

# Redemption and Contemporary Fiction 2018-2019

## Community Reading Group Hosted by Holy Cross Episcopal Church

Welcome to our second year of book study and insightful discussion. This group meets once a month (except for December!) in the Common Room, on a Thursday at 10:00 am. Both men and women participate in these gatherings. All are welcome and encouraged to bring friends.

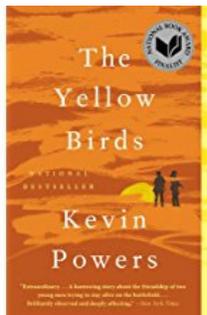
Books are generally paperback and are available at the Book Shelf in Tryon. (*There is a 10% discount for reading groups. Please support our local businesses whenever you shop.*) I look forward to seeing you on September 20.

Facilitator, Wanda K. May

### September 20, 2018

**The Yellow Birds** by Kevin Powers

978-0-316-21936-5



The Yellow Birds is a tale of friendship, loss and redemption. Set against the Iraq War, events beyond their control or understanding forever intertwine three soldiers' lives.

Sergeant Sterling, a veteran of three tours of duty, tasks 21-year-old Private John Bartle with guiding 18-year-old Private Daniel Murphy, also known simply as 'Murph'. Reluctant at first to take responsibility for the younger man, Bartle soon comes to think of Murph as a close friend. Their experiences training for and then fighting in the war bond them in a way that nothing else could, but fate will step in to tear that bond apart.

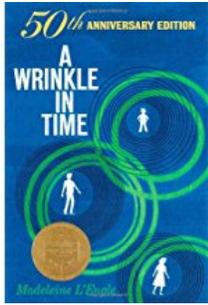
The novel switches back and forth in time with each chapter, beginning with a battle in Al Tifar, Iraq, then flashing back to a base in New Jersey before settling on a back and forth between events in Iraq and Bartle's post-war life in Virginia and then in Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Having promised both Sterling and Murph's mother that he would look out for Murph, Bartle becomes more and more disillusioned as he realizes that he is unable to keep that promise.

At the time he's writing the story, Bartle is living in a cabin on a mountain, still solitary but beginning to heal. This was made into a movie for The Sundance Festival in 2017.

**October 25, 2018**

**A Wrinkle in Time** by Madeline L'Engle 0-978-0-312-36754-1



It was a dark and stormy night; Meg Murry, her small brother Charles Wallace, and her mother had come down to the kitchen for a midnight snack when they were upset by the arrival of a most disturbing stranger.

"Wild nights are my glory," the unearthly stranger told them. "I just got caught in a downdraft and blown off course. Let me sit down for a moment, and then I'll be on my way. Speaking of ways, by the way, there is such a thing as a tesseract."

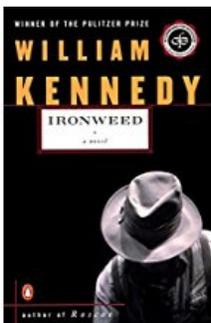
A tesseract (in case the reader doesn't know) is A Wrinkle in Time. To tell more would rob the reader of the enjoyment of Miss L'Engle's unusual book. *A Wrinkle in Time*, winner of the Newbery Medal in 1963, is the story of the adventures in space and time of Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin O'Keefe (athlete, student, and one of the most popular boys in high school). They are in search of Meg's father, a scientist who disappeared while engaged in secret work for the government on the tesseract problem.

*A Wrinkle in Time* is much more than an intergalactic adventure story. L'Engle examines such issues as the nature of good and evil, the meaning of love, and the importance of self-sacrifice. She wishes to show readers what constitutes noble and admirable human behavior, yet her story is never a sermon. It is, instead, a chance for the reader to watch Meg, Calvin, and Charles Wallace face challenges, overcome them, and grow as a result of their tests.

**November 29, 2018**

**Ironweed** by William Kennedy

978-1-101-66592-3



*Ironweed* is the remarkable story of Francis Phelan, once a talented major league baseball player, husband, and father of three, who has fallen so far from grace that his home for the past twenty-two years has been the street. Author William Kennedy takes us into the mind and heart of a homeless vagrant and explores the situations which have brought Francis to this heartbreaking station in life. Francis' denigration of himself and his common-law wife, Helen, makes for a disturbing read, and yet the novel is ultimately uplifting. It begins not with Francis' fall from grace, but rather with the day on which he begins his journey towards redemption.

**January 24, 2019**

**Invisible Man** by Ralph Ellison

978-0-679-7326-1

A milestone in American literature--a book that has continued to engage readers since its appearance in 1952.



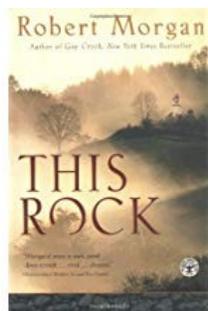
A first novel by an unknown writer, it remained on the bestseller list for sixteen weeks, won the National Book Award for fiction, and established Ralph Ellison as one of the key writers of the century. The nameless narrator of the novel describes growing up in a black community in the South, attending a Negro college from which he is expelled, moving to New York and becoming the chief spokesman of the Harlem branch of "the Brotherhood", and retreating amid violence and confusion to the basement lair of the Invisible Man he imagines himself to be. The book is a passionate and witty tour de force of style, strongly

influenced by T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Joyce, and Dostoevsky.

**February 28, 2019**

**This Rock** by Robert Morgan

0-7432-2579-1



From the author of *Gap Creek*--an international best-seller and winner of the Southern Book Critics Circle Award--comes the gripping story of two brothers struggling against each other and the confines of their mountain world in 1920s Appalachia.

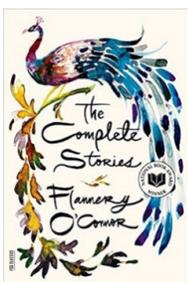
The Powell brothers--Muir and Moody--are as different as Cain and Abel. Muir is an innocent, a shy young man with big dreams. Moody, the older and wilder brother--embittered by the death of his father, by years of fighting his mother, and by his jealousy of Muir's place in the family, takes to moonshine

and gambling and turns his anger on his brother. Muir escapes by wandering, making his way around the country in attempts to find something--an occupation, a calling--to match his ambition.

When Muir, in a drunken vision, decides that his purpose in life is to clear a space on a hill and build a stone church with his own hands, the consequences of his plan are far-reaching and irrevocable: a community threatens to tear itself apart, men die, and his family is forever changed. All that's left in the aftermath are the ghosts and the memories of a new man.

**March 28, 2019**

**Collected Stories** of Flannery O'Connor



We will discuss three of the stories, but you are encouraged to read them all at some point. Flannery O'Connor is one of the most studied Southern writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. She was a devout Catholic and her writing reflected her Roman Catholic faith and frequently examined questions of morality and ethics.

Her texts usually take place in the South and revolve around morally flawed characters, frequently interacting with people with disabilities or disabled themselves (as O'Connor was), while the issue of race often appears in the background. Most of her

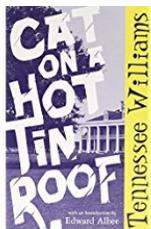
works feature disturbing elements. She wrote, "The stories are hard but they are hard because there is nothing harder or less sentimental than Christian realism. "When I see these stories described as horror stories I am always amused because the reviewer always has hold of the wrong horror."

We will discuss the stories "Revelation" "Greenleaf" and "Judgement Day"

**April 25, 2019**

**Cat on a Hot Tin Roof** by Tennessee Williams

0-8112-1601-2



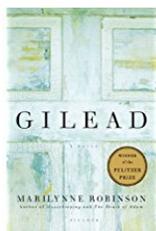
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof is the story of a Southern family in crisis, especially the husband Brick and wife Margaret (usually called Maggie or "Maggie the Cat"), and their interaction with Brick's family over the course of one evening's gathering at the family estate in Mississippi.

The party is to celebrate the birthday of patriarch Big Daddy Pollitt, "the Delta's biggest cotton-planter",<sup>[2]</sup> and his return from the Ochsner Clinic with what he has been told is a clean bill of health. All family members (except Big Daddy and his wife Big Mama) are aware of Big Daddy's true diagnosis: He is dying of cancer. His family has lied to Big Daddy and Big Mama to spare the aging couple from pain on the patriarch's birthday but, throughout the course of the play, it becomes clear that the Pollitt family has long constructed a web of deceit for itself.

**May 23, 2019**

**Gilead** by Marianne Robinson

0-312-42440x



*Gilead* is a novel written by Marilynne Robinson, published in 2004. *Gilead* won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, as well as the National Book Critics Circle Award. It is her second novel, following *Housekeeping*, which was published in 1980.

Here, Robinson returns with an intimate tale of three generations from the Civil War to the twentieth century: a story about fathers and sons and the spiritual battles that still rage at America's heart. Writing in the tradition of Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, Marilynne Robinson's beautiful, spare, and spiritual prose allows "even the faithless reader to feel the possibility of transcendent order" (*Slate*). In the luminous and unforgettable voice of Congregationalist minister John Ames, *Gilead* reveals the human condition and the often unbearable beauty of an ordinary life.