

First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee

Book Discussion Group

2025-26 Titles

- September 14:** **Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End by Atul Gawande**
A 2014 non-fiction book by American surgeon Atul Gawande. The book addresses end-of-life care, hospice care, and also contains Gawande's reflections and personal stories. He suggests medical care should focus on well-being rather than survival.
- October 12:** **A Death in the Family by James Agee**
A Death in the Family is an autobiographical novel by James Agee. It was based on events which occurred to Agee in 1915, when his father went out of town to see his own father, who had suffered a heart attack. During the return trip, Agee's father was killed in a car crash.
- November 9:** **The Memory Wall by Anthony Doerr**
Set on four continents, Anthony Doerr's collection of stories is about memory: the source of meaning and coherence in our lives, the fragile thread that connects us to ourselves and to others.
- December 14:** **Homeland Elegies by Ayad Akhtar**
A deeply personal work about identity and belonging in a nation coming apart at the seams, Homeland Elegies blends fact and fiction to tell an epic story of longing and dispossession in the world that 9/11 made. Part family drama, part social essay, part picaresque novel, at its heart it is the story of a father, a son, and the country they both call home.
- 2026**
- January 11:** **Being Jewish after the Destruction of Gaza. A Reckoning by Peter Beinart**
"At this painful moment, Peter Beinart's voice is more vital than ever. His reach is broad—from the tragedy of today's Middle East to the South Africa he knows well to events centuries ago—his scholarship is deep, and his heart is big. This book is not just about being Jewish in the shadow of today's war, but about being a person who cares for justice." —Adam Hochschild, author of *American Midnight* and *King Leopold's Ghost*
- February 8:** **Godstruck: Seven Women's Unexpected Journeys to Religious Conversion by Kelsey Osgood**
A candid, thought-provoking exploration of contemporary women's experiences of religious conversion and the relationship between faith and fulfillment in our time
- March 8:** **The Story of a Heart: Two Families, One Heart, and the Medical Miracle that Saved a Child's Life by Dr. Rachel Clarke**
The first of our organs to form and the last to die, the heart is both a simple pump and the symbol of what makes us human; as long as it continues to beat, there is

hope. In *The Story of a Heart*, Dr. Rachel Clarke blends the history of medical innovations behind transplant surgery with the story of two children—one of whom desperately needs a new heart.

April 12:

Pompeii by Robert Harris

Robert Harris's harrowing novel *Pompeii* illustrates why historical fiction can often inspire readers with more wonder than a nonfiction work does. The novel by the U.K.-based author is eloquent, compelling and well researched. I learned more about ancient Rome from it than I would have from any nonfiction work.

Note:

ONE WEEK EARLY DUE TO MOTHER'S DAY

May 3:

Birnam Wood by Eleanor Catton

The novel follows members of guerilla gardening collective Birnam Wood as, with the help of a charismatic tech billionaire, they undertake a new project on abandoned farmland. The book is a psychological thriller and social satire that explores themes of environmentalism, capitalism, and human nature.

June 14:

When It All Burns by Jordan Thomas

In *When It All Burns*, wildland firefighter and anthropologist Jordan Thomas recounts a single, brutal six-month fire season with the Los Padres Hotshots—the special forces of America's firefighters. He uncovers the hidden cultural history of megafires, revealing how humanity's symbiotic relationship with wildfire became a war—and what can be done to change it back. Thomas weaves ecology and the history of Indigenous peoples' oppression, federal forestry, and the growth of the fire industrial complex into a narrative about a new phase in the climate crisis.

July 12:

Troubled: A Memoir of Foster Care, Family, and Social Class by Rob Henderson

In this raw coming-of-age memoir, Rob Henderson, born to a drug-addicted mother and a father he never met, shuttling between ten different foster homes in California, vividly recounts growing up in foster care, enlisting in the US Air Force, attending elite universities, and pioneering the concept of "luxury beliefs"—ideas and opinions that confer status on the upper class while inflicting costs on the less fortunate.

August 9:

North Woods by Daniel Mason

A sweeping novel about a single house in the woods of New England, told through the lives of those who inhabit it across the centuries. This magisterial and highly inventive novel from Pulitzer Prize finalist Daniel Mason brims with love and madness, humor and hope. Following the cycles of history, nature, and even language, *North Woods* shows the myriad, magical ways in which we're connected to our environment, to history, and to one another. It is not just an unforgettable novel about secrets and destinies, but a way of looking at the world that asks the timeless question: How do we live on, even after we're gone?