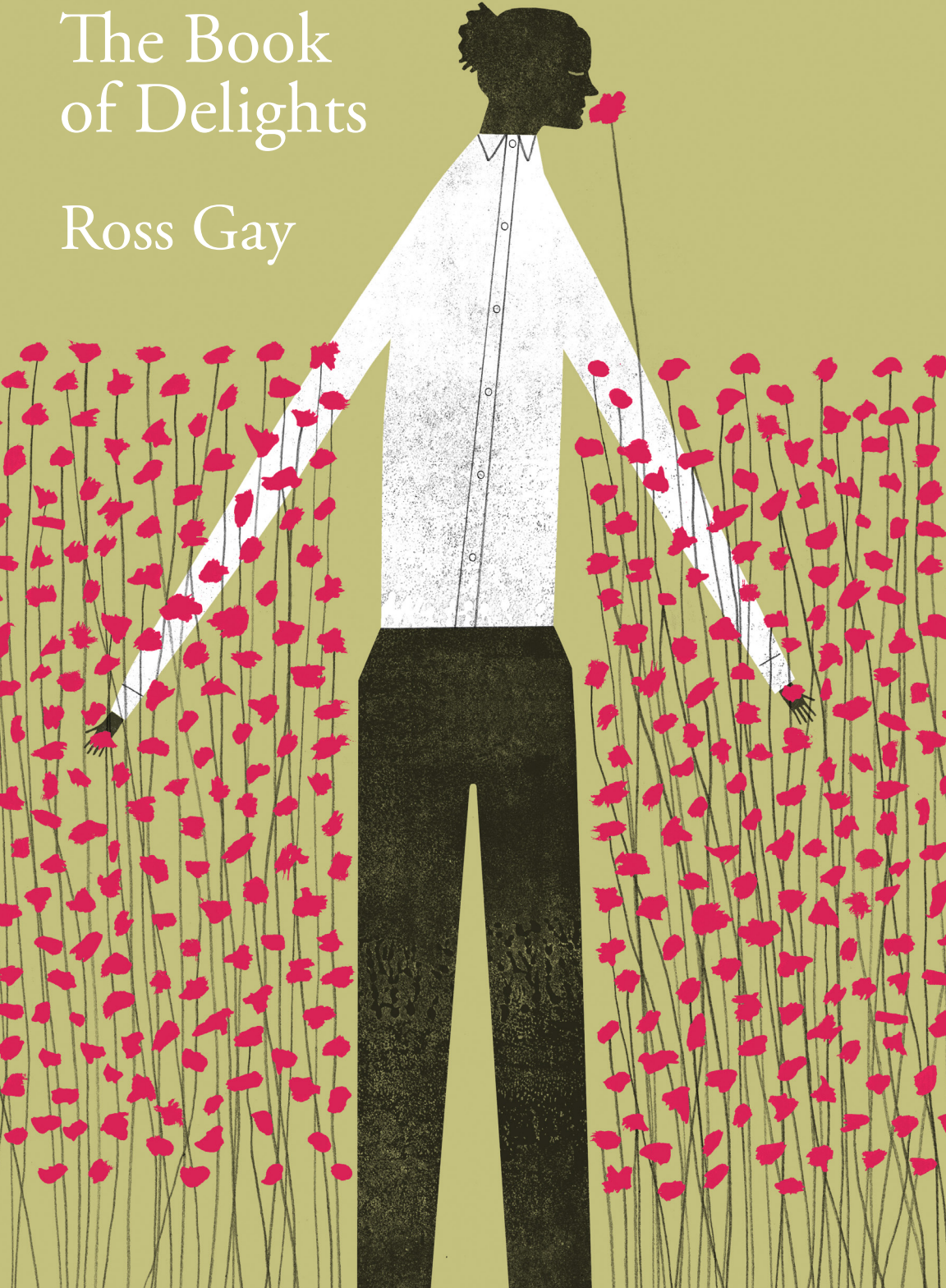


One Maryland One Book 2021

Reader's Guide

The Book of Delights

Ross Gay



WHAT IF EVERYONE READ THE SAME BOOK AT THE SAME TIME, THEN CAME TOGETHER TO TALK ABOUT IT?

When we read a great book, we can't wait to share the experience with others. That's one of the joys of reading. In this spirit, Maryland Humanities created One Maryland One Book to bring together diverse people in communities across the state through the shared experience of reading the same book.

Now in its fourteenth year, One Maryland One Book remains Maryland's only statewide community reading program. Each year, the selection process is guided by a common theme. The theme for 2021 is "Hope."

The Maryland Center for the Book at Maryland Humanities partners with public libraries, high schools, colleges and universities, museums, bookstores, correctional facilities, and other organizations to bring book-centered discussions and other related events to communities across Maryland. But One Maryland One Book is not just about reading or literature; it is also about bringing people together for meaningful dialogue.

The book selected for 2021 is *The Book of Delights: Essays* by Ross Gay.

GRAB YOUR COPY

Find a copy of *The Book of Delights* at your local library or bookstore and get reading! What if a copy of *The Book of Delights* finds you? If you're out and about, you might find copies of the book in unexpected places. Our Wandering Books can be found in a myriad of public spaces from bus stops to doctor's offices to coffee shops. If you find a copy, it's yours for a short time. Register the book online so we can see how far it travels (instructions are included inside the book). Read it, review it, and

then leave it somewhere for someone else to find and enjoy.

REACH OUT

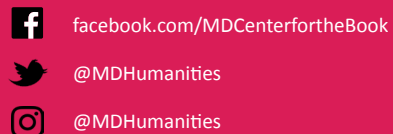
Each year, more than 15,000 Marylanders read the One Maryland One Book selection. How many of those people are your friends or family? Use the book to jumpstart a meaningful conversation in person or virtually with an old friend or to make a new one.

PULL UP A CHAIR

We invite you to join Maryland Humanities and thousands of other Marylanders at one of the many book discussions and related events happening around the state and online from mid-September to mid-November, including the author tour in October. To find One Maryland One Book programs in your area, go to onemarylandonebook.org and click on Events. Be sure to check for the dates of Ross Gay's appearances this fall.

After each One Maryland One Book program you attend, please visit omobfeedback.org and share your thoughts by taking our brief survey.

For all the latest information, "like" or follow us:



Feeling inspired after reading Ross Gay's essayettes and ready to write about your own delights? Visit our website to learn how to submit your essayette. It may be featured on our website and social media channels.

FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



We are thrilled that you are joining Maryland Humanities for the fourteenth year of One Maryland One Book, Maryland's largest reading and discussion program. Since 2008, readers across Maryland have enjoyed reading and discussing the One Maryland One Book title, selected by a juried panel composed of distinguished members from Maryland's literary community. Literature brings joy and reflection along with the opportunity to gain a better understanding of ourselves while offering a glimpse into the lives of those near and far.

Each year we explore the power of literature through discussions and events across the state. Thousands of Marylanders connect in their communities to read and discuss the chosen book through book clubs, libraries, high schools, colleges, museums, senior centers, correctional facilities, and more. Whether you read with us every year or are new to the program, welcome!

A few years ago, poet Ross Gay decided to give himself a year-long assignment: write a daily essay about something that delighted him. A "discipline," he called it. These essayettes, drafted quickly by hand rather than on a computer, became *The Book of Delights*, our book for this year. This collection of musings and personal stories reflect the joy he finds in butterflies and flowers, music, a friend's "reckless" use of air quotes, a high-five from a stranger, and the universal language of babies. His essayettes also touch on race and privilege, a friend's cancer remission, and our inevitable death, yet Gay's approach when reflecting on things sad or unpleasant, always allows for a glimmer of hope. This compilation of 102 essayettes illuminate the many things that tie us together as humans and fellow citizens.

We encourage you to pick up a copy of *The Book of Delights* and join the conversation at one of our many public discussion events across the state, whether in person or virtually. A program of the Maryland Center for the Book at Maryland Humanities, One Maryland One Book is made possible each year through the generosity of our sponsors and community partners. We greatly thank them for their support. Find out how to get involved at onemarylandonebook.org.

Please join us!

Mary Hastler, Board Chair
Lindsey Baker, Executive Director



Photo Credit Natasha Komoda

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

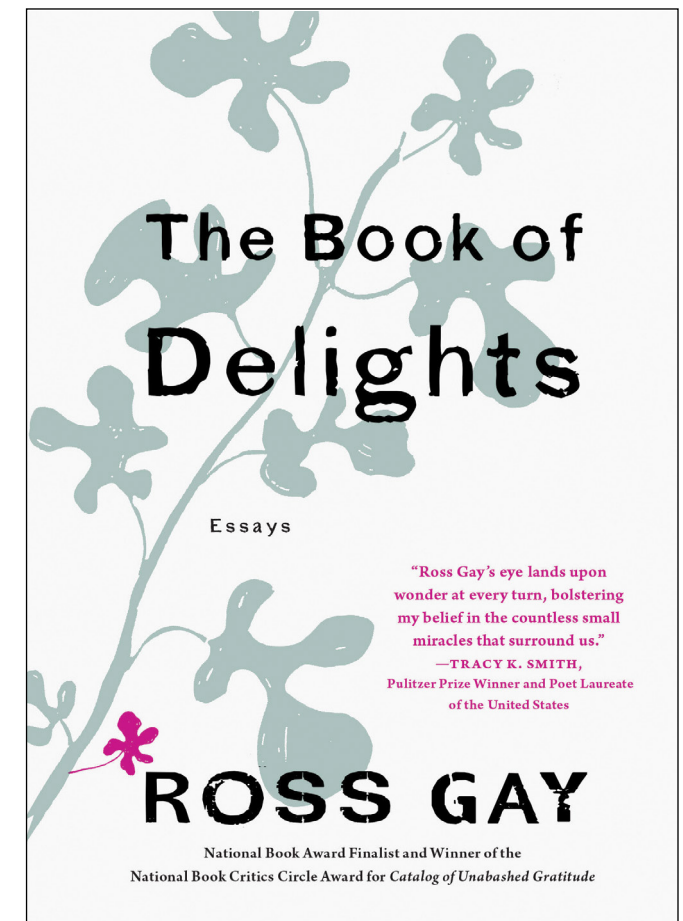
Ross Gay is the author of *The Book of Delights*, a genre-defying book of essays, and four books of poetry, including his most recent, *Be Holding*, a love song to legendary basketball player Julius Erving—known as Dr. J—who dominated courts in the 1970s and '80s as a small forward for the Philadelphia 76ers. Gay is a founding editor, with Karissa Chen and Patrick Rosal, of the online sports magazine *Some Call it Ballin'*. A founding board member of the Bloomington Community Orchard, a non-profit, free-fruit-for-all food justice and joy project, Gay has received fellowships from Cave Canem, the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference, and the Guggenheim Foundation. He teaches at Indiana University.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Reprinted from the book's back cover

In *The Book of Delights*, one of today's most literary voices offers up a genre-defying volume of lyric essays written over one tumultuous year. The first nonfiction book from award-winning poet Ross Gay is a record of the small joys we often overlook in our busy lives. Among Gay's funny, poetic, philosophical delights: a friend's unabashed use of air quotes, cradling a tomato seedling aboard an airplane, the silent nod of acknowledgement between the only two black people in a room. But Gay never dismisses the complexities, even the terrors, of living in America as a black man or the ecological and psychic violence of our consumer culture or the loss of those he loves. More than any other subject, though, Gay celebrates the beauty of the natural world—his garden, the flowers peeking out of the sidewalk, the hypnotic movements of a praying mantis.

The Book of Delights is about our shared bonds, and the rewards that come from a life closely observed. These remarkable pieces serve as a powerful and necessary reminder that we can, and should, stake out a space in our lives for delight.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In *The Book of Delights*, some essays are dedicated to a praying mantis, hummingbirds, a beehive on a bridge, fireflies, and a pawpaw grove, among others. What's the significance of nature throughout the text and to Gay?
- In "Hole in the Head," Gay recounts his friend Kia saying, "'You'd have to be crazy not to be paranoid as a black person in this country,'" (16) when he reveals to her he has been struggling with paranoia. What do you make of Kia's statement? Given the information revealed in the essay about Vertus Hardiman, current events, and the history of people of color in this country, discuss what this reveals about the reality of being a Black American.
- Gay talks about the practice of nodding "at every black person you see" (23) as an act of acknowledgement in "The Negreeting." What does this essayette reveal about cultural practices and their meaning, particularly for Black Americans?
- Masculinity is explored in many of the essayettes. In "Infinity," Gay speaks to how his views of masculinity were shaped during his childhood. How were your views of masculinity shaped and how have they changed?
- Throughout the text, Gay makes many references to pop culture, whether it be film, writers, artists, songs, etc. Which is your favorite and why? What made you connect to it? What did the pop culture reference add to the essay?
- In "The Sanctity of Trains," Gay talks about the general trust among passengers of Amtrak trains and reflects on the common decency of people. What do you make of his observations? Do you have trust in the general public? Do you take part in the "caretaking" that Gay mentions?
- In the essay "Babies. Seriously," Gay describes the reactions people have to babies in public. Why are babies so universally delightful to adults?
- In "Flowers in the Hands of Statues," Gay states, "it is common to see public statues in our country carrying guns...Statues of white men adorned with guns. You will probably notice this in public squares, often, and near city halls and courthouses, which is an unambiguous assertion of cultural values" (187). What is Gay saying about our culture? Who does this particular culture serve? What else does Gay say about statues in the essay?
- In "The Marfa Lights," Gay points out horrible figures of speech we so easily speak in our day-to-day lives. What are some that you can come up with? Now that you are aware, will you stop using any of these figures of speech?
- In "Grown," Gay tells the readers, "a feature of being an adult, what I will call being grown... to have endured some variety of thorough emotional turmoil, to have made your way to the brink, and if you're lucky, to have stepped back from it—if not permanently, then for some time, or time to time" (265). Why do you think Gay is sharing this observation? How do you feel after having read it? Can you relate to it?
- After having read the essays, which ones were your favorites and why?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Each year we hope that your participation in One Maryland One Book inspires continued exploration of the themes and topics examined in the selected book. This year's selection offers an excellent opportunity to explore love, friendship, grief, self-reflection, justice, acceptance, and more. The following list of books, films, podcasts, and music might be of interest after reading *The Book of Delights*. While we include suggested age groups for the readings, they are just a guide. Feel free to choose based on your interests. We encourage you to continue your exploration!

ADULT FICTION

How to Walk Away by Katherine Center

Margaret Jacobsen has it all: a fiancé who adores her, her dream job, and a picture-perfect life. Then suddenly her entire world changes. How will Margaret move on? This roller coaster of a story is full of hope, determination, and second chances.

The Hard Tomorrow by Eleanor Davis

Searingly contemporary, this graphic novel both looks at our current environment of social justice protests, while also distilling it down to the desires of the protagonist. Whether trying to get pregnant with her male lover in the back of their van or keeping an eye on the woman whose attraction she shares, Hannah is a character not often depicted so clearly in literature.

The Lightest Object in the Universe by Kimi Eisele

World-wide economic collapse, a flu-like pandemic, and natural disasters crumble the nation's infrastructure; no more cell phones or central heat and oops, there goes the indoor plumbing. It's time to reinvent a new way of living based on cooperation, imagination, and hustle as Carson makes his way cross-country to reconnect with his love, Beatrix.

How to Stop Time by Matt Haig

Tom Hazard is embarking on a new job as a history teacher near London. But he's not a middle-aged Englishman as he appears, rather, he's been alive for centuries. Eternal life comes at a price—the one rule is to never fall in love. Inside this fantastic premise, we can learn a lot about love, life, change, and happiness. Haig is the author of the recent bestseller, *The Midnight Library*, which has similar themes.

Get a Life, Chloe Brown by Talia Hibbert

After a near-death experience in which her uneventful life flashes before her eyes, chronically ill Chloe Brown decides to get a life, and there's only one way to make sure it happens: make a list. First up? Move out of her family home. Her new flat gives her independence and a frustrating yet sexy superintendent who may be able to unwittingly help her through the rest of her list.

The Keeper of Lost Things by Ruth Hogan

Andrew Peardew is the keeper of lost things. He once lost a keepsake that belonged to his fiancée and she died the next day. He then made it his life's mission to reunite lost objects with their owners. When Andrew dies, Laura, his assistant, is left with his house and his calling. This is a delightful tale of redemption and hope sprinkled with a little bit of mystery, fantasy, and romance.

Klara and the Sun by Kazuo Ishiguro

Klara is a highly advanced robot and an Artificial Friend for an ill and socially awkward 14-year-old girl. Nobel winner Ishiguro explores the ideas of love, family, service to others, and the concept of a soul, raising the question: are these constructs uniquely human?

The Brilliant Life of Eudora Honeysett by Annie Lyons

Eighty-five-year-old Eudora is determined to leave the world on her own terms. She has lived a long life and is ready to say goodbye. Then she meets her new neighbor, spunky ten-year-old Rose who is determined to make Eudora her friend. Now that joy has returned to Eudora's life, is she still ready? This book is a story of friendship and hope and will have you asking yourself if you are truly living your life to the fullest.

The Switch by Beth O'Leary

At 29, Leena masks her grief over the death of her sister until it bursts out in the form of a panic attack. Her grandmother Eileen's cheating husband left her for a younger woman. When Leena takes two months off work, she suggests to her grandmother that they switch places for the duration: Leena in the countryside and Eileen in London. New adventures give them both the opportunity to process their grief and to grow.

The Kitchen Front by Jennifer Ryan

A poignant story of four very different women chosen to compete on a BBC cooking show during World War II, tasked with making appealing meals out of rationed foods. Initially at odds, the women end up as friends as they learn to depend on each other while grappling with life-changing challenges on the home front.

Lot: Stories by Bryan Washington

Lot is a collection of interconnected short stories set largely in working class Black and Latinx Houston. The powerfully emotional writing is soulful and full of love.

ADULT NONFICTION & POETRY

Let Love Have the Last Word: A Memoir by Common

Mindfulness, community, relationships, and mental wellness are all influenced by love. Common allows himself to be vulnerable, sharing childhood abuse and his desire to be a better father. He explains that putting in the work and effort are key and acknowledges that race and politics are inevitable hurdles. Letting love in isn't easy, but it's where healing starts.

Untamed by Glennon Doyle

Glennon Doyle's bestselling memoir is all about finding and being true to oneself. Readers will relate to stories of family life, including her divorce from her husband and falling in love and marrying wife, Abby Wambach. Engaging and inspirational, this book highlights the power of female empowerment and the strength of self-awareness.

Bicycling with Butterflies: My 10,201-Mile Journey Following the Monarch Migration by Sara Dykman

Dykman, a nature educator and researcher, biked more than 10,000 miles to follow monarch butterflies during their spectacular annual migration to bring awareness to their fragile existence and the importance of conservation. She also links the flight of the monarchs to and from Mexico with the importance of immigrant and refugee rights.

The Hill We Climb: An Inaugural Poem for the Country by Amanda Gorman

This is the historic poem that Amanda Gorman wrote and recited at President Biden's inauguration. This poignant poem embodies hope not only for Americans, but for readers around the globe.

What if This Were Enough: Essays by Heather Havrilesky

Journalist Havrilesky's advice column, "Ask Polly," has been a must-read for many years. Expanded from the column, these essays reframe the message to say, "It's not you, it's the world we live in." Happiness is found in the imperfections and in shedding materialism and vacuous messaging.

All Creatures Great and Small by James Herriot

Herriot's classic memoir chronicles his life as a veterinarian in the Yorkshire Dales. Each chapter is a vignette of human and animal foibles and a matter-of-fact portrayal of the privations plaguing rural England, set against the harsh and breathtaking landscape of farming country. Written with a droll, self-deprecating yet always kind humor, the stories are an ode to being open to finding love and joy in all of creation.

Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning by Cathy Park Hong

Hong is the daughter of Korean American immigrants, and the "minor feelings" she felt while growing up consisted of huge issues of race consciousness throughout her life. She brings her talents as both a poet and an essayist to enlighten Asian American history through its past and a variety of current identities.

Between Two Kingdoms: Memoir of a Life Interrupted by Suleika Jaouad

After graduating from college, Suleika Jaouad was on her way to Paris with a boyfriend and a great job. But before turning 23, she was diagnosed with leukemia and spent the next four years in and out of hospitals, chronicling her journey in a *New York Times* column. Once in remission, she began traveling around the country and meeting readers who corresponded with her during her recovery.

Almost Everything: Notes on Hope by Anne Lamott

Lamott's writing flows from a unique mix of her religious faith, twelve-step ideology, and lessons learned from personal struggles. These essays offer comfort when feeling overwhelmed by bleak prospects and challenging circumstances. With topics ranging from self-love to difficult families, this work reminds us that "peace of mind is an inside job" and gently points out a path to get there.

Furiously Happy: A Funny Book About Horrible Things by Jenny Lawson

In these essays, Lawson not only shares wacky life moments, but also delves into the weighty topic of her mental illness. Lawson, followed online by millions as *The Bloggess*, hilariously details her family life but is candid about her concerns with this illness and how it affects her family.

Gmorning Gnight!: Little Pep Talks for Me & You by Lin-Manuel Miranda

Full of affirmations plucked from Miranda's tweets and illustrated with line-drawings by Jonny Sun. Miranda's tidbits of encouragement are unique and playful and offer readers comfort and motivation.

Failing Up: How to Take Risks, Aim Higher and Never Stop Learning by Leslie Odom, Jr.

In this inspiring and motivational guide, the author speaks directly to the reader as if he were their personal mentor. This work is aimed at those who are feeling stuck or going through a transition in their lives. He explains the importance of courage and that failure is how people learn, while acknowledging the role race and class can play within that framework.

Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver by Mary Oliver

Mary Oliver, a Pulitzer-prize winner, was one of our most celebrated contemporary poets. This definitive collection is an excellent introduction to fifty years of her passionate, life-affirming work.

Keep Moving: Notes on Loss, Creativity and Change by Maggie Smith

After a divorce and a miscarriage, poet Maggie Smith wrote a book to lift herself up while also giving inspiration to countless readers. Smith's luminous prose and words of encouragement will resonate with readers.

Schadenfreude: The Joy of Another's Misfortune by Tiffany Watt Smith

Joy comes in all forms, even when it's at the expense of others; and let's be honest, sometimes that's the most delicious. Watt Smith explores schadenfreude in all its forms, noting that it is not a modern phenomenon. We have a difficult relationship with schadenfreude, often feeling guilty, but Smith shows how it can help us be more empathetic.

Goodbye Again: Essays, Reflections and Illustrations by Jonny Sun

Mini-essays about mental health, family, and life's small joys. Sun is able to trigger the deepest emotions with the fewest words, accompanied with his lighthearted illustrations.

Here for It: Or How to Save Your Soul in America: Essays by R. Eric Thomas

R. Eric Thomas delivers spot-on storytelling with flair and reflection. Laugh-out-loud funny, Thomas' essays explore serious socioeconomic and social justice issues through a lens of self-discovery and hope.

The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks About Race by Jesmyn Ward

A powerful collection of essays and poems written by contemporary Black writers and thinkers like Claudia Rankine, Isabel Wilkerson, and Kiese Laymon. Inspired by James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, it reflects on the Black experience and "how inextricably woven the past is in the present"—which must be reckoned with now.

TEEN

The Black Flamingo by Dean Atta

Nineteen-year-old Michael is Black, Jamaican, Greek, and gay coming of age in London. His journey to self-acceptance is challenging because of race, racism, homophobia, and identity. Written in verse, this novel is honest and heartfelt as it follows Michael's path to finding joy and loving himself.

Felix Ever After by Kacen Callender

Felix Love has never been in love. He wants that almost as much as he wants to get in to Brown University to study art. Since he came out as transgender, he's been struggling with his identity. He knows he's not a girl, but he doesn't always feel like a boy, so what does that mean? Then the unthinkable happens, and Felix is launched into questioning and doubting who he is and what he truly wants out of life.

You Should See Me in a Crown by Leah Johnson

Liz Lightly is a girl with a plan. She needs to get out of her hometown and she will do so by going to college. When her financial aid falls through, the only thing she can do is run for prom queen and win the scholarship prize. The prom queen process is brutal and Liz finds herself falling for the competition, the new girl Mack. Will this attraction keep her from winning or help her dreams come true?

The Fire Never Goes Out: A Memoir in Pictures by Noelle Stevenson

This collection of essays, drawings, and mini-comics—some taken from Stevenson's Tumblr—can inspire young creatives on their own journey. Using fine-lined drawings floating in white space, she charts her career, vulnerabilities, and challenges. Stevenson's debut graphic novel, *Nimona*, was a National Book Award finalist.

On the Come Up by Angie Thomas

Bri wants to follow in her late father's footsteps and become a legendary rapper. But not only is she fighting against his memory, she's fighting with her family and the conflict between respecting their wishes and following her dreams. Authentic characters with a powerful message about the power of individual voices.



CHILDREN

Dreamers by Yuyi Morales

Coming to a new country is a daunting experience, but Morales has dreams of what life with her baby will be like. A love letter to public libraries and their importance to immigrants, Morales learns English from library books and uses library services to help realize her goals for a new life.

Priya Dreams of Marigolds and Masala by Meenal Patel

Priya is an Indian American girl who has a wonderful storyteller grandmother, Babi Ba. Priya can imagine the smells and tastes of food and the sights and sounds of the streets of India. Priya keeps her family's traditions and cultural identity alive for herself and in turn teaches her classmates through an art project in this warmly illustrated book.

Emmanuel's Dream: The True Story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah by Laurie Ann Thompson

Despite being born with a malformed leg, Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah was determined to be active, playing soccer and riding bikes. As a young man, he rode 400 miles across his native Ghana to raise awareness of those with disabilities. This is a beautiful and inspiring picture book biography.

Ways to Make Sunshine by Renée Watson

This is a heartwarming novel that has a Ramona Quimby feel and is full of Black joy. Ryan Hart and her family are dealing with tough times in rainy Portland, Oregon. Her dad lost his job and they had to move to a smaller house. Despite all of the changes and her annoying older brother, Ryan focuses on being a good friend and finding sunshine in all situations.

Front Desk by Kelly Yang

Mia Tang has three secrets: she lives and works in a motel, her parents help and hide immigrants, and she wants to be a writer. As a 5th grader, all of these situations are tough. Will Mia be able to keep her job, continue to help immigrants, and reach for her dreams? This novel is based on the author's own experience.

FILMS & TV

Beasts of the Southern Wild (2012, PG-13, 93 min.)

A 6-year-old girl and her ailing father live in a Louisiana Bayou town under threat of flooding. To save their home, both humans and magical creatures come to the aid of the area known as The Bathtub. Though there is great sadness, there is greater joy in this unique and artistic story of home and heroism. Quevenzhane Wallis won great acclaim for her portrayal of young Hushpuppy.

Life, Animated (2016, PG, 92 min.)

Based on the book of the same name, this documentary features author Ron Suskind and his nonverbal autistic son, Owen. When Owen's love of animated Disney films becomes apparent, they also become the vehicle by which he sees and relates to the world. Suskind's 1998 book, *A Hope in the Unseen*, was the inaugural One Maryland One Book selection in 2008.

Schitt's Creek (2015–2020, TV-14)

When filthy-rich video store tycoon Johnny Rose and his family suddenly find themselves broke, they are forced to leave their pampered lives to regroup and rebuild their empire from within the town that they once bought as a joke, Schitt's Creek. Over the course of six seasons, the Rose family will evolve right before your eyes. *Schitt's Creek* is one of the most heartwarming, hopeful, hilarious, and unique series of our time.



PODCASTS, WEBSITES & MUSIC

Dilate Your Heart by Ross Gay and Others

<https://rossgay.bandcamp.com/album/dilate-your-heart>

Independent record label Jagjaguwar is celebrating its 25th anniversary with special releases, including Ross Gay's collaboration. It combines Gay's words with a variety of soundscapes that add even more beauty and texture. Check out the video for the piece, *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude*, with Bon Iver, that adds mesmerizing visuals to the package. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBWcnGjfadY>

The Living Facts

www.livingfacts.org

Curious about what other people are up to? Check out this repository of fun and thought-provoking facts from The Pew Charitable Trust and discover what your fellow Americans think and practice about faith, health, their communities, our democracy, and more.

The One You Feed: Practical Wisdom for a Better Life

www.oneyoufeed.net

Recommended by *Oprah Daily* as one of the best motivational podcasts, listeners learn coping skills and behavioral changes designed to decrease personal suffering and increase peace and fulfillment. The podcasts feature a variety of specialists such as scientists, authors, psychologists, spiritual teachers, and public figures.

Our Joy Project

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/our-joy-project/id1535490667>

The Our Joy Project has only one purpose: to share joy every week! Guests share their experiences with joy and how it effects their lives. If you need more joy, happiness, and hope in your life, this podcast will definitely inspire you.

Playlists from suggested books:

The Book of Delights playlist

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3AwIDBXDsY20eAog0ttFqS>

Let Love Have the Last Word playlist

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/76tzoBK7SX4orE9QgulWWY>

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Maryland Humanities is an educational nonprofit organization. Our mission is to create and support educational experiences in the humanities that inspire all Marylanders to embrace lifelong learning, exchange ideas openly, and enrich their communities. To learn more, visit mdhumanities.org.



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