

Books Available for 2024–2025 NEA Big Read Programming

1. [*Bless Me, Ultima*](#) is a coming-of-age novel by **Rudolfo Anaya** set in rural New Mexico in the 1940s. With the help of a spiritual healer, a boy faces a maze of cultural, religious, and moral contradictions in his community of farmers, priests, cowboys, and soldiers.
2. [*Fahrenheit 451*](#) is a visionary novel by **Ray Bradbury** about a society in which firemen burn books and the state suppresses learning. The story follows one fireman’s journey toward disillusionment and ultimately life-threatening efforts to save what he was once told to destroy.
3. [*The Best We Could Do*](#) is a graphic memoir by **Thi Bui** about the lasting effects of one family’s escape from war-torn Vietnam in the 1970s to a new life in America and the universal challenges of becoming a new parent.
4. [*Advice from the Lights*](#) is a poetry collection by **Stephanie Burt** that explores gender and identity through a 1980s American childhood. Some of the poems feature talking objects, plants, and animals grappling with the bodies and circumstances they each inhabit.
5. [*My Ántonia*](#) is a novel by **Willa Cather** about an orphan boy and a young immigrant girl from Bohemia (now the Czech Republic), who move to the Nebraska prairies at the end of the 19th century. Their childhood friendship grows fragile as they are faced with bitter winters, family tragedies, and financial hardships.
6. [*Can’t We Talk About Something More Pleasant?*](#) is a graphic memoir by **Roz Chast**, a longtime cartoonist for the *New Yorker*, about her parents’ final years in their Brooklyn apartment and an assisted living facility. The story is told in part with cartoons, found documents, and family photos.
7. [*The House on Mango Street*](#) is a collection of coming-of-age vignettes by **Sandra Cisneros** about a year in the life of a 12-year-old Mexican American girl growing up in Chicago. She finds confidence and invents herself anew against a poor and patriarchal community.

8. [*Brother, I'm Dying*](#) is a memoir by **Edwidge Danticat**, who lived with an uncle in Haiti for over a decade before joining her parents as immigrants in the U.S. Now grown and living in Miami, she faces the death of her father and the birth of her first child while her uncle and his son are fleeing for their lives from the Haitian government and gang disputes.
9. [*Postcolonial Love Poem*](#) is a poetry collection by Arizona poet **Natalie Diaz**—who is Mojave, an enrolled member of the Gila River Indian Tribe, Latinx, and queer. The poems push against the forces of racism, environmental destruction, addiction, and mental illness with the power of desire, love, and language.
10. [*Infinite Country*](#) is a novel by **Patricia Engel** about a teenage daughter who tries to make her way from Bogotá, Colombia to the U.S., and her mother and siblings who seek safety and opportunity in New Jersey amidst fears that they will be deported like her father. All members of the family hold on to hope, their culture, each other, and the dream of a better life.
11. [*The Round House*](#) is a novel by **Louise Erdrich**, who hails from North Dakota and is a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. Seeking revenge, a 13-year-old boy investigates a brutal attack on his mother that leaves his father, a tribal judge, helpless in his pursuit to bring the perpetrator to justice.
12. [*The Great Gatsby*](#) is a novel by **F. Scott Fitzgerald** set in Long Island, New York, during the 1920s amidst the lavish parties of the nouveau riche. The narrator, a newly arrived Midwesterner, is drawn into the mysterious and tragic world of his wealthy neighbor and the woman his neighbor has always loved.
13. [*Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude*](#) is a poetry collection by Indiana poet **Ross Gay** that demonstrates the practice of gratitude while never losing sight of the sorrow that animates it. Brimming with warmth and an appreciation of the rhythms and abundance of the natural world, the poems suggest that loss can lead to tenderness and joy.
14. [*Homegoing*](#) is a novel by African-born writer **Yaa Gyasi** about the legacy of chattel slavery spanning eight generations. The novel begins with the parallel lives of two half-sisters from Ghana in the 18th century and follows their descendants through periods of history that include the American Civil War and Jazz Age Harlem.
15. [*An American Sunrise*](#) is a poetry collection by **Joy Harjo**, a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation. The poems revisit the homeland from which her ancestors were uprooted by the 1830 Indian Removal Act, immersing the reader in nature, spirituality, memory, violence, and the splintered history of America's Indigenous peoples.

16. [To Live](#) is a novel by **Yu Hua**, translated from Chinese into English by **Michael Berry** and considered one of China's most influential books. A man transforms from a selfish wastrel to a devoted husband and father trying desperately to keep his family alive during the worst famine in Chinese history at a time of dramatic political and social change.
17. [Their Eyes Were Watching God](#) is a novel by **Zora Neale Hurston** about an African American woman's journey toward strength and independence in 1930s Florida. She moves from her grandmother's plantation shack to a joyless marriage with the mayor of an all-Black community to the Everglades, where she enjoys true love before the area is hit by a devastating hurricane.
18. [Lab Girl](#) is a memoir by **Hope Jahren**, a geobiologist from rural Minnesota. A young woman finds friendship in odd places, battles bipolar disorder, perseveres through setbacks and relishes hard-earned triumphs, and becomes a respected scientist and passionate observer of the natural world.
19. [Silver Sparrow](#) is a novel by **Tayari Jones** set in 1980s Georgia. Two teenage girls are sisters but only one knows it, as their father has kept one family public, the other hidden. The girls meet and form a friendship destined to explode when the father's secrets are revealed.
20. [Deaf Republic](#) is a poetic narrative by Ukrainian-born poet **Ilya Kaminsky** about the fictional, private lives of townspeople in an occupied country who have all gone deaf and silent after seeing a soldier shoot and kill a deaf boy. They respond to this murder by turning to sign language to communicate and by committing small acts of heroism.
21. [The Bear](#) is a post-apocalyptic fable by New England author **Andrew Krivak** about a father and daughter, the last two people on Earth, who live off the land at the foot of a mountain. When the daughter finds herself lost and alone, a bear appears to lead her back home.
22. [The Namesake](#) is a novel by **Jhumpa Lahiri** about two generations of a Bengali American family in Massachusetts that struggles between new and old, assimilation and cultural preservation, and striving toward the future while longing for the past.
23. [The Call of the Wild, White Fang, and Other Stories](#) is a collection of prose by **Jack London**. Set during the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897-98 in Alaska and Canada's Yukon Territory, *The Call of the Wild* is told from the perspective of a St. Bernard/Scotch Shepherd dog in charge of a dogsled team.

24. [Station Eleven](#) is a post-apocalyptic novel by **Emily St. John Mandel** set 20 years after a flu pandemic destroys civilization as we know it. A woman moves between the settlements of the altered world with a troupe of actors and musicians until they encounter a violent prophet who threatens the troupe's existence.
25. [Hustle](#) is a poetry collection by **David Tomas Martinez** about his often violent and chaotic Southeast San Diego childhood. He reflects on his membership in a gang, the complicated dynamics of his family life, his time in a shipyard and in the Navy, and eventually his discovery of poetry.
26. [The Heart is a Lonely Hunter](#) is a novel by **Carson McCullers** set in a small Georgia mill town in the late 1930s about the isolation and hardships felt by five of the town's misfits: a teenage girl, the town's Black doctor, an alcoholic socialist, a café owner, and a deaf man who takes on the role as the others' confidant.
27. [The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears](#) is a novel by **Dinaw Mengestu** about the struggles and loneliness of an Ethiopian shopkeeper in a Washington DC neighborhood undergoing gentrification. The story alternates between the present and a past in which he had to flee his country from the Red Terror of the late 1970s.
28. [Beloved](#) is a novel by **Toni Morrison** set in Ohio in 1873 about the scars of slavery, the risk of loving, and the meaning of freedom. A formerly enslaved woman and her daughter are haunted by the past and visited by a mysterious young woman who is the same age as another daughter would have been had she not been killed.
29. [Everything I Never Told You](#) is a novel by **Celeste Ng** about a biracial, Chinese American family in 1970s small-town Ohio trying to understand and cope with the death of the oldest daughter. As the police try to uncover what caused her drowning in a nearby lake, the family must uncover the sister and daughter they realize they hardly knew.
30. [The Things They Carried](#) is a mosaic of linked stories by **Tim O'Brien**, part fiction and part nonfiction, about a platoon of infantrymen during and after the war in Vietnam. Brimming with raw honesty and thoughtful reflection, the book follows the men as they try to make sense of the war's gruesome reality.
31. [There, There](#) is a novel by **Tommy Orange**, an enrolled member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma. It follows the unexpectedly connected lives of 12 characters from Native American communities who travel to a big, and ultimately volatile, powwow in the city of Oakland, California.

32. [*When the Emperor Was Divine*](#) is a novel by **Julie Otsuka** about a Japanese American family forced to move from their home in California to an incarceration camp in Utah following the 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor. They return home after two years to find that their old neighborhood is neither familiar nor hospitable.
33. [*In the Heart of the Sea*](#) is a book by **Nathaniel Philbrick** that tells the true story of the 19th-century whaleship *Essex* out of Nantucket, Massachusetts, that got rammed by a gigantic whale and inspired Herman Melville's novel *Moby-Dick*. The ship sank, sending crewmembers adrift for months as they faced storms, starvation, and disease.
34. [*True Grit*](#) is a Western adventure novel by **Charles Portis** about a 14-year-old girl from Arkansas in the latter part of the 19th century who recruits a marshal to help her avenge the murder of her father. They set out to track the killer during a hard winter across inauspicious territory.
35. [*Citizen: An American Lyric*](#) is a genre-bending book of poetry and nonfiction by **Claudia Rankine** about everyday moments of racism or microaggressions. The book combines lyric prose with internal monologues, visual art, slogans, quotes, film scripts, and a screen grab from YouTube.
36. [*Burning Bright*](#) is a collection of stories by **Ron Rash** offering a portrait of Appalachia from the time of the Civil War to the present day. The collection lets us glimpse the lives of farmers and office workers, soldiers and war widows, pawnbrokers and old bar musicians, all struggling to exist in the world.
37. [*A Small Story About the Sky*](#) is a poetry collection by **Alberto Ríos** sprinkled with magic realism and deeply rooted in the Arizona desert landscape. It is a celebration of the everyday—drinking a morning coffee, feeding the birds, going to the market—and a philosophical exploration of the multiple ways he experiences the world.
38. [*Gilead*](#) is a novel by **Marilynne Robinson** set in Iowa in 1956 about a preacher who looks back on his life, his family legacy, his choices, and his beliefs, all shaped by abolition, economic hardship, and conflicting views on religion and war.
39. [*Heartland: A Memoir of Working Hard and Being Broke in the Richest Country on Earth*](#) by **Sara Smarsh** chronicles her turbulent childhood in Kansas in the 1980s and 1990s. She shares stories of her family, as well as observations of poverty, untreated medical conditions, unsafe job conditions, abusive relationships, and other impediments to the American dream.

40. [*The Grapes of Wrath*](#) is a novel by **John Steinbeck** written in 1939 about a poor family of tenant farmers devastated by the Dust Bowl who must leave their home in Oklahoma and set out for California along Route 66 with thousands of other migrants in search of a better life.
41. [*The Joy Luck Club*](#) is a novel by **Amy Tan** about four Chinese immigrant mothers in San Francisco and their four American-born daughters. Structured like a game of Mahjong, the novel lets us glimpse into their childhoods and the difficult choices each had to make as adults.
42. [*Sitting Pretty: The View from my Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body*](#) is a memoir-in-essays by **Rebekah Taussig** that shares personal stories from her Kansas childhood to the present day. Taussig reflects on living both independently and dependently, the complex issues around charity and acts of kindness, the presentation of disability in the media, and how disability affects us all.
43. [*Into the Beautiful North*](#) is a novel by **Luis Alberto Urrea** about a 19-year-old girl who, inspired by the film *The Magnificent Seven*, travels from her small Mexican village to the U.S. to enlist seven men who've left her town to return and help protect it from drug-dealing *bandidos*.
44. [*The Cold Millions*](#) is a novel by **Jess Walter** set in the early part of the 20th century about two brothers from Montana who jump freight trains and land in Spokane, Washington. There they encounter poverty, violence, unions fighting for fair pay and better work conditions, a powerful mining magnate, and the (real-life) activist Elizabeth Gurley Flynn.
45. [*Our Town*](#) is a play by **Thornton Wilder** about life in a small New Hampshire town at the start of the 20th century. Its three acts follow a man and a woman through an ordinary day, a wedding, and a death, asking big questions and uncovering universal truths.
46. [*Nothing to See Here*](#) is a novel by **Kevin Wilson** set in Nashville, Tennessee, over one hot summer. It follows the emotional journey of a woman charged with looking after two children who, neglected by their wealthy father and stepmother, spontaneously burst into flames whenever they get upset.
47. [*This Boy's Life*](#) is a memoir by **Tobias Wolff** of his early days in the 1950s—moving with his mother from Florida to Utah to Washington state—and his rough years as a young adult at the hands of an abusive stepfather in a small town north of Seattle.

48. [*The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*](#) by **Kao Kalia Yang** tells the story of her family's imprisonment in Laos after the war in Vietnam, their harrowing escape into Thailand's Ban Vinai Refugee Camp, their immigration to Minnesota when Yang was six years old, and their transition to a hard life in America.
49. [*Interior Chinatown*](#) is a novel by **Charles Yu** about a Taiwanese American man in Hollywood, California, who is doomed to play bit parts and generic Asian characters until he gets entangled in a murder case in a procedural cop show. He unravels buried legacies, pervasive stereotypes, and learns to become a new protagonist in his own story.
50. [*Ways of Going Home*](#) is a novel by Chilean author **Alejandro Zambra**, translated from Spanish into English by **Megan McDowell**. It tells two stories: one of a young boy growing up under the brutal dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet and the other about the writer who is writing the boy's story.