdingnag, a land inhabited by giants; Laputa, a wondrous flying island; and a country where the Houyhnhnms, a race of intelligent horses, are served by savage humanoid creatures called Yahoos. Beneath the surface of this enchanting fantasy lurks a devastating critique of human malevolence, stupidity, greed, vanity, and short-sightedness. A brilliant combination of adventure, humor, and philosophy, *Gulliver's Travels* is a durable literature classic.

August 8, 2011

Jean Kwok: **GIRL IN TRANSLATION**

Kimberly Chang is a brilliant, dirt-poor sixth grader, just off the boat from Hong Kong but determined to make it in America. She and her mother arrive planning to live with family on Staten Island, but they're forced into a roach-infested tenement in one of the worst neighborhoods in Brooklyn. Kimberly spends her days trying to fit in at school, where she can barely communicate in English but commands perfect scores in math and science; after school, she pulls second shift helping her mother at a Chinatown sweatshop. Drawing on her own experience in relocation, the author weaves a modern immigrant tale with a twist. Overcoming her many hardships, Kimberly learns to excel in both of her worlds. At the factory, she becomes the fastest skirt bagger and meets the love of her life; at school, she scales the heights of academic excellence and begins to move with the popular crowd. But as these two worlds progress on a collision course, Kimberly is forced to make a wrenching choice. *Girl in Translation* is a gripping, poignant story of perseverance and success against all odds.

September 5, 2011 ** **NO MEETING TONIGHT. LABOR DAY MONDAY** **

October 3, 2011

Louise Erdrich: **THE PLAGUE OF DOVES**

The unsolved murder of a farm family still haunts the white small town of Pluto, North Dakota, generations after the vengeance exacted and the distortions of fact transformed the lives of Ojibwe living on the nearby reservation. Part Ojibwe, part white, Evelina Harp is an ambitious young girl prone to falling hopelessly in love. Mooshum, Evelina's grandfather, is a repository of family and tribal history with an all-too-intimate knowledge of the violent past. And Judge Antone Bazil Coutts, who bears witness, understands the weight of historical injustice better than anyone. Through the distinct and winning voices of three unforgettable narrators, the collective stories of two interwoven communities ultimately come together to reveal a final wrenching truth. *The Plague of Doves* is fictional; however, the author has contributed an evocation of Native American history that has been all too absent from our literature.

November 7, 2011

Donna Tartt: **THE SECRET HISTORY**

Truly deserving of the accolade a modern classic, Donna Tartt's novel is a remarkable achievement—both compelling and elegant, dramatic and playful. Under the influence of their charismatic classics professor, a group of clever, eccentric misfits at an elite New England college discover a way of thinking and living that is a world away from the humdrum existence of their contemporaries. But when they go beyond the boundaries of normal morality their lives are changed profoundly and forever, and they discover how hard it can be to truly live and how easy it is to kill.

December 5, 2011

Mitch Albom: **TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE**

As a student at Brandeis University in the late 1970s, Mitch Albom was especially drawn to his sociology professor, Morris Schwartz. On graduation, Mitch vowed to keep in touch with Mr. Morris Schwartz, which he failed to do until 1994, when he saw a segment about him on the TV program *Nightline*, and learned that Morrie had just been diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease. By then a sports columnist for the Detroit Free Press and author of six books, Mitch Albom was idled by the newspaper strike in Detroit and so had the opportunity to visit Morrie in Boston every week until the older man died. Their dialogue is the subject of this moving book in which Morrie discourses on life, self-pity, regrets, aging, love and death. Far from being awash in sentiment, the dying man retains a firm grasp on reality. *Tuesdays with Morrie* is an emotionally rich book and a deeply affecting memorial to a wise mentor, who was 79 years old when he died in 1995.