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THE ONLY THING BETTER THAN READING A GOOD BOOK IS TALKING ABOUT A GOOD BOOK!

Since I retired, I've joined two book clubs. Consequently, I've been cleaning out my bookshelves to make room for new books. This has caused me to reflect on my "reading life" the past couple of years and how it has changed quite dramatically. Which surprised me.

So maybe like me, you're in the mood to make some changes in your reading habits. And I happen to have some suggestions for you.

DISCLAIMER: I'm going to mention my book clubs several times, but only because I am fairly new to book clubs and I'm having a fun time with them. But whether or not you are in a book club doesn't matter. We are all members of the **BOOK COMMUNITY**. It might be:

- Talking books with girlfriends at lunch....
- Asking a stranger in the doctors waiting room what they are reading....
- Discovering a great used book store....
- Texting your BIL that the latest Anne Hillerman book just dropped....
- Getting a text from a friend in Arizona asking for a recommendation for her book club....
- And of course there are a variety of online groups and celebrity book clubs to follow....

So here are my three suggestions on how you can enhance your enjoyment of reading.

*****NOTE: Please feel free to tweak this script to more closely reflect your reading life and the books you've enjoyed.**

#1- Be intentional in your reading choices.

You need diversity in your financial portfolio. The same applies to your reading portfolio.

I really like how one of my book clubs handles this - we meet monthly and we balance our reading list so every year we include a classic, a non-fiction, a mystery, and a childrens and/or young adult book. This past year we even tried a fantasy book! (*The Emperor's Soul* by Brandon Sanderson.)

We also tend to be a little behind on reading best sellers - most of our group uses the library. I like to buy my own copy, but I prefer to buy cheaper used books. So we usually wait until after the paperback comes out and the library waiting list isn't as long....

I have really enjoyed the classics we've read. Everyone has one they've always meant to read!

- *My Antonia* by Willa Cather
- *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery
- *The Scarlet Pimpernel* by Baroness Orczy
- *Animal Farm* by George Orwell
- *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson
- *Around the World in 80 Days* by Jules Verne

***DISCUSSION QUESTION: What are some of your favorite Classics? What have you read or re-read recently? What have you always meant to read?

My DAR book club has really challenged me. We meet bi-monthly and I think I've read more non-fiction in the past few years than I have read in my entire life! NOT my favorite genre....

But a friend told me to look for non-fiction with a strong narrative. That has been a game-changer for me.

- *The Boys in the Boat* by Daniel James Brown
- *Where the Wind Leads* by Vinh Chung
- *Killers of the Flower Moon* by David Gann
- *The Wright Brothers* by David McCullough
- *The Small and the Mighty* by Sharon McMahon
- *Dinners with Ruth* by Nina Totenberg

***DISCUSSION QUESTION: What are some of your favorite non-fiction books?

#2- Consider the themes of the books you are reading.

Flashback to your high school English classes.... The theme of a book is the central idea or moral lesson or message that the author wants to convey. For example, I previously mentioned the book *My Antonia* by Willa Cather. This book explores the theme of **the lives of immigrants in the United States** frontier in the second half of the nineteenth century; it addresses the hardships of farming the land, the homesickness and loss from leaving their country, and the prejudices they encounter. It also celebrates their resilience and the contributions they make to the community. *Where the Wind Leads* by Vinh Chung explores this same theme, but in post-Vietnam War United States. I am looking forward to reading several other books on my TBR list with the theme of the lives of immigrants in the United States.

Some of the repeating themes in the books I've been reading the past couple of years include:

- **The marginalization of women in American society....**
The Only Women in the Room by Marie Benedict (based on Hedy Lamar's story)
Switchboard Soldiers by Jennifer Chiaverini (WW1 historical fiction)
The All-Girl Filling Station's Last Reunion by Fannie Flagg (WW2 historical fiction)
The Women by Kristin Hannah (Vietnam War historical fiction)
- **Is murder ever justified?**
The Thursday Murder Club by Richard Osman
Where the Crawdads Sing by Delia Owens
The Maid by Nita Prose
- **Coming of age....**
My Antonia by Willa Cather
The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho
A Christmas Memory by Richard Paul Evans
Anne of Green Gables by Lucy Maud Montgomery
Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson

*****DISCUSSION QUESTION:** *What are some of the recurring themes of the books you have been reading? Do you see any patterns?*

#3- Take advantage of author talks: in-person and online

Hearing a favorite author speak is a real treat. And nowadays technology allows us much greater access through a variety of venues. Here's who I've followed recently:

- Public Libraries - Hudson Library & Historical Society interview (July, 2022) with Jennifer Chiaverini - author of *Switchboard Soldiers*.
 And on February 18, 2025, author Marie Benedict visited the Gwinnett Public Library Duluth Branch to talk about her new book *The Queens of Crime* (2025)
- Documentaries - *Boys in the Boat* by Daniel James Brown - DAR interview with Joe Rankin's daughter.
 And PBS television - *The Boys of '36*.
- Independent Book Stores - Liberty Book Store in Lawrenceville - Charles Martin - author of *Long Way Gone*, and more recently *The Keeper* (2025).
- TED Talks - Tara Westover - author of *Educated*
- Decatur, GA Book Festival

And don't ignore the preface, author's notes, acknowledgments, bibliography, and discussion questions, etc....

This is especially important when reading historical fiction: what were their source documents, how did they change the original story, WHY did they make changes, etc. I previously mentioned the book *Switchboard Soldiers* by Jennifer Chiaverini; one of her main sources was the real-life story of Grace Banker in the non-fiction book *The Hello Girls* by Elizabeth Cobbs

THANK YOU ALL FOR BEING PART OF MY **BOOK COMMUNITY**....

SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES

1. Pass around a couple of notebooks so you can compile a Chapter "Good Reads" List. I organized ours by genre and included the names of the sisters who made the recommendation.
2. Have a book swap at one of your meetings.
3. Every summer our Chapter donates childrens books to the Southeast Gwinnett Co-Op. They have a space where the children can wait and read while their parents conduct their business, and then when it's time to leave the children take a book home with them.
4. Have a "Book Tasting" - everyone brings a favorite book and gives a quick review.