

Museum on Main Street

READING AND DISCUSSION

Between Fences

Brooks, David. *On Paradise Drive: How We Live Now (And Always Have) in the Future Tense*. Simon and Schuster, 2004.

In his new book, Brooks takes a look at the contemporary culture of consumerism and the uniform American landscape of strip malls, chain restaurants, McMansions, and gas-guzzling SUVs that represent the superficiality of modern suburbia. In this context he asks, “What does it mean to be American?” Brooks is also author of the bestseller *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (Simon and Schuster, 2001), a hilarious social critique of the new American bohemian–bourgeois upper class.

Brown, Dee. *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (Thirtieth Anniversary Edition). Henry Holt and Company, 2001.

This best-selling history of Western settlement from the Native American point of view documents the loss of land to European settlers, forced migration, and elimination of the Native American population in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Byrd, Bobby and Susanna Mississippi Byrd. *The Late Great Mexican-American Border: Reports from a Disappearing Line*. Cinco Puntos Press, 1996.

From the journal *El Planeta Platica*, this wonderful collection of essays by local writers is about the border and border culture. *The Late Great Mexican-American Border* is an enjoyable book written in non-academic prose, rich in information and personal insight.

Cather, Willa. *O Pioneers!* Penguin Classics, 1994.

An American classic and arguably Cather’s masterpiece, this novel set on the Nebraska prairie captures the mythic grandeur of the changing frontier and the nineteenth century immigrant experience. While their neighbors gradually move to more hospitable territory, Alexandra and her family stay and continue to work the land after the death of their father.

De Cristoforo, Violet Kazue, Editor. *May Sky / There Is Always Tomorrow: An Anthology of Japanese American Concentration Camp Kaiko Haiku*. Sun and Moon Press, 1997.

During World War II, thousands of innocent Japanese Americans were forced to leave their homes and live in internment camps. Poets among them who were active in haiku societies continued to write during their confinement. The editor of this collection, a former internee, places the poems in their historical, artistic, and social context.

Ellis, Erika. *Good Fences*. Random House, 1998.

Set in the decade of the 1970s, *Good Fences* is the story of the Spaders, an ambitious, upwardly-mobile, yet dysfunctional black family who discover that the white picket fence dream of American success is only another setting for struggle and survival.

Frost, Robert. Edited by Edward Connery Lathem. *The Poetry of Robert Frost*. Owl Books, 2002.

A poet laureate of the United States, Frost has long been established as one of America's greatest poets. His poem "Mending Wall" remains a favorite with academics and readers of all ages. Perfect for the casual reader as well as the serious student of literature, this book collects three volumes of Frost's poems. Interviews, essays, and other writings by Frost are included to help readers better understand the artist and his work

Jerome, John. *Stone Work: Reflections on Serious Play and Other Aspects of Country Life*. University Press of New England, 1996.

John Jerome tells the story of the year he spent building a stone wall on his property in the Massachusetts Berkshires. The wall he started for aesthetic purposes turns into a back-breaking journey through the seasons, a discourse on the difference between work and craft, and an opportunity to reflect on masculinity and the complexities of aging.

Kismaric, Carole. *Growing Up With Dick and Jane: Learning and Living the American Dream*. Harper Collins, 1996.

Dick and Jane taught American children how to read for over forty years and remain two of the best-known and loved icons for life behind the white picket fences of the suburban, post-World War II American Dream. Kismaric's amusing and beautifully illustrated analysis of American popular culture combines essays, commentary, original illustrations from the Dick and Jane books, and period photographs. In the back flap, a bonus reproduction paperback copy of Dick and Jane stories in their original format is included.

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Little, Brown and Company, 1988.

This Pulitzer Prize winning novel is told from the point of view of eight-year-old Scout Finch whose father, attorney Atticus Finch, defends a black man wrongfully accused of raping a white woman. As the trial progresses, Scout struggles to understand the absurdity of adult behavior guided by prejudice. Boundaries between the races in the era of Jim Crow as well as public and private spaces and points of view are examined. In the novel's most substantial subplot, Scout, her brother Jem, and their friend Dill make a game of trying to get a glimpse of a local recluse named Boo Radley. They dare each other to cross the fence into his yard and repeatedly trespass on his property. When Boo finally does come out, he is not the boogey man the children expected. Since its original publication in 1960, *To Kill a Mockingbird* has been a perennial favorite with adults as well as younger readers.

McCarthy, Cormac. *All the Pretty Horses* (Vol. I of *The Border Trilogy*). Vintage, 1993.

A bestseller and winner of the National Book Award in 1992, this novel tells the story of a dispossessed sixteen-year-old boy who crosses the Texas border into Mexico on horseback with two companions, finds employment as a ranch hand, and experiences an ill-fated romance with the wealthy ranch owner's daughter. The other two volumes of *The Border Trilogy* are *The Crossing* (Vintage, 1995) and *Cities of the Plain* (Vintage, 1999). Both tell stories of young men who cross the border into Mexico, one to protect a wolf that he has captured on the American side and the other for the love of a beautiful

Mexican prostitute he wishes to rescue. As in the first book in the trilogy, the subsequent two novels are tragic journeys of discovery, social displacement, and death.

Morris, Lucy W. *Old Rail Fence Corners: Frontier Tales Told by Minnesota Pioneers*. Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1976.

First published in 1914 by the Daughters of the American Revolution, this book contains the personal stories of 154 early settlers. The collection is noted for the richness of description of everyday life on the Minnesota frontier from the 1840s to the 1860s.

Paine, Luran. *Open Range*. Leisure Books, 2003.

Set on the Western prairie in the early 1880s, *Open Range* is a violent story of murder and revenge during a range war. As the once open expanses of the prairie are being fenced in, a small group of free range cattlemen fall victim to a powerful landowner in a dispute over the right of access to the land.

Rawlings, Marjorie Kinnan. *The Yearling*. Scribner, 2002.

Originally published in 1938, this Pulitzer Prize winning novel is about a boy's coming of age on a farm in the Florida wilderness. The struggle between man and nature is heightened when Jodie Baxter adopts a fawn as a pet. As the young deer grows, it becomes a threat to the family's livelihood since it cannot be kept from eating the crops. No matter how high or how well made the fence, the pet deer cannot be contained or controlled, and Jody is forced to drive the animal away. The book is also noted for the author's use of local dialect and for her naturalist's eye in attention to the details of the central Florida landscape. This American classic is equally appealing to adults and young readers.

Razac, Oliver and Jonathan Kneight. *Barbed Wire: A Political History*. W.W. Norton and Company, 2003.

From its original use for enclosing and claiming the land and controlling its inhabitants to its application in the trenches of World War I and beyond, the author traces the political history of this quintessentially modern American invention.

Rolvaag, Ole Edvart. *Giants in the Earth: A Saga of the Prairie*. Perennial Classics, 1999.

Giants in the Earth tells the story of a group of Norwegian immigrants who journey from their fishing village in Norway through Canada to Spring Creek in the Dakota Territory. The author examines themes of fear and loneliness, myth and religion, amid an unsparing account of the pioneer experience that has won the book consistent praise since its first publication in 1927.

Sandoz, Mari. *Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas (Fiftieth Anniversary Edition)*. University of Nebraska Press, 1992.

Crazy Horse, a leader of the Oglala Sioux, fought tirelessly against the U.S. Government's efforts to confine the Lakotas to reservations. Sandoz's popular book on Crazy Horse reads more like a novel than a biography and has been praised for its style as much as for its historical accuracy.

Smiley, Jane. *A Thousand Acres*. Anchor, 2003.

A best-selling novel, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award, *A Thousand Acres* is a modern retelling of Shakespeare's *King Lear* set on an Iowa farm. When their stubborn, alcoholic father divides his land between three daughters, the struggle that ensues brings out long-hidden secrets and threatens to destroy the family.

Tateishi, John. *And Justice for All: An Oral History of the Japanese American Detention Camps*. University of Washington Press, 1999.

In this collection of oral histories, John Tateishi allows thirty Japanese Americans who lived in American internment camps during World War II to tell their stories in their own words. *And Justice for All* was originally published in 1984. In this edition, Tateishi brings readers up to date on the lives of those whose oral histories the book records.

Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. University of California Press, 2002.

From the Mark Twain Library, this classic nineteenth-century novel is the author's first book about the childhood escapades of Tom Sawyer and his friend Huckleberry Finn. The episode in which Tom tricks other children into whitewashing a fence for him is arguably the most remembered and celebrated event in American literature. In the context of the novel, whitewashing the fence is a complex social and ethical metaphor for what people can accomplish when they work together and the power of the individual to rise above the group. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* has the advantage of being appreciated and enjoyed by adults as well as younger readers.

Urrea, Louis Alberto. *The Devil's Highway: A True Story*. Little, Brown, and Company, 2004.

The newest book by American Book Award-winning writer Louis Alberto Urrea is an unsentimental retelling of an illegal border crossing through the Sonora desert at the Arizona border, a route known as the Devil's Highway. Twenty-six men from Veracruz started the journey in May 2001; only fourteen survived. The book describes the systematic victimization by "coyotes," the men who recruited the Mexicans and took their money, promising them jobs in the U.S., and the immigrants' fear of the enemies, the U.S. Border Patrol and the Mexican Federales.

Wilson, August. *Fences: A Play*. Plume Books, 1995.

This Pulitzer Prize-winning drama by African American playwright August Wilson is set in Pittsburgh in the 1950s. As in Wilson's other plays, a tragic character, Troy Maxson (a name that suggests the Mason-Dixon line), paves the way for other African Americans to have experiences and opportunities that were not available to him.