



off the shelf

writers for a change, readers with a difference

For Poetry Lovers

Copper Woman And Other Poems - *Afua Cooper*

Natural Heritage Books (October 2006) ISBN: 1897045093

Divided into five parts, family binds Copper Woman together, even as it delves into individual topics such as the mindlessness of war, and the futility of cementing over a sordid past.

Woman Who Has Sprouted Wings: Poems by Contemporary Latin American

Women Poets - *Mary Crow (Ed)*

Latin American Literary Review Press; 2nd edition (September 1988) ISBN: 0935480358

This is a volume of outstanding poets who are well-known both within their own countries and abroad. Crow has translated them faithfully to reflect the personal, intellectual and emotional circumstances that inspired these works.

Poems for a New World - *Connie Fife*

2001 ISBN 0-921870-90-6

This collection of poems extends an invitation to the mind and heart to come together as equal partners at the banquet table of mother Earth. Fife asks us to reflect on our contemporary directions and what we are doing to our fellow human beings and the environment. She takes us into the midst of social and domestic injustice and allows us to feel the people's anger and sorrow.

My Mother's Last Dance (Collected Poems) - *Honor Ford-Smith*

Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1997

My Mother's Last Dance is set in Jamaica and Canada and examines the bonds and stresses in the lives of a great-grandmother, a grandmother, a mother and a daughter over the span of 100 years.

For More Information

AWID - www.awid.org

Toronto Women's Bookstore - www.womensbookstore.com

Women, Ink - <http://www.womenink.org>

Canadian Writers in Person Lecture Series - <http://www.yorku.ca/akevents/Master/lectures-canadianwriters.html>

Toronto Public Library - <http://bookbuzz.torontopubliclibrary.ca/index.html>

This initiative was undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The books presented were recommended by members and friends of the Ontario Council for International Cooperation and represent a range of views and perspectives. Publishers' summaries were edited to provide readers a synopsis of each book.

Cover Design: Fisnik Basha

Celebrating Spoken & Written Word

In celebration of International Development Week 2007, members of the Ontario Council for International Cooperation worked collaboratively to develop and offer both a creative program and resources to help the Canadian public better understand global development issues – especially as they relate to the achievement of gender equality.

The highlight of our program is a provincial reading and speaking tour of Zimbabwean author, Audrey Chihota-Charamba. During her tour, Chihota-Charamba will be reading from *A Tragedy of Lives*, the first book presented in this Kit. As part of this program, we wanted to offer this guide as a resource to initiating your own book club. It includes general tips to help you get started, profiles of four books with guiding discussion questions, and additional lists of recommended books, poetry, websites and organizations with information on women's issues in development. Please share it widely!

Getting Started

Participating in a book club can be an exciting way to way to engage with new ideas, build community and foster lasting relationships. It can also be a space to express and explore others' understandings and viewpoints and to challenge assumptions about the world. Many public libraries organize book clubs and online reading groups sometimes develop out of chat rooms or email groups. If you are not aware of an existing group and would rather meet face to face with people you already know, you can always start your own.

Starting a book club is as simple as finding a few friends that are enthusiastic about the idea, choosing a book you think all will enjoy, and setting a date to discuss it. Over time you can invite other friends, colleagues or networks to join you, until your group reaches its optimum size – generally, 8 to 12 people. Keeping your group open to women and men of diverse ages, experiences and backgrounds will obviously add to the richness of the experience. As you grow, you may want to agree on a process for inviting or accepting new members.

Open discussion around expectations in the early days of your book club may help you develop and encourage participation for the long-term. Sharing ideas and responsibilities for organizing gatherings, selecting books, facilitating discussions or creative means of sharing reflection, and even inviting local or visiting authors to participate are just a few aspects to consider. One person may be willing to keep track of what you've read and plan to read, and to send out reminders of meeting dates and venues. Another may contact a local bookstore to order enough copies of books you plan to read. Diana Loevy's *Book Club Companion* can give you more ideas.

About this Book Club Kit

This book club kit highlights works that explore and celebrate the diverse roles women play as they work to change the world for better. It offers a glimpse into the kinds of literary expression available as more women realize that in order for change to be lasting, it must be documented and shared with others. Writers are witnesses, recorders, critics and prophets, and ultimately, the forces of change in any community. We hope you will enjoy this selection.

International Development Week 2007 Special Profile

A Tragedy of Lives

Chiedza Musengezi and Irene Staunton (Eds)
Weaver Press, Zimbabwe 2003, ISBN 0 77922 017 0

A collection of first-hand stories drawn from interviews with former female prisoners, each is highly personal and particular. This collection reveals how women in prison are often driven by circumstances into situations where the emotional or material poverty of their lives makes breaking the law the only option. They illustrate how once in prison, women are subjected to punitive or demeaning action and are often regarded as pariahs by their families, friends and society at large.

The stories also shed light on the impact of imprisonment on the children of prisoners. They pose serious questions, such as how much responsibility should be borne by the culprits themselves, and how much their failures are an indictment against the whole society? The stories are supplemented by scholarly essays by law specialists, as well as gender and prison reform activists. They raise important issues surrounding women, criminal law and punishment regimes.

Recommended Readings with Guiding Questions to Begin

The Country Under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War

Gioconda Belli
Anchor, 2003, ISBN: 9781400032167

This is no ordinary memoir. Until her early twenties, Gioconda Belli inhabited an upper-class cocoon. Sheltered from the poverty in Managua in a world of country clubs and debutante balls, Belli was educated abroad, married, and become a mother early in her life. In 1970, everything changed. Her growing dissatisfaction with domestic life, and a blossoming awareness of the social inequities in Nicaragua led her to join the Sandinistas – then a burgeoning but still hidden organization. Over the next twenty years she became involved at the highest, and often the most dangerous levels. This book is about one woman entangled among many lives and deaths expended in the unkillable hope for human freedom and love. But it is also about American history, both North and South.

Questions for discussion

1. How did Gioconda Belli transform from an upper class wife and mother to “Comandante Belli”?
2. Men in the movement often preferred to relate to Comandante Belli as a woman, and not as a compañera. What role did machismo play in the revolution?
3. Gioconda writes: “I have been two women and I have lived two lives.” Tradition, marriage and family govern one of her lives; the other, a yearning for and achieving the privileges men enjoy:

The Autobiography of My Mother - Jamaica Kincaid

Plume, 1997, ISBN: 97804522746621997

This haunting tale of a child growing up in Dominica explores the power of colonialism and oppression. The narrator takes us through her life, marred from the beginning by the death of her mother during childbirth. Alone at the end of her life, she tells us the story of her loss and longing, making her another one of the sorrowful and hard-hearted Caribbean women who populate Kincaid's literary universe. Kincaid has focused her work on the lives of mothers and daughters, sexuality, power and the end result of colonialism on small islands, revealing a history of suffering and humiliation and the demise of a civilization

The Trap - Ana Maria Matute

Ana Maria Matute explores the ties that bind family, society and culture. Through her compelling use of a powerful first-person narrative, she highlights the experience of women during the tumultuous years of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Matute delicately weaves a feminist subtext into the larger context of Spain's difficulties in dealing with gender, class and cultural distinctions and examines the lasting effects of social upheaval, discrimination and lives trapped in conflict.

“Amar Meyebela”: My Bengali Girlhood - Taslima Nasrin

1998, ISBN: 1586420518

This autobiographical book tells Nasrin's life story from birth to adolescence and was banned in Bangladesh as the government believed “its contents might hurt the existing social system and religious sentiments of the people.” “Girls suffer, especially in Muslim countries,” she says. “Women are not treated as human beings. They are taught for centuries that they are slaves of men.” It was necessary for her to create new language to denote this passage, as none existed in her native tongue. The Bengali term for childhood is “chelebela”, meaning boy-time. Nasrin created the term “meyebela”, meaning girl-time, to provide a space for the lives and experiences of girl-children in Bengali society.

Persepolis (2003) and Persepolis 2 (2004) - Marjane Satrapi

2003 ISBN: 0375422307 Knopf Publishing Group

Satrapi's bestselling graphic novel Persepolis depicts her childhood in Tehran during the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the Iran-Iraq War. Persepolis 2 follows her to school in Vienna, back to Iran, and then again to Europe - perhaps for good. Her parents are upper-middle-class Marxists whose extensive family connections and political involvement expose her to the full tumult of the times.

Champions for Peace: Women Winners of the Nobel Peace Prize - Judith Stiehm

Noted feminist writer, Barbara Ehrenreich, wrote, “Champions for Peace is a book that was waiting to be written, and Judith Stiehm has handled the task with insight and verve.” Pamela Aall, from the United States Institute of Peace noted that “[she] has written a wonderfully readable book about twelve gifted activist women who have been forces for change in the world.”

of her sister during the violence of Partition. Her neighbour Leela sees herself as a “half-and-half” – a newcomer struggling to find her way in the colourful desi community of Vancouver. Nimmo is orphaned by the devastation that engulfed India after Partition, and tries to rebuild her life in Delhi. For all three, the conflicts of the past re-emerge with shattering results.

Writing Women in Modern China (Two Volumes) - Amy D. Dooling and Kristina M. Torgeson (Eds)

Columbia University Press, 1998 and 2005 ISBN: 0-231-10701-3 and 0-231-13217-4

This major anthology highlights the contributions of women to modern literary culture, with respect to the heated gender debates of early twentieth-century China. With examples of fiction, drama, autobiography, essays and poetry by eighteen writers, many neglected by mainstream literary history, this collection shows the creative diversity in modern women's writing. The editors' introduction charts key developments in the study of gender, literature and women's writing in modern China, and provides an overview of the relevant events of this century's first three decades.

The Colour of Resistance: A Contemporary Collection of Writing by Aboriginal Women - Connie Fife

Sister Vision Press, Toronto, 1998 ISBN: 0920813623

This anthology, which features a wide variety of literature in the form of poetry, fiction and non-fiction, discloses the anger and pain of many Aboriginal women. It demonstrates a brilliant blending of traditional oral storytelling and contemporary literary tools, combined and used as a unique form of expression by the featured Aboriginal women. Contributors use this new medium as a way of expressing themselves and asserting their reflections on themes and issues central to their lives as Aboriginal women.

A Daughter's Legacy - Pamphilia Hlapa

University of Kwa Zulu Natal Press ISBN 1869140850

“...what I know and what I have seen, I will tell. Things did happen to me and to other girls right in front of me. By silencing me, you let it happen to me and others, but I cannot let it happen to the daughters of the world, the daughters I might have... I have found the strength to want to leave a different legacy for my children, both girls and boys.” A Daughter's Legacy is the story of Kedibone's journey from childhood to parenthood, from the dusty streets of her home village, to the modern worlds of university and working life. Determination and resilience battle with fear and insecurity in Kedibone's searing engagement with relationships and personal growth.

Sister Girl - Jackie Huggin

Published as part of the University of Queensland Press Black Australian Writers Series, this work is a long-awaited collection of Aboriginal activist Jackie Huggins' writings over 10 years. Sister Girl is classified in the genre of history and essays, but because of Huggins' real life experiences, roles and responsibilities as an Indigenous woman of profile and power in Australia, it is also a cultural studies work giving a very real insight into the psyche of a contemporary Murri woman and the society from which she comes.

“...independence, self-reliance, a public life, mobility, lovers.” Can the two lives co-exist simultaneously? Discuss.

Iran Awakening: A Memoir of Revolution and Hope

Shirin Ebadi

[Random House](#), 2006, ISBN 1400064708

In her memoir Shirin Ebadi recounts her public career and reveals her private self. She talks about her faith, her experiences and her desire to lead a traditional life – even while serving as a rebellious voice in a land where such voices are muted and even silenced by brute force. She describes her girlhood in a modest Tehran household, her education, and her early professional success in the mid 1970's as Iran's most accomplished female jurist. She speaks eloquently about the ideals of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and of her deep disillusionment with the direction Iran has taken since.

Questions for discussion

1. Knowing what we know now about the Iranian revolution, it may be easy to overlook the optimism that young Iranians felt at the time. What was your reaction to Shirin Ebadi's initial support for the revolutionary movement?
2. In Chapter 5, Ebadi describes her last meeting with an old friend. During the conversation she announces that she is retiring, while her friend is choosing to work from within the system. Ebadi writes: “I told her that even if she was one day promoted to some exalted position, it would be an empty victory, for seniority in an unpopular system was more damning than being a sidelined nobody.” What do you think?
3. In Chapter 10, just after having been released from prison for the Ezzat case, Shirin Ebadi asks “Why do Iranian young people simply not rise up? If their discontent is so deep, their alienation so irreversible, if they are 70 per cent of Iranian society, what explains their complacency?” What are your thoughts on her statement that the “high personal price of protest” was too high?
4. In the epilogue Ebadi writes: “What good am I abroad? The nature of my work, the role that I play in Iran, could it be conducted from across continents? Of course not. And so I remind myself that the greatest of all is my own fear; that is our fear, the fear of the Iranians who want a different future that makes our opponents powerful.” What do you think of her decision to remain in Iran, despite the sacrifices it has required?
5. Do you think Iran Awakening would have been more effective in condemning the corruption of the current government had more details of the cases Ebadi represented been given?
6. The Islamic Republic of Iran's interpretation of religious laws to govern Iran ultimately end up limiting Shirin Ebadi's rights and her role in the society. Nonetheless, she remains a woman of faith and has kept her Islamic beliefs. She also advocates an “interpretation of Islam that is in harmony with equality and democracy.” In your opinion, how does she reconcile her own Islamic faith and the oppressiveness of Islamic theocracy in Iran?

Unbowed: A Memoir

Wangari Maathai

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006 ISBN-10: 0307263487

In *Unbowed*, Wangari Maathai offers an inspiring message of hope and prosperity through self-sufficiency. We see her studying with Catholic missionaries, earning a bachelor's and a master's degree, and becoming the first woman both to earn a Ph.D. in East and Central Africa, and to head a university department in Kenya. Maathai understands how the good earth sustains life, both as a biologist, and as a Kikuyu woman who grew up nourishing food in the rich soil of Kenya's central highlands. In this engrossing memoir she describes the paradise she knew as a child in the 1940's, when Kenya was a "lush, green, fertile" land of plenty, and the deforested nightmare it then became. Discriminated against as a female university professor, Maathai fought hard for women's rights. And it was women she turned to when she undertook her mission to restore Kenya's decimated forests, launching the Green Belt Movement and providing women with work planting trees. Maathai's ingenious activism led to arrests, beatings, and death threats, and yet she and her tree-planting followers remained unbowed. We witness her numerous run-ins with the brutal Moi government, and she makes clear the political and personal reasons that compelled her to establish the Green Belt Movement.

Questions for discussion

1. What inspired Wangari Maathai to join the environmental movement? With the growing importance of environmental issues at the local level, have you been able to engage with local initiatives?
2. Who were Maathai's significant influences? How do these parallel potential influences for environmental change and protection in Canada?
3. Which events do you think had the most lasting impacts on Maathai's life?

Shooting Water: A Mother-Daughter Journey and the Making of a Film

Devyani Saltzman

Key Porter, 2005, ISBN: 1552637123

At age 19, Devyani Saltzman was invited to join the production crew of *Water*, set to shoot in India. Her mother, film director Deepa Mehta, desperately wanted to tell the story of an invisible 'caste' in Indian culture, the Hindu widows. In Hindu tradition they must atone for their husband's death by living as "ascetics, wearing only white, the colour of mourning, shave their heads to renounce vanity, and live in ashrams, or spiritual refuges." *Shooting Water* deftly chronicles the dual challenges of shooting a controversial movie and mending a strained relationship between a daughter and her mother.

Questions for discussion

1. Discuss the parallel struggles of making the film *Water*, and the relationship between Saltzman and her mother. Can you relate to difficult parent/child dynamics in your own life?
2. Throughout the memoir Saltzman discusses her feelings of displacement, and of being caught between two cultures. Have you experienced anything similar in your own life? What

are the pros and cons of growing up in a multi-cultural household?

3. The film *Water* reveals the experience of three Hindu widows in 1938 India – women who after the deaths of their husbands must live a life of "ascetic" mourning. There are many instances of women being similarly "disinherited" in other cultures. What impact can disinheritance have for women in society? Does the film give an accurate picture of women in India?
4. Do you think that the treatment of widows in *Water* is just one part of grieving rites, or that it reflects the position of women in society and their status as mere property?

More Recommended Books from Around the World

Purple Hibiscus - *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*

The story, recounted by a 14-year-old Nigerian girl, captures the love and conflict of a family whose patriarch is staunchly Catholic. Against the backdrop of a corrupt, crumbling society, the implacable force of religious fundamentalism plays out not against secular humanism, but against the animist practices of tribal elders.

Strong Women Stories: Native Vision and Community Survival - *Kim Anderson & Bonita Lawrence (Eds)*

ISBN 1-894549-21-X

This collection of seventeen essays presents original perspectives from writers, scholars and activists on issues that concern Aboriginal women and their communities in both rural and urban settings in Canada. Their contributions explore the critical issues facing Native women as they rebuild and revive their communities. Through topics such as the role of tradition, reclaiming identities and protecting Native children and the environment, they identify the restraints that shape their actions and the inspirations that feed their visions.

The Caged Virgin - *Ayaan Hirsi Ali*

Free Press, 2006 ISBN: 0743288335

Ali was the screenwriter on Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh's film *Submission*, which questions the individual's relationship with God through the eyes of five Muslim women. This documentary caused an outcry in the Dutch Muslim community – a price that Van Gogh paid with his own life. In 2004, he was stabbed and shot to death by an unidentified gunman in an Amsterdam park. Ali – a Somali Dutch woman who has renounced her Muslim faith since – criticizes Western nations for deliberately overlooking aspects of Muslim culture that oppress women. She details abuses suffered by female Muslims, from genital mutilation to arranged marriages of young girls, to domestic violence. Ali, a member of the Dutch Parliament until 2006, challenges Western culture and Islam to honestly confront issues of religion and individual freedom in this compelling look at Islam and gender politics.

Can You Hear the Nightbird Call? - *Anita Rau Badami*

Canada: Knopf, September 2006

This book tells the stories of three women linked in love and tragedy, over a span of fifty years. Bibi-ji steals the heart of her sister's fiancé and returns with him to Vancouver, where they become pillars of the Sikh community, and is haunted by the subsequent disappearance

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