

Vanessa's Book Club Recommendations:
Eleven Books You Maybe Haven't Heard Of (But Might Like a Lot!)

***Remarkable Creatures* – Tracy Chevalier**

Set in early nineteenth century England, this novel tells the story of two real-life women who became amateur scientists: fossil hunters. These strong, independent women challenge the religious dogma of the day, which is bent on explaining the quickly expanding fossil record in biblically acceptable terms. It's a beautiful friendship story set within a fascinating historical and scientific struggle.

***Mistress of the Art of Death* – Ariana Franklin**

Adelia has been trained as a forensic pathologist in Salerno (Italy), where her position as a woman doctor is unusual but permissible. Summoned to Henry II's twelfth-century England, though, where her education would make her a "witch," she must solve a series of brutal murders without revealing her intelligence or skill. It's the first in a series of four mysteries, but probably the darkest of the bunch.

***The Night Circus* – Erin Morgenstern**

In this magical fantasy, *Le Cirque des Rêves* (the Dream Circus) always arrives mysteriously and is only open at night. Was it really there at all, visitors wonder, or was it just a dream? Both dark and playful, this tale of fascinatingly unique circus performers and the circus's intrigued, imaginative followers is also a complex love story between lifelong rivals. It is mesmerizing and mysterious, and a lot of fun. Also, Jim Dale narrates the audio book!

***Room* – Emma Donoghue**

Room is charmingly narrated by Jack, age five. As Jack describes his world, the tension grows between Jack's innocent happiness with his life and the reader's increasing horror at his situation. As Jack and his mother work to improve their life, they are forced to ask: Which is more important, a wonderful parent or a stable life? Can adversity be overcome? Jack and his mother, who love each other deeply, are wonderful characters, and you'll be on the edge of your seat, rooting for them to succeed.

***People of the Book* – Geraldine Brooks**

Although linked by the overarching story of Hanna, a rare-book expert who is analyzing an ancient and beautifully illustrated Haggadah and racing to conserve it, this is really several stories in one. Each clue Hanna finds in the book – a hair, a wine stain – leads us further into the book's past, revealing more about one of the people who helped to create or care for this book over its long and mysterious history.

***The Family Fang* – Kevin Wilson**

Annie and Baxter grew up as Child A and Child B, essential pieces in their parents' chaotic and disruptive performance art pieces. Now as adults, they are struggling to become artists in their own right and to figure out what the hell is really going on with their crazy parents. While the book asks big questions about family (can we overcome the shit our parents do to us?) and art (what is art, what is beauty, and what is the highest good?), it's mostly an absurdly funny and poignant story.

***Fingersmith* – Sarah Waters**

Sue, orphaned from birth, has grown up in a family of fingersmiths – petty thieves – in Victorian London. Finally given a chance to make something of herself, her life becomes inextricably entwined with that of another, far wealthier but far more isolated orphan girl. However, Sue's telling of events takes up just part of this novel, and as we hear the same story from others, we begin to realize just how unreliable, uninformed, or untrustworthy each narrator is.

***The Eyre Affair* – Jasper Fforde**

Thursday Next is a literary detective living in a surreal, alternate England, where the most feared criminal in history has just traveled into the original version of *Martin Chuzzlewit* and killed off a main character, therefore changing every copy of the book. *Jane Eyre* is next, and Thursday has to put all of her SpecialOps military and literary training to work in order to overcome both bureaucracy and nefarious evil, and save that book before it's too late. This quirky, fast-paced detective novel (first in a series) is one long inside joke for book lovers and will make you wish that you, too, had a pet dodo.

***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* – Mark Haddon**

When Christopher discovers that his neighbor's dog has been murdered, he sets off to solve one mystery and ends up unraveling far more. Fifteen years old and autistic, Christopher explains the events from his unique point of view, which includes a lot of math, maps, and, when he needs to relax, some groaning. He insists that the book will not be funny (since he doesn't understand humor), but he is an excellent narrator, so it is both very funny and very touching to see the world as he does.

***The Selected Works of T. S. Spivet* – Reif Larsen**

When the Smithsonian invites twelve-year-old mapmaker T.S. Spivet (whom they presume to be an adult scientist) to accept an award in Washington, he leaves without telling his family, hops a freight train, and embarks on a great adventure. As he makes unexpected discoveries about his seemingly callous family, he maps, illustrates, charts, and footnotes his findings and his journey.

***Go Set a Watchman* – Harper Lee**

I haven't actually read this one (the original, unpublished version of *To Kill a Mockingbird*) yet, because it might be hard to take, but it seems like book club is a good and safe place to think critically about it. Also, since Harper Lee died just this week, now might be the moment to finally crack it open.