



WSIRN Episode 176: When your reading life is a roller coaster
Hosted by Anne Bogel, with guest Kate Mitchell

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KATE: When I first read like the back in a Barnes and Noble in 2013, like I just went this is it. This is everything I've ever waited for. [LAUGHS]

[ANNE LAUGHS]

[CHEERFUL INTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers. I'm Anne Bogel, and this is What Should I Read Next? Episode 177.

Welcome to the show that's dedicated to answering the question that plagues every reader: What should I read next?

We don't get bossy on this show: What we WILL do here is give you the information you need to choose your next read. Every week we'll talk all things books and reading and do a little literary matchmaking with one guest.

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ANNE: All right, readers, I have exciting news. A couple of weeks ago we hinted at an announcement and if you visited our Patreon page at patreon.com/whatshouldireadnext.

That's P-A-T-R-E-O-N.com/whatshouldireadnext and watched my video there you heard me explain that a new project was in the works. And now, that project is HERE.

Today we launched another bookish podcast, and it's very different from What Should I Read Next? But in a way I'm very excited about. What Should I Read Next? as you know is all about helping my readers find their next read. In each episode, the recommendations are geared toward a particular reader's style, and I'm always looking for titles that they haven't read before.

Our new podcast is a short format show, and I know, I know. I originally said What Should I Read Next? was going to be 18 minutes tops and now it's an hour, but never mind. This one is going to be short and stay short and it is called One Great Book. In every episode, I'll pull one standout selection off my personal bookshelves and tell you all about it. I'm highlighting books that I love that you may have missed or forgotten about, but that you'll be glad to discover—whether that's again, or for the first time.

We have 8 books planned for this first volume (commonly known as a season, on podcasts that are not of the bookish variety), and book one in that volume is out today. New episodes drop on Fridays starting this week. And as a really fun bonus for our patreon backers I'll be recording bonus episodes for patrons to correspond with new episodes of One Great Book. On One Great Book I'm focusing on books that have been out in the world for at least a year, but in those bonus episodes for patrons I'll be telling you about a great book that hasn't been published yet—so you can be in the know AND be the first on your library holds list. If you're interested in hearing those episodes go to patreon.com/whatshouldireadnext and please, find One Great Book in your podcast player and hit subscribe today.

Readers, today's guest Kate Mitchell has experienced polar opposites in her reading life. She's gone from a period of time when reading was literally her job, to stretches where reading was literally impossible. Many listeners and past guests on What Should I Read Next? have shared their stories of reading dry spells due to chronic illness, anxiety, and disability and other things. Today Kate is sharing some of the wisdom she's developed through her own roller coaster of a reading life, including practical tips for how to accept reality and adapt your reading life if you're having a rough go of it.

We're also chatting about what realism looks like in the fantasy genre, books wayyyy too big to keep in your purse, some historical fiction classics, and also Kate gives me the {student debt}-free cheat sheet to reading like you've got a Master's degree in literature. Her answer, I was happy to hear, involves highlighters.

Readers, let's get to it!

ANNE: Kate, welcome to the show.

KATE: Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to be here.

ANNE: Well it is mutual. When we got your submission here at What Should I Read Next headquarters, which is basically my home office. [KATE LAUGHS] We love the sound of your books of course 'cause that's something we always pay attention to. We're looking for a really interesting mix of reading tastes, but also, there were several aspects of your personal story I know that listeners are really going to resonate with for very different reasons and I'm so excited to get to explore that with you today.

[00:04:32]

KATE: Me too.

ANNE: We have many readers among us who say that they wish they could read as their job. Because of your professional background, you got to do that basically for a good number of years.

KATE: Yeah, I was a high school teacher for a year and I also did a little internship in publishing. I did an independent study in college where I read YA books based on myths and wrote about them. So that was a pretty great study program.

ANNE: Okay, I'm thinking there a lot of them, but are there more than most people would ever realize?

KATE: Oh, absolutely. And this was back in 2012, so *Circe* is going around the book world right now. And that wasn't out then. Basically my professor gave me a very, very long list of books that were retellings of or based on myths from around the world. And I studied a lot of myths through high school and middle school and undergrad. I taught *The Odyssey* when I was student teaching. I taught some *Percy Jackson* when I was student teaching a different position. So I consider myself fairly aware of books based on mythology and I was surprised to see how many there were. Some were based on myths that I hadn't known existed. Some are very far from the source material. So it was a really fun project to do.

ANNE: After spending all this time reading YA novels based on mythology, I imagine that you had the chance to formulate some theories about why that's such a popular launching off point for contemporary novels. What do you think?

KATE: These are stories that have fascinated people for hundreds if not thousands of years. We as humans are still finding new ways to approach these stories from all different sorts of directions. You know, there are modern based. There are some that are set in the original time period the myth was created, but it does it a little differently. I think that it's a fun way for you know writers who have always been interested in myths to move into fiction writing. It's also a fun way for people to stretch their writing chops. You know, you have something that you want to write a new version of, it's easy in that you have source material. But it's difficult in that you

have to walk a fine balance between writing a new version of this tale, doing something completely the same but in a different setting or completely different. And like with all books, you know, you have to ask yourself why would someone want to read this book?

I think that it's probably harder than it looks like at first. Especially because it's easy to be like oh well, they're just writing a modern version of you know whatever myth. That can't have been that hard. [ANNE LAUGHS] I have to imagine that it's very hard. [KATE LAUGHS] Especially if it's one that lots of people know about.

[00:07:56]

ANNE: Right. So you get that advantage of getting to begin with the bones of your story already in place, but then you set yourself up to be compared to some of the most well known stories of all time.

KATE: Exactly. Who wants to have to be compared to *The Odyssey*?

[BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: That is a tall order. What were some of the titles that stood out to you from that project?

KATE: That's how actually I got started reading *the Percy Jackson* series. And it was the sort of series where I read the first book for this independence study, and then I read as many as the books that were available possible.

ANNE: Just for the fun of it?

KATE: Yeah. Yeah. Especially because I was like I'm going to be student teaching. I need to ... I need to know what the kids are reading these days. It's totally not because it's extremely interesting. Definitely not that. [LAUGHS] So I had a really good time doing that and I was very grateful for my professor who proposed the idea.

ANNE: So many readers think that being able to read books, talk about books, and write about books all day sounds like the dream, and that's what you got to do. How was it? Like every reader's fantasy?

KATE: You know, it was really good when I was taking classes in reading books that I enjoyed. It was not when I was not doing that. [ANNE LAUGHS] Because I didn't have the time to do much reading for fun. Really the only reading for fun that I did during my semesters was my audiobook on my phone while going to and from class because I get motion sickness and so I can't actually read a hardcopy book on the train. So I would listen to an audiobook and that was really the only reading for fun that I did.

ANNE: So if the school reading wasn't fun, then reading wasn't fun.

KATE: Yeah. Luckily, during my school breaks, I went right back into my old reading habits and reading for fun. And so I luckily wasn't being overbooked.

ANNE: Kate, I don't have a master's degree in literature. I don't think I'm ever going to get one. What is one thing that you learned in the course of getting your degree that you could share with those of us who are never going to do that but has changed the way you read even though you've now moved on from that stage in your life.

[00:10:17]

KATE: Hmm. I think I would have to say if you really want to get something extra out of your reading, it will not harm you to annotate your books.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] I can hear people like rubbing their hands together like "Ooh."

KATE: Yes. [LAUGHS] What I'll do is I'll read with a highlighter and a pen and a stack of sticky notes. Highlight words or phrases or even themes that stand out to me. Just the action of physically highlighting and writing down some notes really makes my brain think harder about the book than I would otherwise. What I do sometimes now with fiction is I have a running list of book quotes on my phone. I will type down quotes that stood out to me. Ones that really encapsulate something important from the book. That way I'm able to look back later and say, oh, yeah, this book stood out to me in these different ways. And when it comes to annotating, it also helps when I look back later because I can flip through and find the different things that I've highlighted, different notes that I wrote to myself. Sometimes it'll be questions whether about the text or about something mentioned in the text. You know I'll go straight to Wikipedia and start Googling like what is this event mentioned this book I haven't heard of before. And I'll also ask questions about something that I want to think about later. I'm currently reading *White Fragility*, all about what we white people need to know about racism. And so I am annotating the heck out of that book because I can consider myself a good ally but I definitely am all about learning more.

And you know, I used to be one of those people who was like oh, no, I must never write in any book ever. And then I went to grad school and stopped caring about that. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: I was recently talking with a group of readers. It was our final session of the book school I've been leading and someone asked a specific question and said my daughter's getting ready to take AP English literature. We've never been a write in the books family. How do we cope with this?

KATE: Mm-hmm.

ANNE: And I said, you know, it's different when it's research. Get out those highlighters, those book darts, those pens, those Post-It notes. Mark that baby up. It engages a different part of your brain.

KATE: It really does.

ANNE: Thank you for saving me all those years of effort. All I need to do is get out my highlighter and it's basically the same, right?

KATE: Oh, for sure. [BOTH LAUGH] Now about the student loans that I have that I could have saved.

[00:13:08]

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Kate, there's something else that you said when you wrote in on our guest submission form. And that is at WhatShouldIReadNextPodcast.com/guest. You said that something that really affected your reading life for over a decade now was chronic illness. And the reason that jumped out at me was first of all, I don't know what that's like and I'm very interested in hearing how different realities in people's lives affect their reading lives. But also we've talked to several guests over our three plus years now who do have chronic illness. And some have been very upfront about it. For some of them, you may not know if you listened, but it's something I know from our private conversations. And I get emails every week from readers who say I'm really struggling with X. This is why reading is hard or this is how reading is helping me. So for those listeners out there who do have chronic illness as part of their lives, I think they probably feel like they're the only ones, but my inbox and my personal experience just with a guest here on What Should I Read Next? tell a very different story. I really appreciated the way that you said this is your reality and it's something you're very comfortable speaking about. Thank you for telling us about that and for being willing to go in those places today.

KATE: Yeah, of course. So I live with a little collection of chronic illnesses.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] That makes it sound like something on the bookshelf you should dust.

KATE: Yes. The main illness that I have is rheumatoid arthritis. I've been in pain for 17 years. I've had surgeries. I take a zillion medications. And it has really impacted my reading life over the years. In a variety of ways. On the plus side because I go to the doctor a lot, I have a lot of time for reading. It is extremely rare when I go to a doctor's office and they are ready to see me immediately. Even if it's just five minutes or unfortunately I've been at offices where I've had to wait up to two hours. I always carry a book with me when I go to these appointments because I know that I'm going to have reading time. I like to look at the plus side of stuff. Especially because you know like I said in my form, it is my reality. I like to look at the positives in my life even if they don't always seem like positives.

Honestly, living with chronic illness has also made me be a lot more honest with myself about the books that I'm reading and my feelings about them. I used to be a person who never put a book down if I didn't enjoy it. And I still take my time before I put a book down. I try to give it a good amount before giving up on it. But at the end of the day, I only have so many hours in the day that I feel up to reading, which is something I'll talk about in a second. So I don't want to spend my time reading something that I don't enjoy. You know, especially if it's a book that I'm forcing myself through it, only so that I can say that I read it. It just doesn't make sense.

Part of the downside of having chronic illness, especially some of the illnesses that I have, is that I have what is called brain fog. I can get it from medications; it can be a symptom of my illness. I have fibromyalgia as well as RA. It's really hard to describe if you haven't experienced it. The term brain fog really just is my brain feels foggy. It can be hard to concentrate sometimes. You know, reading the same paragraph over and over again for no good reason other than my brain has forgotten that I just read it. It has also meant that at the worst years of my health, I read almost nothing.

[00:17:02]

ANNE: Kate, we hear from a lot of readers who say I just don't know what I would do with myself if I couldn't read. And we've talked to people who've gotten things like either major concussions, which are a big deal, but do pass with time. As well as people who are coping with ongoing chronic illness and they can't read. So what would you say to those people who go, oh my goodness, I have no idea what I would do with myself if I couldn't read? Because you've had to answer that question.

KATE: Right. Well I have two things that I want to say about this. One is that there's ... I'm unable to read unless I make some changes. And there's I'm not able to read at all. And I've been at both places. By changes, I mean, going from the hardcopy format to the audiobook format. Going from smaller print book to larger print book. Some of those things can help if you are at a point where your little compact version of your book is really not working with your brain or any illness that you might have.

Now when it comes to not being able to read in general. In my experience, and in the experience of people that I've talked to, you might go through a period of time where you really aren't able to read or it takes months or even a year to read a book. First and foremost, you have to cut yourself some slack. These things happen. They've been happening to people probably since the beginning of time. If you spend your time beating yourself up because you are really struggling to read, then you are hurting yourself even more.

You deserve better than to be dealing with crap coming from yourself. And also if reading is really important to you and you have tried a variety of things and you're just not able to read, listening to things like podcasts about books, watching TV shows or movie adaptations of books can make you feel like you haven't left the literary world while still giving your brain the time that it needs.

And I do want to clarify. I am not a medical doctor. I do not have a medical degree. What I say about different ways to cope are coming from my personal experience. Just putting that out there. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: We're glad to hear what has worked for you, someone who's been there.

KATE: This is why I am as open about my health as I can be. Because I know what it is like to feel like I am the only person out there dealing with it. And there are millions of people dealing with stuff like this, and so I hope that me sharing my experience will help another reader out there.

ANNE: Well Kate, I can't wait to hear more about what you choose to read. Are you ready to talk about your books?

[00:19:58]

KATE: So ready.

ANNE: Readers, spring is finally here where I live. The daffodils are blooming, asparagus is in the stores, and the days of walking Daisy in 16-degree biting winds are GONE.

*But as the seasons change, I feel like I forget how to cook. Every spring when the weather warms up, Will and I look at each other and say, do YOU remember what we like to eat in the spring? Because *I* sure don't.*

Thankfully for us, PrepDish is on top of the changing seasons. PrepDish is the healthy, whole food based meal planning subscription that delivers weekly meal plans right to your inbox. Meal plans that keep me from aspirationally buying seasonal produce and then getting it home and realizing I don't have a clue what to DO with it.

With PrepDish, I just print out the shopping list, buy my ingredients, and then on prep day do all of the chopping, marinating, and mixing so that even on the busiest days, we can have dinner on the table in a flash. Dinners like Salt & Pepper drumsticks w/roasted mushrooms and asparagus, exactly the kind of thing spring vegetable I'd eagerly buy without knowing exactly what I was going to do with it.

I am especially thankful for PrepDish right now because I'm in a busy season—we're about to launch a new podcast, after all—and I don't have mental energy to spare to figure out what's for dinner. I'm happy that PrepDish is doing the deciding for me.

You too can take care of your meal planning for the whole year RIGHT NOW with a premium PrepDish subscription—no matter what diet fits your lifestyle—Paleo, Gluten Free, or even Keto.

If you're trying out the Keto diet this year—OR if you've been curious about Keto, you can now try it with PrepDish's Keto menu free for two weeks. Get recipes for meals and fat bombs, those high calorie snacks that keep your carb intake low.

With PrepDish, you shop once, prep once—Then enjoy delicious home cooked meals for the whole week in just 20-30 minutes a day.

Check out PrepDish.com/readnext for a free 2-week trial. Again, that's PrepDish.com/readnext.

Readers, we don't say should around here when it comes to your reading life, so I wouldn't tell you Tolstoy is a must-read, but many of you have said you aspire to read really thick Russian novels like War and Peace. And I would love to see you meet your personal reading goals.

If you're not sure where to jump in, begin with the Great Courses Plus. The Great Courses Plus is the streaming learning service that recruits some of the best college professors to teach in depth, relatable courses across a variety of fields.

Fields like astronomy, archaeology, foreign languages, and Russian literature.

I've learned so much from the great courses over the years and I'm sure you will too with this course from Professor Irwin Weil. Dr Weil covers the great names of Russian literature like Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Solzhenitsyn, but also the historical and cultural keystones that informed their work. Because if you're going to devote 800 pages of your reading life to War and Peace, you want to make sure it's worth your while. The Great Courses Plus can help you do just that.

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ANNE: Well, Kate, you know how this works. You are going to tell me three books you love, one book you don't, and what you're reading now, and we will talk about what you may enjoy reading next. Tell me about your first favorite.

[00:23:35]

KATE: *Outlander* as a whole, like the entire series.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] The whole 9,000 pages?

KATE: Thousands and thousands and thousands of pages. I love it. It holds a wide variety of things that I love individually. And in *Outlander*, they're all there. It's historical fiction, which is easily my favorite genre. Strong female characters and the female characters are a big variety of personalities and so it's not like strong female characters who are all the same. They are realistic. Women who do bad things. Women who do good things. Women who do in-between

things. It's really nice to see relatable and realistic women. And there also is of course a very powerful love story. There's also a lot of action in it.

For people who have never heard of *Outlander* before, a World War II nurse accidentally goes back in time to the 18th century in Scotland. She meets this Scottish highlander. She goes from trying to make her way back to the 20th century and running water and all that jazz to trying to exist in Scotland in the 18th century when she knows that there is war on the horizon.

The relationship between the English and the Scottish people, especially during the 18th century, was not awesome. Which is a vast understatement. As such, there is a lot of action in the series as a whole and in the first book. It hits on all of my big bullet points that I love.

[00:25:22]

ANNE: Well what's really hitting me is that you just called *Outlander*, several times, realistic and relatable, which is really fun for an 18th century time travel novel. But I hear what you're saying, and that's really interesting that you love historical fiction because when we talked to Mallory O'Meara and she chose *Outlander* for the book that didn't work for her, she said it was fine once she got to the 18th century, but what she really wanted to know was so how did those standing stones work? Tell me the mechanics of the portal. What's the physics of the situation? How does that all happen? And she said that was her area of interest, so I love that you know what your sweet spot is as a reader and that *Outlander* totally checks those boxes.

KATE: When I first read like the back of *Outlander* in a Barnes and Noble in 2013, like I just went this is it. This is everything I've waited for. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: All right. Are we taking a big step down with your next favorite? If *Outlander* has everything you want, how do you feel about your second favorite?

KATE: So my second favorite is *Six of Crows*. I really love it, but it's also extremely different. So *Six of Crows* is a YA heist book basically, set in a world where some people have magic. I love me a good heist movie. I don't read a ton of heist books, but I love, you know, the *Oceans* movies, etcetera. So I really enjoyed this book and it was one that took me a little bit to get into, but then once I was into it, I like sat in a chair and like didn't move for [ANNE LAUGHS] however long it took me to finish it.

One of the reasons why I really love it - there actually are disabled people in it. With my collection of chronic illnesses, I consider myself disabled. You know, disabled people are 20% of the population and yet they are so rarely in fiction, books, movies, that sort of thing. There are some disabled people in *Outlander*, which I appreciated because in the 18th century Scotland, it was extremely common for someone to have a leg amputated because they didn't have antibiotics in 18th century Scotland.

And in *Six of Crows*, there is a main character who has kind of an unlabeled thing where he uses a cane and he wears gloves. He doesn't like to talk about it, which plenty of people don't like to talk about their chronic illness or their disabilities. To each their own. But he inspires so much

fear in people that they 100% do not ask him about his disabilities because they know it will end badly for them. Which is kinda you know a nice thing as someone who regularly gets comments, both in person and online that say, what's wrong with you? I really appreciate that from him-

[00:28:23]

ANNE: Yeah.

KATE: 'Cause you know, sometimes I just want to be like ... I want to say, quite a bit, but that's none of your business or I want to say, what are you talking about? Everything's totally fine. [BOTH LAUGH] Which doesn't always go well when you're in a cast and using crutches, but after a little while, you don't really want to answer rude questions like that.

ANNE: Oh, I can imagine.

KATE: So I appreciated that in a main character.

ANNE: Kate, tell me about your final favorite.

KATE: Okay. We are headed back to historical fiction. *World Without End*, which is the second book in the Kingsbridge trilogy. A series that is all based in the same fictional town in England and so you don't need to read the first or the second book in order to read the third, etcetera. But *World Without End* is set in the 14th century, I believe. It follows a variety of people living their medieval lives and it's all based around this cathedral that was built in the first book. The cathedral now in the second book is a thriving center of the community. And what I really like about the Kingsbridge books is that they cover, I mean, as much as 50 plus years in a book.

Speaking of realistic, you get to follow these different characters for a prolonged period of time. It is, I will warn people, it is a very long book. Like *Outlander*, but I just ... got really engrossed in this world and I was reading it and I kept texting a friend of mine who had read it already my different thoughts. Like, oh my God, I can't believe this happened. I can't believe so-and-so did X. It was also one of those where I got to like the last 100 pages and just went oh no, there are only 100 pages left. What am I going to do when I finish this book? [ANNE LAUGHS] You know, like *Outlander*, I really felt connected to it because of the historical fiction and the realistic world. I also thought it was very interesting because during this long time period that the book covers, the plague comes to England.

Looking back on it, hundreds and hundreds of years later, we know generally how this illness got to England and how it spread, and you know, we know about germs now. But just so interesting to read about people who had no idea what was causing this illness that was wiping out the population. I don't know the stats of it, but the black plague took out, I want to say like 1 in 3 of the population. It was some ginormous percentage. Unprecedented. And one of the main characters was working in a healthcare capacity when this plague happened. And so it was very interesting to sort of see how the healthcare providers of the 14th century were reacting to this ridiculous illness.

[00:31:34]

ANNE: Oh, that sounds terrifying.

KATE: You know, I think it could be. If you do not like reading about death or bad things happening, *World Without End* is not for you. Because it is a very realistic book and so you know, there are characters who die.

ANNE: Kate, tell me about a book that was not for you.

KATE: I did not get along with *The Shadow of the Wind*.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] I like the way you put that.

KATE: [LAUGHS] Thanks. You know, on paper, *The Shadow of the Wind* seems to be everything that I would like. There is, you know, this mystery. It's historical fiction. There are strong relationships between different characters, but I think for me it was just a little too slow. I kept waiting and waiting to get excited about what it was talking about and to get attached, to really get into the meat of the story, and then eventually when I got to a point where I was avoiding reading, just said, okay, this is clearly a sign that I need to just stop reading this book altogether.

I am not opposed to giving this another go in the future. But it would have to be when my TBR stack is a little smaller. I think I would listen to it maybe sped up a bit. The audiobook does a really good job of using sound and the narrator to set the setting, but I think maybe part of that is why I had difficulty getting into it. Because it was slow and kinda romantic voice, but I think it was too much for me.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Like they were signing you a lullaby.

KATE: [LAUGHS] Yes. Exactly.

ANNE: I'm saying this as someone who really enjoyed *The Shadow of the Wind*, the plot is not super strong in that book and you have explicitly said that you like books that are action packed. There does seem to be a gap there.

KATE: That would explain why I just couldn't get into it.

ANNE: I think it's wonderful and readers can say, this is for me, and this is not, but it's also kinda fun to take a second chance on things sometimes.

KATE: Absolutely. You know, in a year or two, when I am in a different stage of life or have stopped buying books at a ridiculous pace [BOTH LAUGH] It might be another one that I pick up.

ANNE: Do you see that happening in a year or two, you're going to stop buying books at a ridiculous pace?

[00:34:03]

KATE: Oh, gosh. Anne, you know, I can't lie. Probably not. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: What are you reading right now, Kate?

KATE: *Small Great Things* by Jodi Picoult. You know she is such a good writer. I have been reading her books since I was in high school and I've read most of them. The story is breaking my heart as I'm reading but I don't want to stop reading it. [ANNE LAUGHS] 'Cause I want to find out what happens so that my heart won't be broken.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Just take it, Jodi. Take it.

KATE: It is a book told from a variety of perspectives. About a situation where a black nurse helps take care of a white baby who happens to be the child of extremely racist parents. You know, one of them has a swastika tattoo, and unfortunately this baby dies. The nurse, Ruth, is in the tough situation where she stopped caring for this baby because the racist parents didn't want her touching their baby, but then if she had gone against their wishes, could she have saved this baby?

There are so many layers to a situation like this. We hear a lot more about all of their different backgrounds. How these things influence who they are when this happens. It is ... I think one of the more heartbreaking of Jodi Picoult's books.

I've read others with similarly heartbreaking scenarios that the book is structured around, but again it's so well written and it's so fascinating I just ... I can't stop reading it.

ANNE: Kate, what I'm noticing about that is it's not historical. It's not YA. It would be slotted as contemporary fiction in the bookstore, so that's a place you're willing to go.

KATE: It is.

ANNE: 'Cause I have something in mind but I wasn't sure if it would fit in with your favorites.

KATE: If I'm in a physical bookstore, I am going to look in historical fiction first, but I'm also going to look in the YA and the contemporary sections.

ANNE: Okay. That door's wide open. That just cracked like you did with *Shadow in the Wind*.

KATE: Exactly.

ANNE: Is there anything you want to be different in your reading life?

[00:36:14]

KATE: Like many readers, I would love to read more. [ANNE LAUGHS] I would also love ... this would hopefully help you a little bit. I would also love to branch out a little bit because I do read a lot of historical fiction. I don't want to miss out on good books that are out there because I'm mostly looking at historical fiction.

ANNE: Okay. Well for issue one, we'll put your time turner in the mail. [KATE LAUGHS] And for issue two, we'll see what we can do. And I've been thinking about a book, that's on my desk. I'm holding it in my hand right now. I wasn't sure if it would check all your boxes, but maybe we will go for it.

KATE: It might.

ANNE: Readers, ThirdLove's goal is for you to wear the perfect fitting bra. ThirdLove uses data points generated by millions of women who have taken their Fit Finder quiz, to design bras with breast size and shape in mind for a perfect fit and premium feel.

The Fit Finder quiz is just a few simple questions that only takes 60 seconds. But if you're not convinced this easy tool will get exactly what you need. ThirdLove's team of expert Fit Stylists are available everyday to help via text, chat, or phone.

ThirdLove is committed to giving you the most comfortable bra you've ever worn. So committed that they give you 60 days to wear it, wash it, and put it to the test, and if you don't love it, just return it and ThirdLove will wash it and donate it to a woman in need.

These bras really have been the most comfortable ones I wear. In fact, these days they're the ONLY ones I wear, because I keep replacing my worn-out bras from other brands with Third Love bras.

ThirdLove knows there's a perfect bra for everyone. So right now they're offering my listeners 15% off your first order. Go to ThirdLove.com/ReadNext now to find your perfect fitting bra. And get 15% off your first purchase. That's ThirdLove.com/ReadNext for 15% off today.

ANNE: So you love *Outlander*, *Six of Crows*, a YA heist kind of story. It's fantasy. And then Ken Follett's *World Without End*, 14th century historical fiction. And *Shadow in the Wind* was not for you. Despite having a lot of elements you like, we think it maybe lacked the action that really makes you want to pick up a book and read it. And then you've been reading Jodi Picoult's *Small Great Things*. Okay, so here's what I'm noticing. You've used the words realistic and relatable repeatedly while talking about books that contain things that can't happen in real life. So I'm noticing that while you really like the things that are supposed to be accurate to be accurate, you like fantasy as a genre. We can be open to that.

[00:38:40]

KATE: Yes.

ANNE: All your picks are long, Kate. That's good to know that you're not afraid to go there 'cause some readers get nervous. I mean I'm nervous for your shoulder, but we can tell [KATE LAUGHS] that you can manage when and where to read even the 900 pagers. And you're not afraid of books that are complex. Many characters that unfold over many years.

KATE: If I open a book and there's a list of characters and how they're related and/or a map, I'm excited.

ANNE: Ohhh.

KATE: However, if I am looking at this same book and it's only 300 pages, but it needs a list of cast of characters, I'm a little weary.

ANNE: All right. I'm ready. Are you ready?

KATE: Okay. Yes.

ANNE: Let's start with historical fantasy. Have you read *The Gilded Wolves* by Roshani Chokshi?

KATE: No.

ANNE: Ooh. Now your historical picks have gone waaay back in time and this one only goes back like 130, 140 years. Is that okay?

KATE: Yeah.

ANNE: 'Cause you're branching out.

KATE: Exactly.

ANNE: This is a historical fantasy. It's a YA book. It's set in 1899 Paris and when you said Ocean's 11 and we know you like *Six of Crows*, this one popped into my mind because it also features a group of friends who come together who are sort of outcasts, sorta misfits. They've never found their place in the world until they've found these people who all share that one thing in common.

It's set in ... Just right at the turn of century Paris in 1899. There's also a bit of a treasure hunt in this story as much as on their relationships. And there is a romance here. It's very understated, though I think it's very strong as well. I'm imagining that you like to see strong relationships of any stripe among your characters. Is that fair?

[00:40:19]

KATE: Yeah. That's not usually why I'm reading a book, but I definitely like to see it.

ANNE: How about we'll call these strong, well developed characters?

KATE: Yes.

ANNE: They have something to prove and something to accomplish. They all have their own gifts, and some are gifts are 100% realistic. Yes, that could happen to a person in the real world. And some are fantastical, made up. But I think they're persuasive. I like that the parts that are suppose to be authentic, belle époque Paris, actual historical facts that this is built around work. But also the imagined stuff is also believable and slips right into the story. And it's a really interesting cast of characters. They're fun to read about and also it's an adventure like *Six of Crows* or *Ocean's 11*. How does that sound to you?

KATE: That sounds great.

ANNE: Ooh, you know what else? I don't want it to sound like history class, okay? But they also do deal with things like colonialism and its effects and the idea of cultural appropriation and I think as someone who does have a master in literature, that's not done heavy handed but it is present and I think you'll enjoy seeing the characters and the author wrestle with those things on the page.

KATE: You are 100% correct.

ANNE: Fantastic. That is *The Gilded Wolves* by Roshani Chokshi.

KATE: Okay.

ANNE: And it's gorgeous. Not that a book has to be beautiful to capture your attention, but I mean, you're not going to complain about it, right?

KATE: Oh, you are completely correct about that.

ANNE: All right. This is the one that I wasn't so sure about. We're going to sandwich this between the ones that I think are more in your comfort zone.

KATE: Okay.

[00:41:55]

ANNE: There's a book coming out on April 2nd. I just finished reading the advance review copy myself, so it's sitting right here on my desk. It's by Nell Freudenberger. It's called *Lost And Wanted*. Is this a book you know anything about?

KATE: No.

ANNE: The premise of this one really got me and made me want to pick it up. It's set in the world of academia. So our protagonist Helen is a physics professor and she has a friend, long lost is probably an exaggeration, but she had a friend who was incredibly important to her earlier in her life. But they drifted apart a little bit and they haven't spoken in several years at the time that her friend dies.

After her friend dies, Helen starts getting calls and texts from her phone. It's a very interesting set up for a protagonist who deals in space and time and specifically quantum physics. Something you hear a lot is that the very nature of observing things brings them into being. Maybe there is no past and future. There's only a million presences. More than a million. I don't know how physicists would say that. [KATE LAUGHS] But wherever Charlie is, she's still living in the present and there is no future or past to her. So these are ideas they wrestle with.

As the story goes on, you come to learn more about Charlie from the people who knew her best. Specifically her husband and her parents. And what we find out is that Charlie had lupus and it went from being an inconvenience to something that overtook her life. And I know people who have lupus who don't like to discuss their illness so candidly and I don't blame them for that. But seeing the way this was portrayed on the page, the realities of the illness ... Charlie dies at the very beginning of the book. Like that is the inciting incident in here. So she's not speaking for herself, but the people who love her are speaking about her experience. And words you hear a lot are, "No, you don't know what it was really like for her. Let me tell you."

So she's not speaking with her own voice but her experiences are being relayed. And I remember thinking as I read this is not something you see a lot in fiction. I wonder with your comments that you don't see disabled people or people struggling with chronic illness a lot on the page in fiction, if this might be an interesting novel for you. But I wouldn't say that if it didn't have other things to recommend it to you. So it's a contemporary novel about people whose relationships have become fraught, who need to decide whether or not they wish to find their way back to each other, and people who are brought into people's orbits in unusual ways whether or not there is a future for those relationships as well. How does that sound?

KATE: That sounds really interesting. A lot of people don't know this, but lupus is under the arthritis umbrella. There are a hundred different conditions that fall under this umbrella and because of conventions and that sort of thing, I've met a lot of people with lupus. You know, I don't know if you ever watch the show House.

ANNE: Yes!

[00:44:43]

KATE: But he was constantly like, oh! Must be lupus. And he was ... very rarely actually lupus. [ANNE LAUGHS] The only reason a lot of people know the name of that disease. So I'm definitely going to check out this book because I would love it if the world was getting a book with representation of this illness.

ANNE: I think it's important to say and I don't think it's a spoiler, Charlie's story is not a happy one.

KATE: Yeah. I figure if people are saying, "No, you don't know what it was like for her," that's usually not a sign that everything was hunky dory.

ANNE: No. But I don't think as readers of fiction or people in our actual lives who know people with chronic illness are saying, oh, I don't want to hear about it if it's not nice. I mean that's not the way to be as a reader or a person.

KATE: Right. Exactly.

ANNE: And now. Now I want to pick out a big, juicy historical novel for you.

KATE: Ooh.

ANNE: I don't know. What do you like, Kate? What's your favorite period of history?

KATE: Oh my goodness. This is not very helpful. [ANNE LAUGHS] Before 1700 generally.

ANNE: How do you feel about War of the Roses? Have you read anything by Sharon Kay Penman?

KATE: Not everything, but a lot. Oh my gosh. I love her.

ANNE: Okay. So I am on the right track. I was thinking *The Sunne in Splendour*.

KATE: That was the very first book I ever read by her.

ANNE: Okay.

KATE: I love that book. It's interesting. As someone who studied a lot of Shakespeare in college and graduate school, because I read this, *The Sunne in Splendour*, before I read the play *Richard the Third*, it completely shaped my view of him in that play.

[00:46:14]

ANNE: Well what you're talking about is in *Richard the Third*, he's a monster and Sharon Kay Penman is extremely sympathetic. In the same way that Josephine Tey was in *The Daughter of Time*.

KATE: Yes.

ANNE: He's not the kind of man who would have murdered his nephews.

KATE: One of the greatest historical mysteries out there is what happened to them and Shakespeare *Richard the Third* and *The Sunne of Splendour* show two very different versions of this man.

ANNE: Well let's stick with that time period.

KATE: Okay.

ANNE: This one is a little much for a lot of people, but other readers love it and I think with your background there's reason to think you would be one of them. And we're going to stick with Tudor England. Have you read *Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel?

KATE: No, I have not.

ANNE: Oh, do you know about it?

KATE: I do know about it.

ANNE: Okay. So the length is not going to scare you off. It's a Booker Prize winner, which some people take for code for, oh, that's too literary for me, but you have a MA in literature. You're going to be fine. But I like this because it is a substantial, realistic and meticulously research, but fictional take on Tudor England during the era of Cromwell.

The parts that are supposed to be realistic are realistic and her notes and her interviews about her process are amazing. Her portrayals of her characters are very sympathetic. It's character driven. It's complex in a way that it feels like the story needs and not just making it complicated and hard to follow. It is a little bit leisurely in setting up the story, but I think because ... I'm assuming you know a ton about history, you're naturally interested in this subject, you don't need to be sold on it. I don't think that's going to be a challenge for you. And she's funny. So I think it's realistic in the way that you like your historical fiction to be realistic, but she fills in the blanks with her imagined dialogue in a way that makes it really spring to life. How does that sound to you?

KATE: That sounds awesome. I don't think I have gone more than a year without reading a book about someone in the Tudor dynasty in over ten years. [BOTH LAUGH]

[00:48:15]

ANNE: Great. We've got your book taken care of for 2019. Call me next year if you need another one.

KATE: Perfect.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] All right. Kate, today we talked about *The Gilded Wolves* by Roshani Chokshi, *Lost And Wanted* by Nell Freudenberger, and *Wolf Hall* by Hilary Mantel. Of those three books, what do you think you'll read next?

KATE: I think I'm going to have to be extremely on brand and go with *Wolf Hall*. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: I love the sound of that. Thanks so much for talking books with me today.

KATE: Thank you for having me.

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers, I hope you enjoyed my discussion with Kate, and I'd love to hear what YOU think she should read next. That page is at whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/177 (that's 1-7-7) and it's where you'll find the full list of titles we talked about today. You can hear more from Kate about her reading life and chronic illness at katethealmostgreat.com.

Speaking of education and annotation, next week, Emily Freeman of The Next Right Thing podcast is joining me to chat about the pros and cons of reading on a deadline...

[00:49:25]

EMILY: But let me tell you, you're exactly right. As soon as it becomes assigned, it's like my inner 10th grader rebels. It's like wait, what do you mean I have to read this book? You know it kinda changes the experience a little bit. And what I've discovered was it forces me to read at a pace that I'm not as comfortable with. You have to read it by a certain time because if you don't, then you can't write the paper. Reading like a student is different because you know you're going to have to retain it and then be able to reflect upon it with some sense of smarts. [BOTH LAUGH]

I mean I've learned a lot. It forces you to learn, but it's also work, so I have to take notes differently. I have to pay attention differently. My brain doesn't always work that quickly. It is becoming quicker though. It's definitely a learned skill, as far as making connections quickly and then drawing conclusions. I tend to like kick rocks and dottle sometimes. Being a student has helped me to pick up the pace a little bit and I think that's been good for me.

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

[00:50:20]

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Thanks to the people who make this show happen! What Should I Read Next is produced by Brenna Frederick, with sound design by Kellen Pechacek. Readers, that's it for this episode. Thanks so much for listening. And as Rainer Maria Rilke said, "ah, how good it is to be among people who are reading." Happy reading, everyone.