

Best Reads 2021

Each year, Colby Community Library Director Vicky Calmes compiles a list of favorite books. The list for 2021 (20+20+1) contains 41 Fiction titles for readers to enjoy while reading their way to the number one selection for the year.

41. *Local Woman Missing* by Mary Kubica

Shelby Tebow goes missing. Then, Meredith Dickey and her six-year-old daughter, Delilah, vanish. An elusive search follows. Eleven years later, Delilah returns. Townspeople want to know what happened to her, but no one is prepared for the answer. Some people will stop at nothing to keep domestic secrets buried.

40. *The Wrong Family* by Tarryn Fisher

Before moving in with the Crouch family, Juno thought Winnie and her husband, Nigel, had the perfect marriage—the perfect son—the perfect life. Now that she is living in their beautiful house, she sees the cracks in their lives. Still, she is not one to judge. After her grim diagnosis, the retired therapist simply wants a place to live out the rest of her days in peace. That peace is shattered the day Juno overhears a chilling conversation between Winnie and Nigel.

39. *The Forgotten Daughter* by Joanna Goodman (Home for Unwanted Girls #2)

The year is 1992 and French-Canadian factions renew Quebec's fight to gain independence. Véronique Fortin, daughter of a radical separatist convicted of kidnapping and murdering a prominent politician in 1970, has embraced her father's cause. So it is a surprise when she falls for James Phénix, a journalist of French-Canadian heritage who opposes Quebec separatism. At the same time, James's older sister, Elodie Phénix, one of the Duplessis Orphans, becomes involved with a coalition demanding justice and reparations for their suffering in the 1950s when Quebec's orphanages were converted to mental hospitals.

38. *The Paris Library* by Janet Skeslien Charles

Paris, 1939: Young and ambitious Odile Souchet has it all: her handsome police officer beau and a dream job at the American Library in Paris. When the Nazis march into Paris, Odile stands to lose everything she holds dear, including her beloved library. Together with her fellow librarians, Odile joins the Resistance. But when the war finally ends, instead of freedom, Odile tastes the bitter sting of unspeakable betrayal.

Montana, 1983: Lily is a lonely teenager looking for adventure in small-town Montana. Her interest is piqued by her solitary, elderly neighbor. As Lily uncovers more about her neighbor's mysterious past, she finds that they share a love of language, the same longings, and the same intense jealousy, never suspecting that a dark secret from the past connects them.

37. Pretty Little Wife by Darby Kane

Lila Ridgefield lives in an idyllic college town, but not everything is what it seems. Lila is not what she seems. A student vanished months ago. Now, Lila's husband, Aaron, is also missing. At first these cases are treated as horrible coincidences until it is discovered the student is really the third of three unexplained disappearances over the last few years. The police are desperate to find the connection. With the small town in an uproar, everyone is worried about the whereabouts of their beloved high school teacher. Everyone except Lila, his wife. She is definitely confused about her missing husband but only because she was the last person to see his body, and now it is gone. Shouldn't the dead stay dead?

36. The Shadow Box by Luanne Rice

After artist Claire Beaudry Chase is attacked and left for dead in her home on the Connecticut coast, she doesn't know who she can trust. But her well-connected husband, Griffin—who is running for governor—is her prime suspect. Just before the attack, Claire was preparing for an exhibit of her shadow boxes, one of which clearly accuses Griffin of a violent crime committed twenty-five years ago. If the public were to find out who her husband is, his political career would be over. Claire is certain her husband and his powerful supporters would kill her to stop the truth from getting out.

35. The Return by Nicholas Sparks

Trevor Benson never intended to move back to New Bern, NC. But when a mortar blast outside the hospital where he worked as an orthopedic surgeon sent him home from Afghanistan with devastating injuries, the dilapidated cabin he inherited from his grandfather seemed as good a place to regroup as any. Tending to his grandfather's beloved bee hives while gearing up for a second stint in medical school, Trevor isn't prepared to fall in love with a local woman. Further complicating his stay in New Bern is the presence of a sullen teenage girl, Callie, who lives in the trailer park down the road from his grandfather's cabin. When he discovers she was once befriended by his grandfather, Trevor hopes Callie can shed light on the mysterious circumstances of his grandfather's death.

34. The Last Thing He Told Me by Laura Dave

Before Owen Michaels disappears, he manages to smuggle a note to his beloved wife of one year: *Protect her*. Despite her confusion and fear, Hannah Hall knows exactly to whom the note refers: Owen's sixteen-year-old daughter, Bailey, who wants absolutely nothing to do with her new stepmother. As Hannah's increasingly desperate calls to Owen go unanswered and as a US Marshal and FBI agents arrive at her Sausalito home unannounced, Hannah realizes her husband is not who he said he was.

33. The House Guest by Mark Edwards

When Ruth and Adam are offered the chance to spend the summer house sitting in New York, they cannot say no. Young, in love, and on the brink of professional success, they feel as if luck is finally on their side. So the moment that Eden turns up on the doorstep, drenched from a summer storm, it seems only right to share a bit of that good fortune. Beautiful and charismatic, Eden claims to be a friend of the homeowners, who told her she could stay whenever she was in New York. They know you are not supposed to talk to strangers—let alone invite them into your home—but after all, Eden’s only a stranger until they get to know her. As suspicions creep in that Eden may not be who she claims to be, they begin to wonder if they have made a terrible mistake...

32. The Yellow Crocus by Laila Ibrahim

Lisbeth Wainwright was born to white plantation owners but raised by her enslaved black wet nurse, Mattie. Lisbeth’s childhood unfolds on the line between two very different worlds. Growing up under the tender care of Mattie, Lisbeth adopts her surrogate mother’s deep-seated faith in God, her love of music, and the tradition of hunting for yellow crocuses in the early days of spring. In time, Lisbeth realizes she has freedoms and opportunities that Mattie does not have, though she is confined by the societal expectations placed on women born to privilege. This compelling historical novel is set during one of the most sinister chapters of American history.

31. What She Left Behind by Ellen Marie Wiseman

Ten years ago, Izzy Stone’s mother fatally shot her father while he slept. Devastated by her mother’s apparent insanity, Izzy, now seventeen, refuses to visit her in prison. But her new foster parents, employees at a local museum, have enlisted Izzy’s help in cataloging items at a long-shuttered state asylum. There, amid piles of abandoned belongings, Izzy discovers a stack of unopened letters, a decades old journal, and a window into her own past.

30. Dark Roads by Chevy Stevens

Cold Creek Highway stretches close to five hundred miles through British Columbia’s rugged wilderness to the west coast. Isolated and vast, it has become a prime hunting ground for predators. For decades, young women traveling the road have gone missing. Motorists and hitchhikers, those passing through or living in one of the small towns scattered along the region, have fallen prey time and again. No killer or abductor who has stalked the highway has ever been brought to justice.

29. Fountains of Silence by Ruta Sepetys

It is 1957 in Madrid. Under the fascist dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, Spain is hiding dark secrets—among them, the stealing and selling of babies. Meanwhile, tourists and foreign businessmen flood into Spain under the welcoming promise of sunshine and wine. Among them is eighteen-year-old Daniel Matheson, the son of an oil tycoon, who arrives in Madrid with his parents hoping to connect with the country of his mother's birth through the lens of his camera. Photography introduces him to Ana, whose family's interweaving obstacles reveal the lingering grasp of the Spanish Civil War.

28. Those Who Are Saved by Alexis Landau

As a Russian Jewish émigré to France, Vera's wealth cannot protect her or her four-year-old-daughter, Lucie, once the Nazis occupy the country. After receiving notice that all foreigners must report to an internment camp, Vera has just a few hours to make an impossible choice: Does she subject Lucie to the horrid conditions of the camp, or does she put her into hiding with her beloved and trusted governess, safe until Vera can retrieve her?

27. Hush Little Girl by Lisa Regan (Detective Josie Quinn #11)

When twelve-year-old Holly Mitchell's fragile little body is found on the steps of a mountainside church in the small town of Denton, a doll made from pine cones clasped tightly to her chest, Detective Josie Quinn rushes to attend the scene. She knows this little girl's angelic face, as her mother had offered Josie help when she had needed it most. In searching the girl's house, Josie is devastated to find that Holly's mother is dead too, and her little sister is missing. No one is safe until Josie can figure out the dangerous secret that has escaped this remote family home.

26. Band of Sisters by Lauren Willig

A scholarship girl from Brooklyn, Kate Moran thought she found a place among Smith's Mayflower descendants, only to have her illusions dashed the summer after graduation. When charismatic alumna Betsy Rutherford delivers a rousing speech at the Smith College Club in April of 1917, looking for volunteers to help French civilians decimated by the German war machine, Kate is too busy earning her living to even think of taking up the call. But when her former best friend Emmeline Van Alden reaches out and begs her to take the place of a girl who had to drop out, Kate reluctantly agrees to join the new Smith College Relief Unit.

25. The Whisper Man by Alex North

After the sudden death of his wife, Tom Kennedy believes a fresh start in Featherbank will help him and his young son, Jake, heal. But Featherbank has a dark past. Twenty years ago, a serial killer abducted and murdered five residents. Until Frank Carter was finally caught, he was nicknamed "The Whisper Man," for he would lure his victims out by whispering at their windows at night. Just as Tom and Jake settle into their new home, a young boy vanishes. His disappearance bears an unnerving resemblance to Frank Carter's crimes, reigniting old rumors that he preyed with an accomplice. And then Jake begins acting strangely. He hears a whispering at his window...

24. The Rose Code by Kate Quinn

As England prepares to fight the Nazis in 1940, three very different women answer the call to mysterious country estate Bletchley Park, where the best minds in Britain train to break German military codes. Vivacious debutante Osla is the girl who has everything. Self-made Mab, product of East-End London poverty, works the legendary code-breaking machines as she conceals old wounds and looks for a socially advantageous husband. Both Osla and Mab are quick to see the potential in local village spinster Beth, whose shyness conceals a brilliant facility with puzzles, and soon Beth spreads her wings as one of the Park's few female cryptanalysts. But war, loss, and the impossible pressure of secrecy will tear the three apart.

23. We Begin at the End by Chris Whitaker

Walk has never left the coastal California town where he grew up. He may have become the chief of police, but he is still trying to heal the old wound of having given the testimony that sent his best friend, Vincent King, to prison decades before. Now, thirty years later, Vincent is being released. Duchess is a thirteen-year-old self-proclaimed outlaw. Her mother, Star, grew up with Walk and Vincent. Walk is in overdrive trying to protect them, but Vincent and Star seem bent on sliding deeper into self-destruction.

22. Before She Was Helen by Caroline B. Cooney

When Clemmie goes next door to check on her difficult and unlikeable neighbor Dom, he isn't there. But something else is. Something which is stunning, beautiful, and inexplicable. Clemmie photographs the wondrous object on her cell phone and makes the irrevocable error of forwarding it. As the picture swirls over the internet, Clemmie tries desperately to keep a grip on her own personal network of secrets. Can fifty years of careful hiding under names not her own be ruined by one careless picture? And although what Clemmie finds is a work of art, what the police find is a body. . . in a place where Clemmie was not supposed to be and where she left her fingerprints.

21. The Good Sister by Sally Hepworth

Fern Castle works at the local library. She has dinner with her twin sister Rose three nights a week. She avoids crowds, bright lights, and loud noises as much as possible. Fern has a carefully structured life and disrupting her routine can be dangerous. When Rose discovers that she cannot get pregnant, Fern sees her chance to pay her sister back for everything Rose has done for her. Fern can have a baby for Rose. She just needs to find a father.

20. The Children's Blizzard by Melanie Benjamin

The morning of January 12, 1888, was unusually mild. Following a long cold spell, the weather was warm enough for the homesteaders of the Dakota territory to venture out again and for their children to return to school without their heavy coats—leaving them unprepared when disaster struck. At just the hour when most prairie schools were letting out for the day, a terrifying, fast-moving blizzard struck without warning. School teachers as young as sixteen were suddenly faced with life and death decisions: keep the children inside, to risk freezing to death when fuel ran out, or send them home, praying they would not get lost in the storm?

19. Sooley by John Grisham

In the summer of his seventeenth year, Samuel Sooleymon gets the chance of a lifetime: a trip to the United States with his South Sudanese teammates to play in a showcase basketball tournament. He has never been away from home nor has he ever been on an airplane. During the tournament, Samuel receives devastating news from home: A civil war is raging across South Sudan and rebel troops have ransacked his village. His father is dead, his sister is missing, and his mother and two younger brothers are in a refugee camp. Does Sooley follow his dreams or try to save his family? (Note: Listening to this book in audio format is exceptional.)

18. Girl, 11 by Amy Suiter Clarke

Once a social worker specializing in kids who were the victims of violent crime, Elle Castillo is now the host of a popular true crime podcast that tackles cold cases of missing children in her hometown of the Twin Cities. After two seasons of successfully solving cases, Elle decides to tackle her white whale—The Countdown Killer. Twenty years ago, TCK abruptly stopped after establishing a pattern of taking and ritualistically murdering three girls over seven days, each a year younger than the last. No one has ever known why he stopped with his eleventh victim, a girl of eleven years old, or why he followed the ritual at all.

17. *The Ones We Leave Behind* by Deanna Lynn Sletten

In 1955, Anna Bergman Craine's life changes in an instant when she commits a crime of passion and is sentenced to life in prison. Leaving behind two young children, she is left alone in the world, never to hear from family or friends again. Decades later, she is set free and finds she has a family that has chosen to forget her. What caused this beautiful, intelligent, young woman to commit such a drastic deed that would pull her away from everyone she loved?

16. *The Letter Keeper* by Charles Martin (Murphy Shepherd #2)

Murphy Shepherd has made a career of finding those no one else could—survivors of human trafficking. His life's mission is helping others find freedom. But then the nightmare strikes too close to home when his new wife, her daughter, and two other teenage girls are stolen. Murphy is left questioning all he has thought to be true. With more dead ends than leads, he has no idea how to find those he loves.

15. *Forest of Vanishing Stars* by Kristin Harmel

After being stolen from her wealthy German parents and raised in the unforgiving wilderness of Eastern Europe, Yona finds herself alone in 1941 after her kidnapper dies. Her solitary existence is interrupted, however, when she happens upon a group of Jews fleeing the Nazi terror. Stunned to learn what is happening in the outside world, she vows to teach the group all she can about surviving in the forest. In turn, they teach her some surprising lessons about opening her heart after years of isolation. But when Yona is betrayed and escapes into a German-occupied village, her past and present come together in a shocking collision that could change everything.

14. *The Black Swan of Paris* by Karen Robards

It is 1944 in Paris. Celebrated singer Genevieve Dumont is both a star and a smokescreen. An unwilling darling of the Nazis, her position of privilege allows her to go undetected as an ally to the resistance. When her estranged mother, Lillian de Rocheford, is captured by Nazis, Genevieve knows it won't be long before the Gestapo succeeds in torturing information out of Lillian that will derail the upcoming allied invasion. The resistance movement is tasked with silencing her by any means necessary—including assassination. But Genevieve refuses to let her mother become yet one more victim of the war. Reuniting with her long-lost sister, she must find a way to navigate the perilous cross-currents of Occupied France undetected—and in time to save Lillian's life.

13. *The Four Winds* by Kristin Hannah

Texas, 1934. Millions are out of work and a drought has broken out in the Great Plains. Farmers are fighting to keep their land and their livelihoods as the crops are failing, the water is drying up, and dust threatens to bury them all. One of the darkest periods of the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl era, has arrived with a vengeance. In this uncertain and dangerous time, Elsa Martinelli—like so many of her neighbors—must make an agonizing choice: fight for the land she loves or go west, to California, in search of a better life.

12. *The Winemaker's Wife* by Kristin Harmel

Champagne, 1940. Inès has just married Michel, the owner of storied champagne house Maison Chauveau, when the Germans invade. As the danger mounts, Michel turns his back on his marriage to begin hiding munitions for the *Résistance*. Inès fears they will be exposed, but for Céline, half-Jewish wife of Chauveau's head winemaker, the risk is even greater—rumors abound of Jews being shipped east to an unspeakable fate. When Céline recklessly follows her heart in one desperate bid for happiness, and Inès makes a dangerous mistake with a Nazi collaborator, they risk the lives of those they love.

11. *The Things We Cannot Say* by Kelly Rimmer

In 1942, Europe remains in the relentless grip of war. Since she was nine years old, Alina Dziak knew she would marry her best friend, Tomasz. Now fifteen and engaged, Alina is unconcerned by reports of Nazi soldiers at the Polish border, believing her neighbors that they pose no real threat, and dreams instead of the day Tomasz returns from college in Warsaw so they can be married. But little by little, injustice by brutal injustice, the Nazi occupation takes hold, and Alina's tiny rural village and its families are divided by fear and hate. Then, as the fabric of their lives is slowly picked apart, Tomasz disappears.

10. *The Warsaw Orphan* by Kelly Rimmer

In the spring of 1942, young Elzbieta Rabinek is aware of the swiftly growing discord just beyond the courtyard of her comfortable Warsaw home. She has no fondness for the Germans who patrol her streets and impose their curfews, but she has never given much thought to what goes on behind the walls that contain her Jewish neighbors. She knows all too well about German brutality and that it is the reason she must conceal her true identity. But in befriending Sara, a nurse who shares her apartment floor, Elzbieta makes a discovery that propels her into a dangerous world of deception and heroism. Using Sara's credentials to smuggle children out of the ghetto brings Elzbieta face-to-face with the reality of the war behind its walls, and to the plight of the Gorka family, who must make the impossible decision to give up their newborn daughter or watch her starve.

9. Mercy by David Baldacci (An Atlee Pine Thriller #4)

For her entire life, FBI agent Atlee Pine has been searching for her twin sister, Mercy, who was abducted at the age of six and never seen again. Mercy's disappearance left behind a damaged family that later shattered beyond repair when Atlee's parents inexplicably abandoned her. Now, after a perilous investigation that nearly proved fatal, Atlee has finally discovered not only the reason behind her parents' abandonment and Mercy's kidnapping, but also the most promising breakthrough yet: proof that Mercy survived her abduction and then escaped her captors many years ago.

8. The Three Sisters by Heather Morris (The Tattooist of Auschwitz #3)

When they are girls, Cibi, Magda and Livia make a promise to their father that they will stay together, no matter what. Years later, at just 15 years old, Livia is ordered to Auschwitz by the Nazis. Cibi, only 19 herself, remembers their promise and follows Livia, determined to protect her sister or die with her. In their hometown in Slovakia, 17-year-old Magda hides, desperate to evade the barbaric Nazi forces. But it is not long before she is captured and condemned to Auschwitz. In the horror of the death camp, these three beautiful sisters are reunited. Though traumatized by their experiences, they are together. They make another promise: they will live! (This book is based on a true story.)

7. The World Played Chess by Robert Dugoni

In 1979, Vincent Bianco has just graduated high school. His only desire: collect a little beer money and enjoy his final summer before college. So he lands a job as a laborer on a construction crew. Working alongside two Vietnam vets, one suffering from PTSD, Vincent gets the education of a lifetime. Now forty years later, with his own son leaving for college, the lessons of that summer—Vincent's last taste of innocence and first taste of real life—dramatically unfold.

6. Falling by T.J. Newman

Imagine: You just boarded a flight to New York. There are one hundred and forty-three other passengers onboard. What you do not know is that thirty minutes before the flight, your pilot's family was kidnapped. For his family to live, everyone on your plane must die. The only way the family will survive is if the pilot follows the kidnapper's orders and crashes the plane.

5. *The Girls in the Stilt House* by Kelly Mustian

Ada promised herself she would never go back to the Trace, to her hard life on the swamp and her harsh father. But now, after running away to Baton Rouge and briefly knowing a different kind of life, she finds herself with nowhere to go but back home. She knows there will be a price to pay with her father. Matilda, daughter of a sharecropper, is from the other side of the Trace. She forms a plan to go north, to pack up the secrets she's holding about her life in the South and disclose them for all to see in Ohio. As the two girls are drawn deeper into a dangerous world of bootleggers and moral corruption, they must come to terms with the complexities of their tenuous bond and a hidden past that links them in ways that could cost them their lives.

4. *His & Hers* by Alice Feeney

When a woman is murdered in Blackdown, a British village, newsreader Anna Andrews is reluctant to cover the case. Detective Jack Harper is suspicious of her involvement, until he becomes a suspect in his own murder investigation. He finds there are two sides to every story: yours and mine, ours and theirs, his and hers. He also discovers this means someone is always lying and some secrets are worth killing to keep.

3. *One Two Three* by Laurie Frankel

Everyone knows everyone in the tiny town of Bourne, but the Mitchell triplets are especially beloved. Mirabel is the smartest person anyone knows, and no one doubts it just because she cannot speak. Monday is the town's purveyor of books now that the library is closed. Mab's job is hardest of all: get good grades, get into college, and get out of Bourne. For a few weeks seventeen years ago, Bourne was national news when its water turned green. The girls have come of age watching their mother's endless fight for justice. But just when it seems life might go on the same forever, the first moving truck anyone has seen in years pulls up and unloads new residents and old secrets. Soon, the Mitchell sisters are taking on a system stacked against them and uncovering mysteries buried longer than they have been alive.

2. *Sunflower Sisters* by Martha Hall Kelly (Woolsey-Ferriday #3) Note: *Lilac Girls* #1, *Lost Roses* #2

In *Sunflower Sisters*, Kelly tells the story of her ancestor Georgeanna Woolsey, a Union nurse who joins the war effort during the Civil War. Woolsey's calling leads her to cross paths with Jemma, a young enslaved girl who is sold off and conscripted into the army, and Ann-May Wilson, a southern plantation mistress whose husband enlists. Inspired by true accounts, this historical fiction novel provides a vivid, detailed look at the Civil War experience, from the barbaric and inhumane plantations to a war-torn New York City to the horrors of the battlefield.

And the #1 Selection for 2021...

1. *The Push* by Ashley Audrain

Blythe Connor believes that she will be the nurturing mother to her new baby, Violet, that she herself never had; however, in motherhood's exhausting early days, Blythe becomes convinced that something is wrong with her daughter. Her husband, Fox, says she is imagining things. The more Fox dismisses her fears, the more Blythe begins to question her own sanity, and the more readers will begin to question what Blythe is telling us about her life as well. Then, their son Sam is born; with him, Blythe has the blissful connection she had always imagined with her child. Even Violet *seems* to love her little brother, but when life as they know it is changed in an instant, the devastating fallout forces Blythe to face the truth.