

Rusland Reading Group - Books suggested for 2005-2006 Season

Last update: 17th Sept 2005

The group meets on the 3rd Thursday of each month (apart from August and December) at 08:00 p.m.

<i>Meeting Date</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
October 20th	Carol McNeil's, Manor Cottage, Oxen Park	<u>Oranges are not the Only Fruit</u>	Jeanette Winterson
<p>Jeanette, the protagonist of <i>Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit</i> and the author's namesake, has issues-- "unnatural" ones: her adopted mam thinks she's the Chosen one from God; she's beginning to fancy girls; and an orange demon keeps popping into her psyche. Already Jeanette Winterson's semi-autobiographical first novel is not your typical coming-of-age tale.</p> <p>Brought up in a working-class Pentecostal family, up North, Jeanette follows the path her Mam has set for her. This involves Bible quizzes, a stint as a tambourine-playing Sally Army officer and a future as a missionary in Africa, or some other "heathen state". When Jeanette starts going to school ("The Breeding Ground") and confides in her mother about her feelings for another girl ("Unnatural Passions"), she's swept up in a feverish frenzy for her tainted soul. Confused, angry and alone, Jeanette strikes out on her own path, that involves a funeral parlour and an ice-cream van. Mixed in with the so-called reality of Jeanette's existence growing up are unconventional fairy tales that transcend the everyday world, subverting the traditional preconceptions of the damsel in distress.</p> <p>In <i>Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit</i>, Winterson knits a complicated picture of teenage angst through a series of layered narratives, incorporating and subverting fairytales and myths, to present a coherent whole, within which her stories can stand independently. Imaginative and mischievous, she is a born storyteller, teasing and taunting the reader to reconsider their worldview. --<i>Nicola Perry</i></p>			

<i>Meeting Date</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
November 17th	Jan Benefield's - Jane Meadow, High Dale Park	<u>Cloud Atlas</u>	David Mitchell
<p>Six interlocking lives - one amazing adventure. In a narrative that circles the globe and reaches from the 19th century to a post-apocalyptic future, David Mitchell erases the boundaries of time, genre and language to offer an enthralling vision of humanity's will to power, and where it will lead us.</p> <p>A reluctant voyager crossing the Pacific in 1850; a disinherited composer blagging a precarious livelihood in between-the-wars Belgium; a high-minded journalist in Governor Reagan's California; a vanity publisher fleeing his gangland creditors; a genetically modified 'dinery server' on death-row; and Zachry, a young Pacific Islander witnessing the nightfall of science and civilisation - the narrators of <i>Cloud Atlas</i> hear each other's echoes down the corridor of history, and their destinies are changed in ways great and small. In his extraordinary third novel, David Mitchell erases the boundaries of language, genre and time to offer a meditation on humanity's dangerous will to power, and where it may lead us.</p>			

<i>Meeting Date</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
January 19th	Jean Crabtree?	The Time Traveler's Wife and also The Turn of the Screw (Henry James) if people want to read another short book over the 2 month Christmas period	Audrey Niffenegger

Cloud Atlas

This extraordinary, magical novel is the story of Clare and Henry who have known each other since Clare was six and Henry was thirty-six, and were married when Clare was twenty-two and Henry thirty. Impossible but true, because Henry is one of the first people diagnosed with Chrono-Displacement Disorder: periodically his genetic clock resets and he finds himself pulled suddenly into his past or future. His disappearances are spontaneous and his experiences are alternately harrowing and amusing. The Time Traveler's Wife depicts the effects of time travel on Henry and Clare's passionate love for each other with grace and humour. Their struggle to lead normal lives in the face of a force they can neither prevent nor control is intensely moving and entirely unforgettable.

The Turn of the Screw (Penguin Popular Classics £1.50)

The narrator is a young governess, sent off to a country house to take charge of two orphaned children. She finds a pleasant house and a comfortable housekeeper, while the children are beautiful and charming. But she soon begins to feel the presence of intense evil.

<i>Meeting Date</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
February 16th	Lin Mackintosh	Saturday and Enduring Love	Ian McEwan

<i>Meeting Date</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
March 16th	Liz Cringle, Low Dale Park	A Short History of Tractors in Ukrainian	Marina Lewycka

from Amazon:

Nadezhda, the daughter of Nikolia, wife of Mike, and mother of Anna, is a professor of Sociology at an English University. She and her Pappa have an interesting relationship, but at least they can talk. Vera, Nadezhda's sister, is estranged from the family, so Nada is the one to go to. Her Pappa calls her one day to tell her he is marrying again. He is 84 and his bride-to-be is 35. Suspicious? Well, I guess. Nikolia tells her the bride is a young, buxom blonde who wants to immigrate to England from Ukraine. Nikolia will do anything to help someone from his home country and a beautiful blonde- you betcha! Needless to say Nada and Vera are alarmed, and this brings them back together again. They must get rid of this gold digger. However, they have not thought much about how their father feels, and they have not met Valentina. Certainly, out for what she can get, but also charming in her own way. A real world wind and trouble in the making.

The story centers on this marriage, the relationship of the family, and the marriage partners and the history of the Russian revolution. Along the way, Pappa starts writing the history of the tractor in the Ukraine, and it turns out to be quite a story. It also opens the door for secrets of the family to come tumbling out. The love story of Momma and Pappa. Why Vera is so negative and difficult to get along with, and the history of the family as it intertwines with the revolution. A fascinating look at the life of a Ukrainian soldier and his family. The bleak famine years and the better years after the move to the UK. This is a story of generations and how they came to be, and how they influence our lives. Also, the story of what it is like to get old, and how the family needs to prepare. How to revere your elders and love them through thick and thin. Family love should not be restricted to only the good times, and family secrets need to be shared. A look at the lives of all us, really, into the future.

<i>Meeting Date</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
April 20th	Carol McNeill, Manor Cottage, Oxen Park	To Kill a Mocking Bird	Harper Lee

from Amazon:

'Shoot all the Bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a Mockingbird.' A lawyer's advice to his children as he defends the real mockingbird of Harper Lee's classic novel - a black man charged with the rape of a white girl. Through the young eyes of Scout and Jem Finch, Harper Lee explores with exuberant humour the irrationality of adult attitudes to race and class in the Deep South of the thirties. The conscience of a town steeped in prejudice, violence and hypocrisy is pricked by the stamina of one man's struggle for justice. But the weight of history will only tolerate so much.

Meeting Date	Where	Title	Author
May 18th	Carol at Windy Hall, Rusland	We Need to Talk About Kevin	Lionel Shriver
<p><u>from Amazon:</u></p> <p>Nature or nurture: what makes a monster? Tackling the ultimate taboo - that a mother can't dislike her own child - a brutally compelling book that encourages the reader to engage with a most contested moral dilemma.</p> <p>Two years ago, Eva Khatchadourian's son, Kevin, murdered seven of his fellow high-school students, a cafeteria worker, and a popular algebra teacher. Because he was only fifteen at the time of the killings, he received a lenient sentence and is now in a prison for young offenders in upstate New York. Telling the story of Kevin's upbringing, Eva addresses herself to her estranged husband through a series of letters. Fearing that her own shortcomings may have shaped what her son has become, she confesses to a deep, long-standing ambivalence about both motherhood in general and Kevin in particular. How much is her fault? Lionel Shriver tells a compelling, absorbing, and resonant story while framing these horrifying tableaux of teenage carnage as metaphors for the larger tragedy - the tragedy of a country where everything works, nobody starves, and anything can be bought but a sense of purpose.</p>			

Meeting Date	Where	Title	Author
June 15th	John Walton's new barn, Crosslands	The Reader	Bernhard Schlink
<p><u>from Amazon:</u></p> <p>Originally published in Switzerland and gracefully translated into English by Carol Brown Janeway, <i>The Reader</i> is a brief tale about sex, love, reading and shame in post-war Germany. Michael Berg is 15 when he begins a long, obsessive affair with Hanna, an enigmatic older woman. He never learns very much about her and when she disappears one day, he expects never to see her again. But, to his horror, he does. Hanna is a defendant in a trial related to Germany's Nazi past and it soon becomes clear that she is guilty of an unspeakable crime. As Michael follows the trial, he struggles with an overwhelming question: what should his generation do with its knowledge of the Holocaust? "We should not believe we can comprehend the incomprehensible, we may not compare the incomparable... Should we only fall silent in revulsion, shame, and guilt? To what purpose?"</p> <p><i>The Reader</i>, which won the Boston Book Review's Fisk Fiction Prize, wrestles with many more demons in its few, remarkably lucid pages. What does it mean to love those people--parents, grandparents, even lovers--who committed the worst atrocities the world has ever known? And is any atonement possible through literature? Schlink's prose is clean and pared down, stripped of unnecessary imagery, dialogue and excess in any form. What remains is an austere beautiful narrative of the attempt to breach the gap between Germany's pre and post-war generations, between the guilty and the innocent and between words and silence.</p>			

<i>Meeting Date</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
July 20th	Helen Adams, Light Hall, Rusland	Never Let Me Go	Kazuo Ishiguro
<p><u>from Amazon:</u></p> <p>In one of the most acclaimed and strange novels of recent years, Kazuo Ishiguro imagines the lives of a group of students growing up in a darkly skewed version of contemporary England. Narrated by Kathy, now 31, "Never Let Me Go" hauntingly dramatises her attempts to come to terms with her childhood at the seemingly idyllic Hailsham School, and with the fate that has always awaited her and her closest friends in the wider world. A story of love, friendship and memory, "Never Let Me Go" is charged throughout with a sense of the fragility of life.</p>			

<i>Meeting Date</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>
September		The Odyssey	Homer. Translation: Shewring

Rusland Valley Reading Group: Other suggested books:

The Places In Between	Rory Stewart
Running with Scissors	Augustin Burroughs
<i>Jan to check this is the right book: The Last Climb: The Legendary Everest Expeditions of George Mallory</i> Biography of George Mallory	by David Breashears , Audrey Salkend
Mrs Dalloway	Virginia Woolf
An Idea of Perfection	Kate Grenfell
Give Me Ten Seconds	John Seargent (Autobiography)
The Poisonwood Bible	Barbara Kingsolver
May you be the Mother of 100 Sons	Elizabeth Bumiller
A Prayer for Owen Meany	John Irving
Galileo's Daughter	Dava Sobel
The Reader	Bernhard Schlink
The American Boy	Andrew Taylor
The Lambs of London	Peter Ackroyd
Baghdad Burning	"Riverbend"
Black Swan Green	David Mitchell
Arthur and George	Julian Barnes
The Accidental	Ali Smith