

Check It Out!

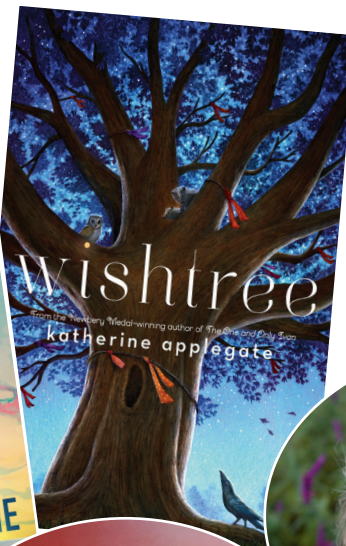
A Fantastic Community Read

Jf books foster a better understanding of the world by allowing readers to travel to far-off places and times—and if fiction ascends to the next rung to unlock the imagination—fantasy arguably transports readers to neighborhoods, societies, and universes they might never have imagined.

“Reading fantasy helps lift us out of our day-to-day world, nurture our creativity, and explore challenging issues in a way that’s accessible,” said Port Townsend Public Library Director Melody Sky Weaver.

It’s clear that the fantasy genre encourages limitless innovation, yet it still has to be relatable and tap into universal stories and archetypes, Weaver said. So it is with both 2022 books selected for Community Read, hosted by our library every March. This year, for the first time, the library is bringing all ages into Community Read by offering a children’s book, *Wishtree* by Katherine Applegate, in addition to *The House in the Cerulean Sea* by TJ Klune, which is geared toward teens and adults.

“Both Klune and Applegate have written fantasy novels filled with resiliency, courage, and hope and that speak to



A book is proof that humans are capable of working magic.

—Carl Sagan

by Lynn Nowak

the importance of belonging and feeling welcomed in one’s community,” Weaver said.

Community Read is intended to promote closer ties among community members through the shared experience of reading, exchanging, and discussing ideas and topics the chosen books generate.

“Two years into the pandemic, it is good to be reminded of the transformative power of reading fiction together,”

Weaver added.

Events and activities kick off the first week of March with the film *Boy*, provided free to stream by the Port Townsend Film Festival. Written and directed by Taika Waititi (*Hunt for the Wilderpeople*, *Jojo Rabbit*), the film is a coming-of-age story with elements of magical realism that examines themes of abandonment and imaginative play. It pairs well with *The House in the Cerulean Sea*, Weaver said. A special art exhibit inspired by *Wishtree*, featuring Max Grover’s painting classes, is displayed at the library throughout the month. Other programming includes book discussions via Zoom, a real wish tree at the library, a tree-themed storytime with local children’s author Toni Yuly, an outdoor StoryWalk for kids and families at Kah Tai Lagoon, and a chance to meet authors Applegate and Klune on Zoom.

(continued on next page)

The library staff traditionally tries to alternate Community Read selections each year between fiction and nonfiction and to vary book genres. Weaver said that usually the library strives to highlight Pacific Northwest authors, but using Zoom for this year's author talks allows the library to "spread its literary wings" by inviting authors from across the country.

Understanding the human condition

Fantasy authors can ignite fires of creativity and enjoy unbridled freedom in the ways they tell their stories. As one reader observed, authors have latitude to bring to the surface the themes and issues they want to address. But regardless of the imaginary settings, they still have to connect with their real-world readers. In some ways, fantasy authors need to understand the human condition more deeply than other writers so their stories can apply to readers, Weaver explained. "They masterfully use fantasy to help the reader explore difficult issues in a way that I hope opens hearts and minds."

Although fantasy comprises at least fifty subgenres, Weaver called the two Community Read novels contemporary urban fantasies. "They're a lot more relatable to a broad spectrum of the community than, say, high fantasy like *Lord of the Rings*." She explained that both novels deal with the classic story of a stranger coming to town, whose presence challenges the way things have always been and encourages growth in the stories' characters.

"We relate to Red, the oak tree and main protagonist of *Wishtree*, because she is so human through her friendships, fears, and courage. Linus Baker in *The House in the Cerulean Sea* is a lonely, by-the-book bureaucrat who suddenly finds himself deeply caring and empathizing with magical children in a way he never had before. We see Linus become more human through his relationships with nonhumans."

Both authors address issues of prejudice for people who are perceived as different, but what readers learn is that all the characters—and all human

Ten ways reading fiction makes your life better

Helps improve creativity
and judgment

Enhances the imagination

Develops empathy

Boosts chances of a
longer life

Improves social skills

Enhances an understanding
of the world

Aids sleep

Improves memory

Increases vocabulary
development

Makes time more valuable
by increasing productivity

Source: Elif Notes

beings—want to belong, to have friends, and to be loved. "When you take away talking trees and crows, and magical islands with sprites, gnomes, and wyverns, you have very human stories that speak to all of us," Weaver continued.

Heightening emotional intelligence

Kathi Johnson, a reader and library staffer, said, "Fantasy expands the imagination and opens you to new ideas." Another fantasy reader said that as a child, reading the genre provided him an escape from reality. Now an adult, he understands that fantasy helps pause the aspects of life that are most stressful and challenging but also piques his curiosity enough that he wants to plumb the allegories told through it. He is fascinated by the psychological and sociological aspects of this brand of storytelling. Fantasy is a stress reliever and a coping mechanism, to be sure—it's easier to remain in another world—but returning to real life seems more manageable after immersion somewhere else, he said. "In a roundabout way, fantasy helps me come to grips with reality," he said. "A book always ends."

"Fantasy is far from frivolous," Weaver said. "After all, we all grew up with fairy tales to teach us important lessons."

One of those lessons is about understanding others and enhancing emotional intelligence. A study by Keith Oatley, novelist and professor at the University of Toronto, showed how reading literary fiction is an exploration of the human experience. He discovered that those who read fiction had higher levels of empathy compared with readers of nonfiction. Further, another study, published in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, examined how fiction influences attitudes toward stigmatized groups. For example, study participants became less prejudicial and more empathetic toward refugees, immigrants, gays, and lesbians after reading the *Harry Potter* series.

"The library is committed to celebrating diversity, equity, and inclusion," said Weaver. "Both *Wishtree*

and *The House in the Cerulean Sea* touch on important issues about embracing diversity, overcoming prejudice, and inspiring positive growth in the characters and their communities.”

Klune, author of *The House in the Cerulean Sea*, has said that it’s important to show accurate, positive queer representation in literature. Weaver concurred. “I agree with Klune that we need more positive stories with happy endings for LGBTQ and BIPOC (Black, indigenous and people of color) characters. It’s exciting to see the fantasy genre diversify.”

“More than ever,” she continued, “we need a little magic and hope, and I’m optimistic that *Wishtree* and *The House in the Cerulean Sea* will be uplifting reads for all ages in our community.” 📖

*In a roundabout
way, fantasy
helps me come
to grips with
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Ten ways reading fiction makes life better from Elif Notes (citing University of Toronto, Creativity Research Journal, Social Science & Medicine, Northcentral University, and the National Library of Medicine)

The Community Read program is made possible by the Friends of the Port Townsend Library, the Port Townsend Library Foundation, and community supporters.

A limited number of free copies of the books are available at the library on a first-come, first-served basis. Additional copies are available at the library on two-week loans, and books may be purchased at Imprint Bookstore.

Special events highlight Community Read

Enjoy reading *Wishtree* and *The House in the Cerulean Sea* this month, and then try any of these related in-person or virtual programs. Check the library’s website for specific links to online programs at ptpubliclibrary.org, under “Programs,” “Community Read.” All events are free.

Movie Kickoff

March 1–8, virtual screening room on demand

Port Townsend Film Festival presents *Boy*, a coming-of-age story filled with magical realism, written and directed by Taika Waititi (*Hunt for the Wilderpeople*, *Jojo Rabbit*). Screen the movie for free March 1–8 through the Port Townsend Film Festival’s online platform, ptfilmfest.com.

Free Screening of *Boy* at the Rose Theatre

March 5 (Saturday), Rose Theatre, 1 PM

Watch *Boy* live at the Rose Theatre. Pick up free tickets at the library or at ptfilmfest.com. Tickets are limited.

Northwind Art

Stand Tall and Reach Deep: Creative Book Covers for *Wishtree*,

March 1–31, Port Townsend Public Library

Max Grover’s painting class has reimaged the cover art for *Wishtree*. On display at the library.

StoryWalk

“A Year around the Great Oak” for kids and their families

March 1–31, Kah Tai Lagoon, anytime during daylight

A fun, outdoor adventure for the whole family. Walk and read Gerda Muller’s beautiful tribute to a great oak tree and the seasons. Starts at Landes Street entrance.

Make-a-Wish Tree

March 1–31, Port Townsend Public Library

Come to the library to make a wish for our own wish tree.

Book Lovers’ Café Online

March 7 (Monday), via Zoom, 2 PM

Join the library’s Book Club for a group discussion of *The House in the Cerulean Sea* with Library Director Melody Sky Weaver.

Meet the Author: Katherine Applegate Online

March 17 (Thursday), via Zoom, 6:30 PM

Join Katherine Applegate for a presentation and reading.

Storytime: Some Questions about Trees

March 22 (Tuesday), online via Zoom, 10:30 AM

Special virtual storytime with author Toni Yuly. For kids 0–6.

Community Book Discussion Online

March 24 (Thursday), via Zoom, 7 PM

Grab a curbside meal from your favorite local restaurant and join the discussion of *The House in the Cerulean Sea* with Kimberley Gorman, executive director of Jumping Mouse.

Meet the Author: TJ Klune Online

March 31 (Thursday), via Zoom, 6:30 PM

Join TJ Klune for a presentation and reading.

What Friends Are Reading

◆ *Silverview*

John le Carré (2021)

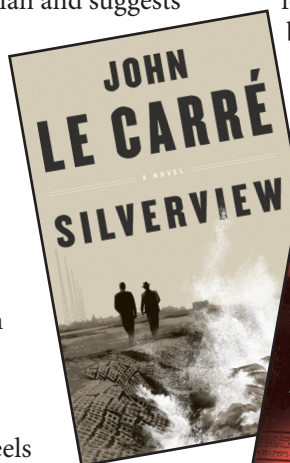
“And that’s the last secret I’ll keep from you”—the unintentionally poignant final line in John le Carré’s unintentionally final novel *Silverview*, a densely plotted, deeply entertaining read.

Julian has recently fled his unsavory Gordon Gekko-like existence in London’s finance industry to set up a bookshop in a coastal East Anglian village. Edward, a garrulous old man with a vaguely foreign accent, befriends Julian and suggests an innovative marketing plan for the struggling store: turn the basement into a highbrow cultural center and gathering place. Like the reader, Julian suspects there is more to this unusual man than mere marketing genius.

Silverview is three mysteries wrapped in one. The first is a complex espionage story that takes the reader from a grim English Cold War bunker to the battle-torn hills of Bosnia. The second is the question, present in many of le Carré’s novels, of how much in the story is autobiographical. Stewart Proctor, the main MI6 character, feels that he’s being put out to pasture too soon, perhaps a natural theme for a writer nearing the end of his days. Another *Silverview* character, the lady of the house that gives the book its name, is an elderly woman dying of cancer. Le Carré’s wife and principal editor was suffering from the same ailment; she would die just two months after him.

The final mystery, described in a brief and intriguing afterword by le Carré’s youngest son, is why the book was published posthumously, given that le Carré had largely finished it well before his death. His son ventures a plausible theory but admits there is no clear answer. Sadly, this is the last secret le Carré will keep from us.

—Rich Johnson



◆ *Wedding Station*

David Downing (2021)

If you have not yet had the pleasure of reading David Downing’s excellent historical thrillers, *Wedding Station* is the perfect starting place. And if you are already a fan of the John Russell novels, this one fills in important gaps in Russell’s history.

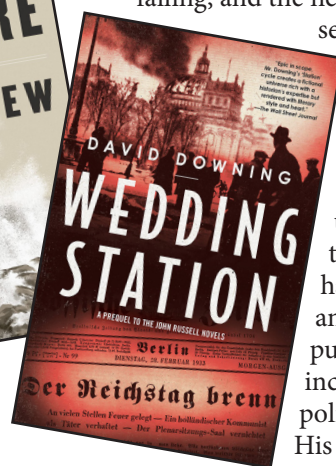
Written as a prequel to the series, *Wedding Station* is set in Berlin in 1933 and opens with the burning of the Reichstag. American journalist John Russell, employed as a crime reporter for a German newspaper, senses a huge story behind the fire but quickly learns that asking too many questions may prove dangerous. Germany is changing: the old political order is falling, and the new order is made up of Brown Shirts, secret police, and increasing pressures on anyone daring to speak the truth.

Russell is no superhero, just an ordinary man caught in extraordinary times. He is beat up, pushed around, lied to, and threatened, but he manages to hang on to most of his principles and better instincts while doggedly pursuing several stories that become increasingly complicated by the political tsunami engulfing the country. His recent separation from his German wife has put his right to remain in Berlin

in jeopardy, meaning he might be separated from his six-year-old son, so Russell must walk a thin line between digging out the facts and not angering the new men in charge of Berlin. Downing gives the familiar historical events plenty of texture and nuance, and shows us how ordinary people react, for good or for bad, to the advent of an authoritarian government.

I heartily recommend not only the seven John Russell novels, each named for a station on Berlin’s Underground system, but also any of Downing’s other books, including the Jack McColl series set during World War I and the excellent stand-alone novel *Diary of a Dead Man on Leave*.

—Kristine Kaufman



◆ *The Samurai's Garden*

Gail Tsukiyama (1994)

In this book, novelist Gail Tsukiyama, the daughter of a Chinese mother and a Japanese father, takes her readers on a remarkable journey during a very troubled time—the late 1930s as World War II is beginning. Despite my dread of reading about ensuing world events, and the fact that I know little about either Chinese or Japanese culture, I was simultaneously captivated both by the characters’ depth and dignity and by the tale’s gentleness.

Stephen, a twenty-year-old Chinese man, has gone to live at his family’s summer home in Tarumi, a remote Japanese village, to recover

(continued p. 5, col. 1, bottom)



Ranie Keithahn

ranie@olympus.net



◆ *The Unwanteds*

Lisa McMann (2012–2017)

All Alex Stowe has ever known is rules, drab colors, and the barbed wire ceilings of Quill. In Quill when you turn 13, the government designates you either as a “Wanted,” who gets to go to college and join the government or the Quillatary, or a “Necessary,” who works drab and essential jobs like digging graves and running farms. But you can also be deemed an “Unwanted”—sentenced to be thrown into a lake of boiling oil in an annual purge. Among Quill’s many rules, the most important is to not show any creativity or emotion. Do that once, you are dropped to the rank of Necessary; do it multiple times, you become an Unwanted.

Alex has known for a long time that he is Unwanted, unlike his Wanted twin brother, Aaron. At peace with his fate, Alex, and the other Unwanteds, stoically face their day of execution, prepared to be delivered to the death farm just outside the Wall. But no one has ever seen outside the Wall.

What really happens outside the walls of Quill? Will the newest Unwanteds meet their expected fate, or will they instead find answers to some important questions? Is it really that bad to express emotions, draw, tell stories, and sing? As soon as the Unwanteds leave Quill’s cold stone walls,

many new doors may open, maybe a whole new world.

This book series is one of my top three favorite series.

Described as Harry Potter meets *The Hunger Games*, the series contains seven books and many delightful and realistic characters

I can relate to, especially since they are purged because of their creativity. I have dyslexia and am more creative than average. Despite the drawbacks—and even if society often thinks of dyslexia as a disability and if in Quill my creativity would be a weakness, making me an Unwanted—I am very glad I have dyslexia.

The books have a lot of interesting twists and cliff-hangers, but they aren’t always serious; they are packed full of humor and fantasy, too. I am also in love with the beautiful and disturbing worlds the author introduces to both the reader and the characters. I definitely recommend the series; it is a good escape from reality. And if you like it, there is another series, *Unwanteds Quest*, which takes place ten years later and lasts for seven more books.

—Hilina Taylor-Lenz, grade 8



(continued from p. 4)

from tuberculosis. There he comes to know and respect Matsu, the gardener who has taken care of the home as long as Stephen can remember.

Early on, Stephen meets a young girl, Keiko, with whom he falls deeply in love—but her brother is fighting in the Japanese Imperial Army, and in time, they realize that theirs is a love that cannot be. Then, as the story unfolds, we meet Sachi, a childhood friend of Matsu, who now lives in a leper village up the mountain from Tarumi. As we learn more about Matsu and Sachi, we

realize how deeply devoted they are to each other, and we experience their growing love for Stephen. And although the Japanese Imperial army is marching toward Hong Kong—where Stephen’s mother and siblings live—his worry for his family and country doesn’t prevent the young man from loving the people who have helped him heal and mature during his time in Japan.

I enjoyed every moment spent with these unforgettable characters. The love they share with one another moved me in ways both indescribable and remarkable.

—Fran Post

What We Need to Know

◆ *Entangled Life*

Merlin Sheldrake (2020)

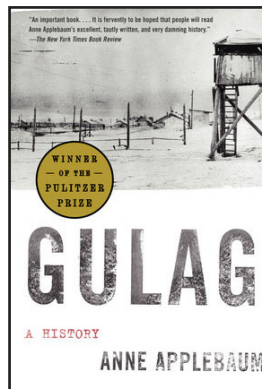
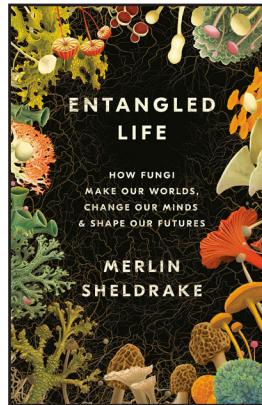
Face to the earth, a young scientist follows his hands and nose along the branching root of a rainforest tree—as rootlets become filaments, filaments become slime, and slime becomes a fungal network vanishing into the soil, reaching for roots of other trees. Mesmerized, I followed the aptly named Merlin deep into the magic of this entangled life, which, like its namesake book, is laced with astounding facts and fully capable of altering a reader's mind.

In *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds, and Shape Our Futures*, Sheldrake invites us to see life from a fungal viewpoint. The kingdom of fungi ranges from the microscopic yeasts that give us bread and beer to a massive, ancient life-form in Oregon that weighs hundreds of tons, spans ten square kilometers, and is 2,000–8,000 years old. For tens of millions of years, fungi served as plants' life-enabling root systems before plants evolved their own. We have coal to burn and argue over because some forests lived, died, and were buried before fungi had developed the ability to rot them. To this day, underground fungal networks, called mycelium, stitch trees together into the “wood wide webs” we call forests. Perhaps you can imagine an ancient “mother tree” using this fungal network to nourish seedlings of the same species. But have you ever turned the forest web upside down and imagined fungi juggling the relationships among trees to best meet their own fungal needs?

This is a fascinating but perhaps not universally pleasurable read. Scientists might find Sheldrake's prose too rhapsodic; nonscientists might wish for fewer details about research and researchers. After early chapters illuminating fungal relationships and lifestyles and why intelligence may not be confined to beings with brains, the book continues in chapters on specific topics, including fungi's potential utility for building furniture and cleaning up humans' planetary messes. The notes and bibliography alone constitute an advanced course in mycology.

After a lifetime with one foot in science and another in language, I loved this book. And I came to understand that most of us would need magic mushrooms to experience anything like the interconnectedness of these awe-inspiring life-forms that sustain, even rule, Earthly life.

—Ellen W. Chu



◆ *Gulag*

Anne Applebaum (2003)

Do you long for a book to brighten your spirits and relieve the winter doldrums? If so, this is not the book for you. That doesn't mean it isn't a good read though. Anne Applebaum's Pulitzer Prize–winning *Gulag: A History* is a thoroughly researched, fully documented, and very readable account of the Gulag system and how it operated almost as a separate civilization within the Soviet Union.

More than 18 million people passed through the Gulag camps between 1918 and 1953. An estimated 4.5 million died there, though the true number will never be known. There were additional deaths outside the camps, as prisoners' children and other dependents sometimes died of starvation.

While some of those who were incarcerated had committed crimes, most were incarcerated for associations with the wrong political party, race, ethnicity, or religion. In some cases when labor was needed, people were picked up off the street, and those who did not have their party cards were singled out for arrest. What Applebaum makes clear is that the system was used as a tool to isolate and persecute people “not for what they had done, but for who they were.” With this assertion, she draws a parallel between the Gulag system and Nazi concentration camps.

It was when Applebaum was visiting Prague and observing American tourists buying Soviet military paraphernalia that she became aware that people did not understand the significance of the Gulag. She reasoned that those people would never wear a swastika but happily wore hats and pins with the hammer and sickle. She writes, “The message could not have been clearer: while the symbol of one mass murder fills us with horror, the symbol of another mass murder makes us laugh.”

Gulag may not be a joyful read, but it is an important one; it's a truth we need to know.

—Christine Heyck



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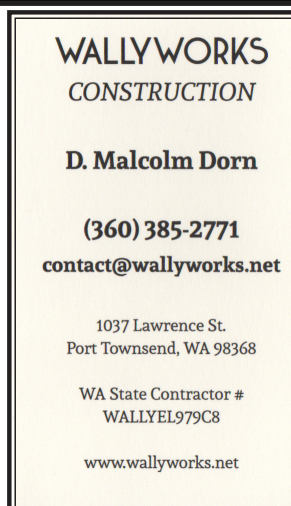
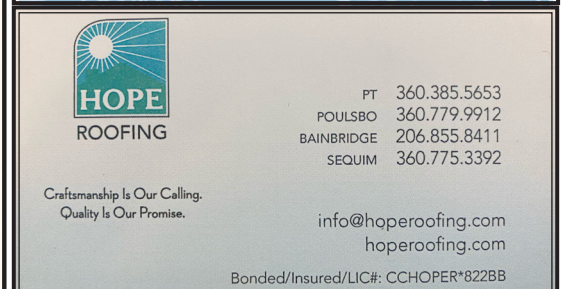
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Who We Are

THE PORT TOWNSEND PUBLIC LIBRARY was founded in 1898 by volunteers and, thanks to continuing community support, has remained an active Carnegie Library since its present doors opened in 1913.

The Friends of the Port Townsend Library, established in 1978, supports programs, services, and materials beyond what the city's library budget covers. Every year we fund reading programs, events, and activities for all ages; we also hold book sales and publish three newsletters. Newsletters are available in the library, around town, and at friendsofptlibrary.org.

Our funding comes primarily from supporters, donations, and book sales. We invite anyone to become a Friend and attend our board meetings, which take place on the second Wednesday of each month, 3:30 PM, on Zoom or at the Library Learning Center (corner of Lawrence and Harrison). Please contact us by e-mail at friendsofptlibrary@gmail.com for updates.

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