

books '12  
Book Talk  
AMPA Lunch  
October 24, 2012



Sandy Mack

*Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*

**Jamie Ford**

Fiction

Author Jamie Ford is of Chinese descent and clearly knows both the geographical and emotional terrain he writes about. Set in 1940s Seattle, this debut novel is a moving account of Henry Lee's life. As a youngster trying to define himself in a largely Caucasian world, he clashes at times with the wishes of his parents. His deepening friendship with a young female Japanese student will ignite family conflict and test their love, all the while reminding us of a shameful period in American history.

*The Soldier's Wife*

**Margaret Leroy**

Fiction

This historical fiction, beautifully written, spans the years 1940-1946 and is set in the island of Guernsey, off the coast of England. Deciding at the very last moment to pass up a boat to England on the last day for evacuees, Vivienne de la Mare is among the families left on the island wondering when and if the Germans will arrive. Her husband is away at war, leaving her to care for their two daughters and his mother. The choices she makes will have repercussions on her life and those around her.

*The Paris Wife*

**Paula McLain**

Fiction

An evocative story which reads like a memoir, the novel tells the story of the courtship and marriage of Ernest Hemingway and Hadley Richardson. The book covers their years together from 1920-1929 as they marry and move to Paris. Not prepared for the fast track pace of life in the Twenties in Paris and living off a trust of Hadley's, they live sparingly while Hemingway hones his writing skills and publishes *The Sun Also Rises*. Despite the depth of their love they face a crisis and a betrayal that will forever change their lives.

*The Dovekeepers*

**Alice Hoffman**

Fiction

Inspired by the massacre of 900 Jewish people who had sequestered themselves in a hilltop fortress in the Judean desert which had been the summer palace of Herod, this is the first account of this incident other than the account written by the ancient historian Josephus. The story focuses on the lives of four women and explains how they came to be at Masada, working as dovekeepers, while waiting for the approaching Roman army coming to destroy them.

*Steve Jobs*

**Walter Isaacson**

Non-Fiction

The definitive biography of Steve Jobs is impeccably researched and based on more than 40 interviews with Jobs himself. The author had unprecedented access to Jobs' circle of friends and associates and what emerges is a fascinating account of one of the most talented, fascinating and yes, odd, persons of our time. The book chronicles his life and the growth of the tech industry in Santa Clara Valley.



## Carl Silva

### *Stoner*

**John Williams**

Fiction

Born at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, William Stoner moves from the dry land of the farm to the life of the university to become a professor. A lover of literature, he only seeks to teach his students and to live a life of learning. Stoner's quiet life is filled with nuance and struggle as the calm world he wants is slowly broken apart by a wife that does not love him, a teacher who seeks his downfall, and a daughter forever torn between his love and his wife's manipulation. Williams is a gifted writer, able to compress entire novels into paragraphs while quietly revealing the struggle of this unremarkable yet remarkable man.

### *The Sense of an Ending*

Julian Barnes

Fiction

A very short novel that you will want to discuss with friends and probably reread. Tony Webster, our charming middle-aged narrator, reflects upon his childhood and a particular love affair that didn't quite go his way. In fact, we, the reader, sympathetic to his memory, begin on his side until a letter reveals that Tony's recollection of the past may not be as accurate as he may be sharing. In fact, the brilliance of the novel is the mere questioning of how any of us construct memory and build a narrative that helps us explain our lives. For Tony and others in the novel, the past can have devastating effects upon the present.

### *The Leftovers*

**Tom Perotta**

Fiction

The rapture has occurred and the chosen ones have been taken. A small problem, though: those left behind cannot figure out why those who vanished were taken. A small town struggles with these contradictions. Families are broken apart because members are no longer with them and small groups of the faithful form, frustrated and bewildered that they still remain. A bit *Twilight Zone* meets *Our Town*, Perotta invites the reader into a town where people struggle to find meaning in a situation beyond their control.

*Picking Cotton*

**Jennifer Thompson-Cannino and Ronald Cotton**

Non-Fiction

In 1984, Jennifer Thompson was raped at knifepoint in her apartment. She escaped and was able to identify her attacker, Ronald Cotton. Based upon her testimony, Cotton was imprisoned despite his continual statement of innocence. After eleven years, Cotton was able to take a DNA test proving his innocence for a crime he never committed. Now that alone makes for a compelling non-fiction work. But what makes this remarkable is that two years later, Jennifer and Ronald will meet to discuss what had happened, turning this work into a remarkable story of courage, forgiveness, and triumph of the human spirit.

*Thinking, Fast and Slow*

**Daniel Kahneman**

Non-Fiction

Kahneman, a Noble Prize winner in Economic Science, takes us on a fascinating journey about how we make decisions. You will definitely think twice about how you buy insurance, why you underestimated your addition to the house, and why a simple list of criteria might just be better than an expert's opinion. There were so many "aha" moments while reading this book that I keep hoping that the next time I make a decision, I can remember just one of his ideas.