

Fiction Book Club's Top 4 Selections of 2010.

1. **The Help** by Kathryn Stockett. Southern maids in white households cooked, served food, changed the linen, and raised the children. But they were not allowed to use the same bathroom as their employers. Eugenia Skeeter Phelan wants to be a writer, she persuades the maids to tell her their stories. A risky activity, they could be visited by nasty people dressed in white sheets.
2. **Major Pettigrew's Last Stand** by Helen Simonson, Major Pettigrew is a ramrod straight, stiff upper lip, proper British gentleman living alone in a small village. Upset by his brother's sudden death, he is comforted by the local shop-keeper, Mrs. Ali. An unlikely friendship blossoms. Complications in village life ensue as they take comfort in each other's company.
3. **The Angel's Game** by Carlos Ruiz Zafon. David Martin, orphaned and alone, is befriended by a noted author. Soon his talents surpass those of his mentor. David lives in a dark, gothic old mansion where he writes shamefully popular pulp. Andreas Correlli is possessed of dark secrets, he makes David an offer he cannot refuse. David is commissioned to write something extraordinary, as good and evil battle for possession of his soul.
4. **The Piano Teacher** by Janice Y. K. Lee. Claire led a sheltered life. She traveled to Hong Kong as a young bride moving into a society for which she possesses no map. She is unmoored. Teaching piano lessons to the Chen's daughter she meets their Anglo chauffeur, Will. He reveals bits of his past in increments that shift her view of life. Will arrived in Hong Kong before WWII and fell in love with high spirited Trudy. The story alternates time periods, opening piece by piece like the petals of a rose, each layer slowly revealing the past.

Mystery Book Club's Top 4 Selections of 2010.

1. **The Girl Who Kicked The Hornet's Nest** by Steig Larsson. Lisbeth Salander rockets through the Millennium Trilogy and she does not deal gently with the bad guys. Mikael Blomkvist is a journalist who exposes the bullies preying on the unprotected. Salander must accept help from Mikael by revealing the secrets of her past. And this girl has a closet stuffed with skeletons!
2. **The Black Tower** by Louis Bayard. Using one of history's more interesting characters as his sleuth, Bayard sets his mystery after the French revolution. Hector Carpentier is shocked to be of interest to the notorious Vidocq. It is not a pleasant sensation. Vidocq was the creator of France's Surete, he was a spy, a criminal, a ladies man. Victor Hugo used Vidocq as the model for both the hero and villain in his masterpiece, Les Miserables. Vidocq was more than capable of solving a little mystery with Hector.
3. **Still Life** by Louise Penney is set in the small village of Three Pines outside Montreal. Who killed retired school teacher Jean Neal? Felled by an arrow, at first the villagers want to believe her death was a horrible accident. Could a confused hunter have mistaken her for a deer? Chief Inspector Armand Gamache of the Surete du Quebec will find the answers.
4. **The Coroner's Lunch** by Colin Cotterill. It is 1975, the Communist Pathet Lao has taken over Laos and 72 year old Dr. Siri Paim-born, a fighter for the cause, believed he would be allowed to retire. Instead he is drafted to be the sole coroner for the country. This causes him more problems than your average doc, he sees the ghosts of the dead. As a coroner he is will have many visits.

Classics Book Club's Top 4 Selections of 2010.

1. **To Kill A Mockingbird** by Harper Lee, winner of the Pulitzer Prize. On its 50th anniversary this masterpiece is just as alive and relevant as the year it was written. A black man is falsely accused of rape. His defense falls heavily on his lawyer, Atticus. Set in 1930's Alabama, it was not a time a white man would be lauded for defending a black. I like these characters, I suspect you will too. They have stood the test of time.
2. **The Great Gatsby** by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Considered one of the greatest novels of the 20th Century, it is set in a time of unbridled opulence. Seething with illicit passion, fast money, and all the energy of the Roaring Twenties, the story centers on Gatsby's doomed love for the shallow, beautiful Daisy.
3. **The Monkey Wrench Gang** by Edward Abbey. A motley gang wages war on the big yellow machines that destroy the landscape they love. Abbey pours all the rage and furor of his opposition to despoiling wild places into his fiction. Ed Abbey was one of those guys who eat up life in great big gulps. He lets us have a little taste of what it is like to live large.
4. **The Brothers Karamazov** by Fyodor Dostoevsky is considered one of the greatest achievements of literature. A father and son vie for the same woman, two brothers eloquently debate the existence of God, and a proud man stands accused of patricide. Betrayal, redemption, love, and hate all broil Dostoevsky's stew.

Non Fiction Book Club's Top 4 Selections of 2010.

1. **The Most They Ever Had** by Pulitzer Prize winner Rick Bragg. He bears witness to the lives of good, hard working people employed in the cotton mill in Jacksonville Alabama. "You need not use foul language to damn a man here. Just say a day's work would kill him, and you tore him down to the bald nothing." We used to value hard work in this country. These people take pride in working hard to provide for their families. They do not anticipate easy lives or great wealth. Is it too much to expect a safe working environment and a living wage? Apparently it is. Rick Bragg wrote a eulogy to the time in America where we built things rather than chasing ever faster after the next deal and the easy dollar. Now a company's parts are worth more than its whole, the jobs go cheaper overseas, and the bad boys of Wall Street must be kept happy.
2. **Zeitoun** by Dave Eggers. **Zeitoun** stayed and rode out Hurricane Katrina, family fled to safety. When the levees broke, he paddled his canoe around helping people. He was hauled off and locked up without even being allowed to phone his wife or let anyone know his whereabouts. This miscarriage of justice caused harm not only to the man and his family, but also to the people he was aiding.
3. **Nine Lives** by Dan Baum. Katrina was one of the worst disasters any American city has suffered, but it is not the only story in the Big Easy. Real people live there, with homes, and jobs, and family. **Nine Lives** tells their story, well nine of them anyway, beginning in 1965 with Ronald Lewis and Hurricane Betsy.
4. **American Lightning** by Howard Blum. In 1911 the Iron Worker's Union planned a major assault and set off their spree by bombing the offices of the Los Angeles Times, killing 21. Before this book is finished it will involve Clarence Darrow, Hollywood powerhouse DW Griffith, and the Secret Service. Action rampages through the pages.

Travel Essay Book Club's Top 4 Selections of 2010.

1. **The Lost City of Z** by David Grann. In 1925 Percy Fawcett, accompanied by his son and another young man, headed into the remote Amazon jungle. The renowned explorer was never seen again. Expeditions have perished trying to discover his fate. Grann tracks the adventurer into the heart of the Amazon searching for a lost civilization.
2. **Out of Africa** by Isak Dinesen. Karen Blixen lived in Kenya from 1914 to 1931. She writes of an Africa still under the yoke of European colonialism. It is a place of great beauty and great peril.
3. **Catfish & Mandala** by Andrew X. Pham is the chronicle of his bike journey along the west coast of the US and Mexico and onto Vietnam. His family fled Vietnam when he was a ten year old boy, he needed to go back to Vietnam to see the family left behind, to see the life he did not live.
4. **Outposts** by Simon Winchester. In the past it was said that the sun never set on the British Empire. Time has left it much diminished. Winchester was curious about what remains. He traveled 100,000 miles to find out, visiting the last remnants of the world's previous super power.

