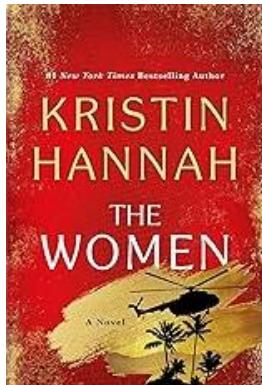


St. Stephen's Book Group Reading Selections for 2026

January



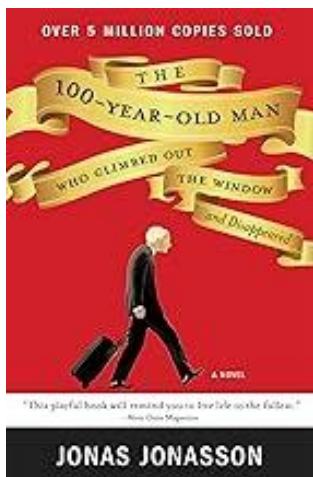
The Women by Kristin Hannah

Women can be heroes. When twenty-year-old nursing student Frances "Frankie" McGrath hears these words, it is a revelation. Raised in the sun-drenched, idyllic world of Southern California and sheltered by her conservative parents, she has always prided herself on doing the right thing. But in 1965, the world is changing, and she suddenly dares to imagine a different future for herself. When her brother ships out to serve in Vietnam, she joins the Army Nurse Corps and follows his path.

As green and inexperienced as the men sent to Vietnam to fight, Frankie is overwhelmed by the chaos and destruction of war. Each day is a gamble of life and death, hope and betrayal; friendships run deep and can be shattered in an instant. In war, she meets—and becomes one of—the lucky, the brave, the broken, and the lost.

But war is just the beginning for Frankie and her veteran friends. The real battle lies in coming home to a changed and divided America, to angry protesters, and to a country that wants to forget.

February



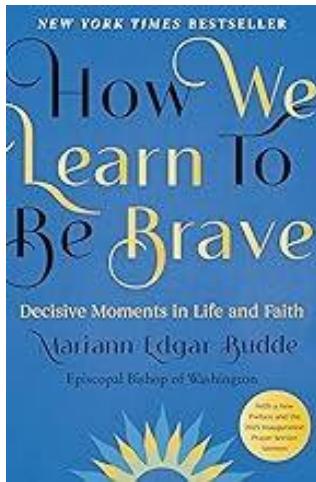
The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared by Jonas Jonasson

After a long and eventful life, Allan Karlsson ends up in a nursing home, believing it to be his last stop. The only problem is that he's still in good health, and in one day, he turns 100. A big celebration is in the works, but Allan really isn't interested (and he'd like a bit more control over his vodka consumption). So he decides to escape. He climbs out the window in his slippers and embarks on a hilarious and entirely unexpected journey, involving, among other surprises, a suitcase stuffed with cash, some unpleasant criminals, a friendly hot-dog stand operator, and an elephant (not to mention a death by elephant).

It would be the adventure of a lifetime for anyone else, but Allan has a larger-than-life backstory: Not only has he witnessed some of the most important events of the twentieth century, but he has actually played a key role in them. Starting out in munitions as a boy, he somehow finds himself involved in many of the key explosions of the twentieth century

and travels the world, sharing meals and more with everyone from Stalin, Churchill, and Truman to Mao, Franco, and de Gaulle. Quirky and utterly unique, *The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared* has charmed readers across the world.

March



How We Learn to Be Brave: Decisive Moments in Life and Faith by Mariann Edgar Budde

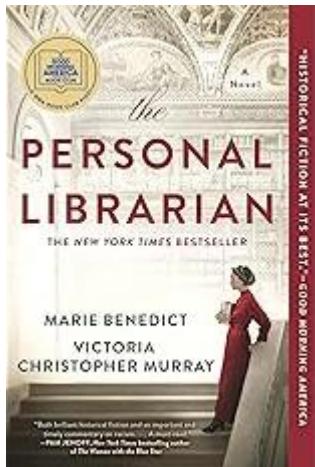
On January 21, 2025, many Americans were introduced to Bishop Mariann Budde thanks to what *The New York Times* called “an extraordinary act of public resistance.” During her prayer service for Donald J. Trump’s second inauguration, Bishop Budde addressed the president directly, imploring him “to have mercy on the people in our country who are scared now,” from those who are part of the LGBTQ+ community to immigrants and refugees.

But for Bishop Budde, this moment was the culmination of a lifetime spent thinking about those pivot points when we’re called on to push past our fears and act with strength. With *How We Learn to Be Brave*, she teaches us that being brave is not a singular occurrence; it’s a journey that we can choose to undertake every day.

Here, Bishop Budde explores the full range of decisive moments, from the most visible and dramatic (the decision to go), to the internal and personal (the decision to stay), to brave choices made with an eye toward the future (the decision to start), those born of suffering (the decision to accept that which we did not choose), and those that come unexpectedly (the decision to step up to the plate). Drawing on examples ranging from Harry Potter to the Gospel According to Luke, she seamlessly weaves together personal experiences with stories from scripture, history, and pop culture to underscore both the universality of these moments and the particular call each one of us must heed when they arrive.

With Bishop Budde’s wisdom, readers will learn to live and to respond according to their true beliefs and in ways that align with their best selves. *How We Learn to Be Brave* will provide much-needed fortitude and insight to anyone searching for answers in uncertain times.

April



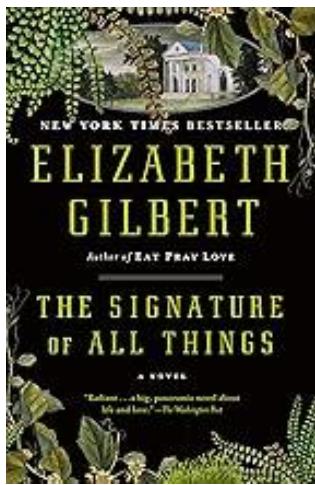
The Personal Librarian by Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray

In her twenties, Belle da Costa Greene is hired by J. P. Morgan to curate a collection of rare manuscripts, books, and artwork for his newly built Pierpont Morgan Library. Belle becomes a fixture in New York City society and one of the most powerful people in the art and book world, known for her impeccable taste and shrewd negotiating for critical works as she helps create a world-class collection.

But Belle has a secret, one she must protect at all costs. She was born not Belle da Costa Greene but Belle Marion Greener. She is the daughter of Richard Greener, the first Black graduate of Harvard and a well-known advocate for equality. Belle's complexion isn't dark because of her alleged Portuguese heritage that lets her pass as white—her complexion is dark because she is African American.

The Personal Librarian tells the story of an extraordinary woman, famous for her intellect, style, and wit, and shares the lengths she must go to—for the protection of her family and her legacy—to preserve her carefully crafted white identity in the racist world in which she lives.

May



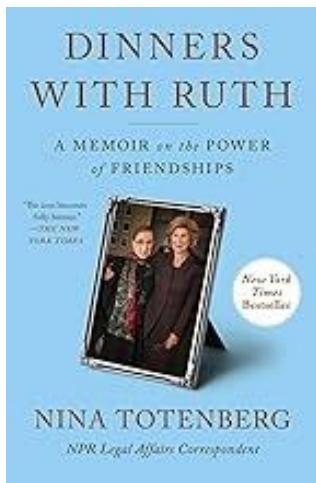
The Signature of All Things by Elizabeth Gilbert

In *The Signature of All Things*, Elizabeth Gilbert returns to fiction, inserting her inimitable voice into an enthralling story of love, adventure and discovery. Spanning much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the novel follows the fortunes of the extraordinary Whittaker family as led by the enterprising Henry Whittaker—a poor-born Englishman who makes a great fortune in the South American quinine trade, eventually becoming the richest man in Philadelphia. Born in 1800, Henry's brilliant daughter, Alma (who inherits both her father's money and his mind), ultimately becomes a botanist of considerable gifts herself. As Alma's research takes her deeper into the mysteries of evolution, she falls in love with a man named Ambrose

Pike who makes incomparable paintings of orchids and who draws her in the exact opposite direction—into the realm of the spiritual, the divine, and the magical. Alma is a clear-minded scientist; Ambrose a utopian artist—but what unites this unlikely couple is a desperate need to understand the workings of this world and the mechanisms behind all life.

Exquisitely researched and told at a galloping pace, *The Signature of All Things* soars across the globe—from London to Peru to Philadelphia to Tahiti to Amsterdam, and beyond. Along the way, the story is peopled with unforgettable characters: missionaries, abolitionists, adventurers, astronomers, sea captains, geniuses, and the quite mad. But most memorable of all, it is the story of Alma Whittaker, who—born in the Age of Enlightenment, but living well into the Industrial Revolution—bears witness to that extraordinary moment in human history when all the old assumptions about science, religion, commerce, and class were exploding into dangerous new ideas. Written in the bold, questing spirit of that singular time, Gilbert’s wise, deep, and spellbinding tale is certain to capture the hearts and minds of readers.

June



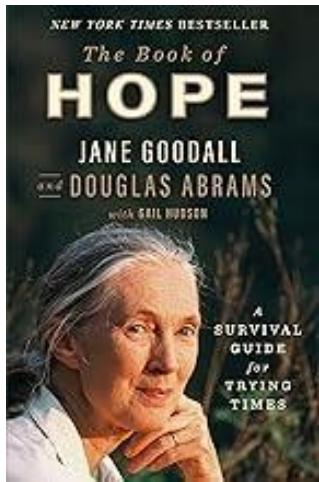
Dinners with Ruth: A Memoir of the Power of Friendships by Nina Totenberg

Four years before Nina Totenberg was hired at NPR, where she cemented her legacy as a prizewinning reporter, and nearly twenty-two years before Ruth Bader Ginsburg was appointed to the Supreme Court, Nina called Ruth. A reporter for *The National Observer*, Nina was curious about Ruth’s legal brief, asking the Supreme Court to do something revolutionary: declare a law that discriminated “on the basis of sex” to be unconstitutional. In a time when women were fired for becoming pregnant, often could not apply for credit cards, or get a mortgage in their own names, Ruth patiently explained her argument. That call launched a remarkable, nearly fifty-year friendship.

Dinners with Ruth is an extraordinary account of two women who paved the way for future generations by tearing down professional and legal barriers. It is also an intimate memoir of the power of friendships as women began to pry open career doors and transform the workplace. At the story’s heart is one, special relationship: Ruth and Nina saw each other not only through personal joys, but also illness, loss, and widowhood. During the devastating illness and eventual death of Nina’s first husband, Ruth drew her out of grief; twelve years later, Nina would reciprocate when Ruth’s beloved husband died. They shared not only a love of opera, but also of shopping, as they instinctively understood that clothes were armor for women who wanted to be taken seriously in a workplace dominated by men. During Ruth’s last year, they shared so many small dinners that Saturdays were “reserved for Ruth” in Nina’s house.

Dinners with Ruth also weaves together compelling, personal portraits of other fascinating women and men from Nina’s life, including her cherished NPR colleagues Cokie Roberts and Linda Wertheimer; her beloved husbands; her friendships with multiple Supreme Court Justices, including Lewis Powell, William Brennan, and Antonin Scalia, and Nina’s own family—her father, the legendary violinist Roman Totenberg, and her “best friends,” her sisters. Inspiring and revelatory, *Dinners with Ruth* is a moving story of the joy and true meaning of friendship.

July



The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide for Trying Times by Jane Goodall

Looking at the headlines—the worsening climate crisis, a global pandemic, loss of biodiversity, political upheaval—it can be hard to feel optimistic. And yet hope has never been more desperately needed.

In this urgent book, Jane Goodall, one of the world's most famous naturalists, and Douglas Abrams, the internationally bestselling co-author of *The Book of Joy*, explore through intimate and thought-provoking dialogue one of the most sought after and least understood elements of human nature: hope. In *The Book of Hope*, Jane focuses on her "Four Reasons for Hope": The Amazing Human Intellect, The Resilience of Nature, The Power of Young People, and The

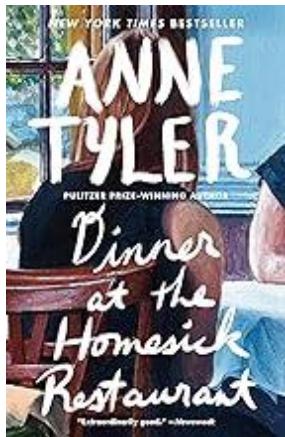
Indomitable Human Spirit.

Drawing on decades of work that has helped expand our understanding of what it means to be human and what we all need to do to help build a better world, *The Book of Hope* touches on vital questions, including: How do we stay hopeful when everything seems hopeless? How do we cultivate hope in our children? What is the relationship between hope and action? Filled with moving and inspirational stories and photographs from Jane's remarkable career, *The Book of Hope* is a deeply personal conversation with one of the most beloved figures in the world today.

While discussing the experiences that shaped her discoveries and beliefs, Jane tells the story of how she became a messenger of hope, from living through World War II to her years in Gombe to realizing she had to leave the forest to travel the world in her role as an advocate for environmental justice. And for the first time, she shares her profound revelations about her next, and perhaps final, adventure.

The second book in the Global Icons Series—which launched with the instant classic *The Book of Joy* with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu—*The Book of Hope* is a rare and intimate look not only at the nature of hope but also into the heart and mind of a woman who revolutionized how we view the world around us and has spent a lifetime fighting for our future.

August



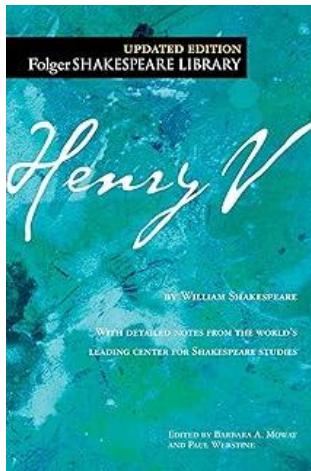
Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant by Anne Tyler

Abandoned by her wanderlusting husband, stoic Pearl raised her three children on her own. Now grown, the siblings are inextricably linked by their memories—some painful—which hold them together despite their differences.

Hardened by life's disappointments, wealthy, charismatic Cody has turned cruel and envious. Thrice-married Jenny is errant and passionate. And Ezra, the flawed saint of the family, who stayed at home to look after his mother, runs a restaurant where he cooks what other people are homesick for, stubbornly yearning for the perfect family he never had.

Now gathered during a time of loss, they will reluctantly unlock the shared secrets of their past and discover if what binds them together is stronger than what tears them apart.

September



Henry V by William Shakespeare

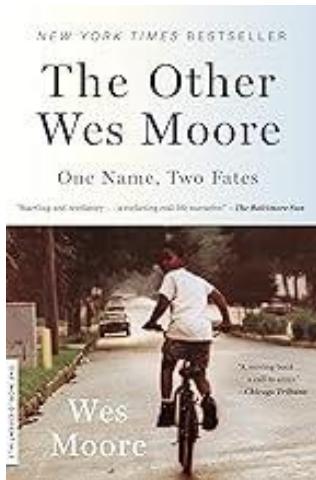
Henry V is Shakespeare's most famous "war play"; it includes the storied English victory over the French at Agincourt. Some of it glorifies war, especially the choruses and Henry's speeches urging his troops into battle. But we also hear bishops conniving for war to postpone a bill that would tax the church, and soldiers expecting to reap profits from the conflict. Even in the speeches of Henry and his nobles, there are many chilling references to the human cost of war.

It is recommended that you get the Folger Shakespeare Library edition of Henry V because:

The authoritative edition of *Henry V* from the Folger Shakespeare Library includes:

- Freshly edited text based on the best early printed version of the play
- Newly revised explanatory notes conveniently placed on pages facing the text of the play
- Scene-by-scene plot summaries
- A key to the play's famous lines and phrases
- An introduction to reading Shakespeare's language
- An essay by a leading Shakespeare scholar providing a modern perspective on the play
- Fresh images from the Folger Shakespeare Library's vast holdings of rare books
- An up-to-date annotated guide to further reading
- An essay by Catherine Belsey

October



The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates by Wes Moore

The chilling truth is that his story could have been mine. The tragedy is that my story could have been his.

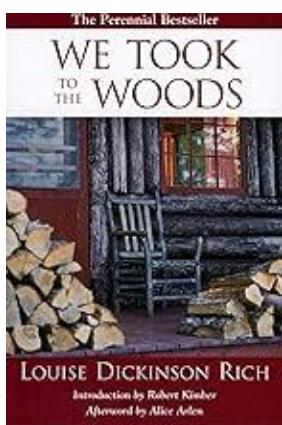
In December 2000, the *Baltimore Sun* ran a small piece about Wes Moore, a local student who had just received a Rhodes Scholarship. The same paper also ran a series of articles about four young men who had allegedly killed a police officer in a spectacularly botched armed robbery. The police were still hunting for two of the suspects who had gone on the lam, a pair of brothers. One was named Wes Moore.

Wes just couldn't shake off the unsettling coincidence, or the inkling that the two shared much more than space in the same newspaper. After following the story of the robbery, the manhunt, and the trial to its conclusion, he wrote a letter to the other Wes, now a convicted murderer serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole. His letter tentatively asked the questions that had been haunting him: *Who are you? How did this happen?*

That letter led to a correspondence and relationship that have lasted for several years. Over dozens of letters and prison visits, Wes discovered that the other Wes had had a life not unlike his own: Both had had difficult childhoods, both were fatherless; they'd hung out on similar corners with similar crews, and both had run into trouble with the police. At each stage of their young lives they had come across similar moments of decision, yet their choices would lead them to astonishingly different destinies.

Told in alternating dramatic narratives that take readers from heart-wrenching losses to moments of surprising redemption, *The Other Wes Moore* tells the story of a generation of boys trying to find their way in a hostile world.

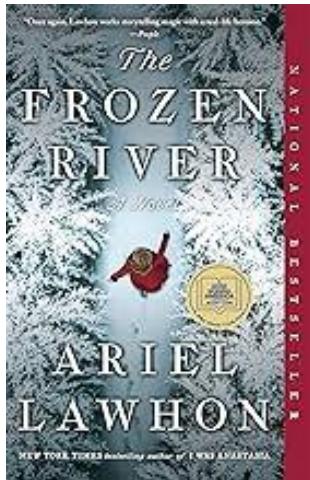
November



We Took to the Woods by Louise Dickinson Rich

In her early thirties, Louise Dickinson Rich took to the woods of Maine with her husband. They found their livelihood and raised a family in the remote backcountry settlement of Middle Dam, in the Rangeley area. Rich made time after morning chores to write about their lives. *We Took to the Woods* is an adventure story, written with humor, but it also portrays a cherished dream awakened into full life. First published 1942.

December



The Frozen River by Ariel Lawhon

Maine, 1789: When the Kennebec River freezes, entombing a man in the ice, Martha Ballard is summoned to examine the body and determine cause of death. As a midwife and healer, she is privy to much of what goes on behind closed doors in Hallowell. Her diary is a record of every birth and death, crime and debacle that unfolds in the close-knit community. Months earlier, Martha documented the details of an alleged rape committed by two of the town's most respected gentlemen—one of whom has now been found dead in the ice. But when a local physician undermines her conclusion, declaring the death to be an accident, Martha is forced to investigate the shocking murder on her own.

Over the course of one winter, as the trial nears, and whispers and prejudices mount, Martha doggedly pursues the truth. Her diary soon lands at the center of the scandal, implicating those she loves, and compelling Martha to decide where her own loyalties lie.

Clever, layered, and subversive, Ariel Lawhon's newest offering introduces an unsung heroine who refused to accept anything less than justice at a time when women were considered best seen and not heard. *The Frozen River* is a thrilling, tense, and tender story about a remarkable woman who left an unparalleled legacy yet remains nearly forgotten to this day.