



**WSIRN Episode 185: What should you read this summer?**  
*Hosted by Anne Bogel, with producer Brenna Frederick*

[CHEERFUL INTRO MUSIC]

[00:00:07]

ANNE: Hey readers, I'm Anne Bogel and this is What Should I Read Next? Episode 185.

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 most weeks, I do a little literary matchmaking with one guest. But this week, I'm joined by What Should I Read Next producer, Brenna Frederick, to hook several What Should I Read Next listeners up with their perfect summer read. You wrote in, you called in, you commented enthusiastically about the bookish vibes you wanted to fill your summer with and oh, wow, do I have recommendations for you.

Let's get to it.

Brenna, welcome to the podcast.

BRENNA: Great to be here again. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Well thank you for joining me for a very special summer reading episode. This is at least our third summer reading episode. Maybe our fourth.

BRENNA: I know, and I don't think I've ever been on a summer reading episode before.

ANNE: This is exciting times then. We have been talking about this and we solicited a lot of summer reading questions and feedback from our listeners, who sent in voicemails and emails, and from our patreon community, who left amazing comments. Around here, we are full of bookish enthusiasm for summer reading season.

If you're a reader, it really is the best time of the year.

[00:01:44]

BRENNA: This was the most submissions we've ever gotten for any audience participation episode in history of What Should I Read Next, I think. So there's your proof. Like people are really pumped about summer reading.

ANNE: Well that is very exciting. Okay, we're going to get into the history of the guide, but let me just say: I have been doing this since 2012. Some years, since the time around maybe 2014, when I started sharing newer releases and not heavy, heavy backlist. Some years I have been concerned that I might not find enough books that I enjoyed enough to include in the guide. But 2019, we are rolling in good titles.

There's so many to choose from. I had a very difficult time narrowing it down, which is a nice problem to have, but still like, ugh, talk about bookish anxiety.

BRENNA: You showed me a picture of the long list you had and all the things that you had to scratch out. I was like, oh, it's going to be a good year for the guide.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] I don't remember that.

BRENNA: So I haven't been around since 2012, and since I work on the podcast, not the blog, I don't actually know that much about the history of the summer reading guide.

ANNE: So you are here to learn, is what you're saying?

BRENNA: I am here to learn.

ANNE: I started blogging in 2011 and I didn't set out to start a book blog or a blog that was very heavy in literary content, but very quickly I realized this is what I enjoy talking about and I started finding readers who were very excited about books and reading. And actually, it was Will who was on episode 61, and who incidentally I'm thinking about having back because he is having his best reading year ever by a mile, and he's made some very specific changes and I think that'd be a fascinating conversation. He said, you're excited about books and reading, you looove summer reading. You take summer reading more seriously than anybody I know, what if you did a summer reading guide to kick off the summer season? And I thought, well, that sounds fun.

So that is when it started. And the first couple years, I did some new releases that had already been published, that I already read. Some old books that were five to 20 years old that I thoroughly enjoyed and thought would be the kind of thing that I would love to read on a road

trip, at the beach, at the pool, in the backyard. And then some books that were coming out that season that I hadn't yet read, but was excited about.

A few years later, here's where we ended up. I talk about backlist all the time and as I started reading more and more new and newer books, and that's because I started getting more comfortable with contemporary fiction, something I felt very, very uncertain of how to choose books I would actually enjoy, when I first started blogging. But I've learned a lot over the years.

And something else that happened was I found that some of those books I put in the guide because I was so excited about reading them, some from authors that I knew and I trusted, well, the books were published and I actually got my hands on them, and I read them, and went oh no. [LAUGHS] This is not good. And I recommended it! To all those people in my summer reading guide. That established the rules I now follow, and that is: I share books published recently.

Although this year's guide 2019 does have the broadest time range we ever had before. There's some books published in December 2018, which I've never done before. There was one title I wanted to read in book club this summer and then there's another title that I read and I loved and I thought would be perfect for summer. And I didn't see it anywhere. I still haven't seen it anywhere. It's not on bookstagram. People aren't reviewing it. At least, not in my circles, so I really wanted to share it this year.

And then there's so many good titles coming out in late July, which I usually don't include late July books in the guide. I usually cut it off around the fourth, but they're too good, and they're great for summer. So I'm just squeezing them in because for better or worst, I make the rules.

[00:05:31]

BRENNA: So what I'm hearing is that this year, we are rich with books.

ANNE: We are rich.

Oh, and something else I should say is that when I started blogging, I don't think publishers were as free with review copies just to regular people, NetGalley wasn't nearly as established, but also now as I have become established as somebody who talks about books, it's easier for me to get my hands on those early copies. So I think that is something worth saying. So when you hear me say I've read every book in this guide, and some of them don't come out until July, publishers are graciously allowing me to read these early so that I can help you narrow down your summer reading options.

Because even though this guide is bigger than ever this year, there's still thousands of titles that are going to be published in this time window, and there are only 30 in the guide. Although as always, we do have the five book minimum list summer reading guide if 30 is just way too many for you to choose from.

[00:06:23]

BRENNA: I want to rewind just a second. You said that Will said that you take summer reading more seriously than anyone else he knows, and you've been doing that since before it was your job to pay attention to summer reading. What's so special about summer reading to you?

ANNE: In the conversations I have with people in my neighborhood, [LAUGHS] people in my friend group, people online, culturally, we get more excited about reading in these late spring, early summer months as a society than we do at any other time of the year. I think books and reading are on people's radar more this time of year, and that's true of regular readers who take packing their books more seriously than packing their clothes for any travel they may be doing this season. But also for people who hardly ever read in their regular lives. When summer comes around, and NPR starts talking about summer reading, they start thinking, ah! Now would be a great time to read a book for the first time since last August. And I just really love how we all turn our thoughts to reading. Of course I want to think it's all, it's not really all, but we all turn our thoughts to reading this time of year.

And something else I really like about summer reading is that whether or not you're a student or a teacher or in some way directly affected by the rhythms of the school year, in a big surprise to me, when I graduated from college and yet didn't have kids, was to discover how much the rhythms of everyone's life are affected by the rhythms of the school year. Events stop and they start and the days get longer.

I think for many of us, summer is a unique time of year. It looks the least like the other three seasons. So it's a long enough amount of time that we can really think like, oh, how many books am I going to read in this season? And what will they be? We can really let our readerly imaginations run wild.

However, it's short enough that we want to use that time carefully. I think this time of year, many people who don't pick up books regularly, also are inspired to pick up a novel for a vacation or just to sit outside and read because it's lovely or to take to the pool or on a trip. I want to celebrate that. I think summer reading can be a great doorway to people who aren't regular readers yet, but we hope to win them over.

BRENNA: I feel like everyone turns their thoughts to recreation in summer and reading is recreation. It's a thing.

ANNE: Oh, it's a real thing.

BRENNA: It's not all kayaking and tennis. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: No, I don't advise combining the two activities actually.

[00:08:48]

BRENNA: So, something that I noticed when I was going through all the submissions, preparing for today's episode, was how different summer reading looks for different kinds of people. Some people, they get time off of work, maybe for vacation, and they really want something light and fluffy. They want to give their brains a break from, you know, work.

But other people, they take that recreation time when they don't have work weighing on them. And they really want to take the opportunity to chew on something maybe more challenging. And it just seems really beautiful to me that we all have different needs and desires out of our summer reading, but we still get to unite around that feeling of having a good summer read.

ANNE: Yes. I loved reading through the submissions. It seemed many people are looking for a change of pace in this season. What that looks like for individual readers varies wildly. And I love that and really want to celebrate that here.

So you know, week after week, we're trying to give you reading recommendations across the spectrum of interest and genre and appeals factor, if you want to talk about in a reader's advisory kind of sense. And I try to reflect that in the guide as well. I mean, the summer reading guide doesn't just have covers with pale blue sky and turquoise water and then a strip of sand. [BRENNA LAUGHS] And not just because we do love and adore our friends in the southern hemisphere, a summer read is a book you read in the summer.

And I really want to celebrate that. But I also think that summer is too short to spend your time fumbling around trying to find a great read. So the summer reading guide, my hope is that it's a shortcut to help you find the good stuff for your reading list this season.

BRENNA: And there will be a link to the summer reading guide in the show notes for this episode, which you can find at [whatshoudireadnextpodcast.com/185](http://whatshoudireadnextpodcast.com/185). And I think we've made them wait long enough, should we recommend some books?

ANNE: Let's do it.

BRENNA: Okay. So first here's a voicemail from listener, Georgia.

[00:10:53]

GEORGIA: I recently finished *Evvie Drake Starts Over* by Linda Holmes, I think it is, and I just thought it was such a good romcom because the characters are actual adults and they didn't make like silly mistakes that you're just kinda screaming at them to quit doing the entire book. So it was such a refreshing, sweet book about a woman who is starting over as the title suggests and I'd love to get more books like this.

I also just finished *The Bookshop on the Corner*, that was another one that I thought was really sweet and had a great love story but was also about a young woman growing up and kinda stepping out on her own.

So I'd love more books that have strong adult characters that don't do obviously silly things even though they may make mistakes, and that also has a bigger purpose beyond just a love story.

[00:11:42]

ANNE: Georgia, first of all, let me say, I completely agree. I hate that feeling of reading this kind of romantic comedy that you're talking about where you're like, um, if you two just had an actual conversation, [BRENNNA LAUGHS] there would be no plot anymore. It would all dissolve and you're making me, ugh. Just clench up as I read. And I hear you about *Evvie Drake Starts Over*. That is actually in the summer reading guide, so this is the debut novel from Linda Holmes, who you may know as the host of the Pop Culture Happy Hour. I'll let you read the details in the guide, but basically two people each dealing with their own junk are brought together in improbable circumstances and forage a friendship. And maybe something more, but you'll have to read it to find out.

And if you do like this kind of book that is, as you said, refreshing and sweet, about starting over, I would love to put more books on your list. Two authors spring to mind that I think would scratch that itch that you're describing. Strong adult characters that don't do obviously silly things even though they remain human. I would check out the works of Marisa de los Santos. You might want to start at the beginning with *Love Walked In*. It's a good one. She does have a loose series, it doesn't need to be read in order. Her most recent book and summer reading guide pick was *I'll Be Your Blue Sky*.

Also the work of Louise Miller. She has two books out so far. The first is *The City Baker's Guide to Country Living*. I think I would start there, um, a woman starting over with baked goods in a small town. And *The Late Bloomer's Club* is also quite delightful.

BRENNNA: And next we have an email from Raeleen, who is the wife of guest from episode 127, Jordan Bradley.

ANNE: And I got to meet my friend Raeleen in Olympia, Washington at Browsers Books when I was on book tour, which was a delight. Hi, Raeleen.

BRENNNA: I was there too and it was so fun to meet her. Okay, Raeleen says: "I want summer reads to be engaging and exciting but not fluffy. I like thrillers, but prefer the dark and twisty ones like Robert Galbraith and Tana French. And frankly, I've been a little disappointed in the thrillers I've read recently. I like good stories with good characters that draw you in, but I've been in a rut of three to four star reads for like a year and a half and really want more five star books in my life. I'm pretty choosy about the five star rating. A book has to be fantastic to get five stars

from me, but my five star reads from this year so far are *Bury Your Dead* by Louise Penny, *The Library Book* by Susan Orlean, and *Four Seasons in Rome* by Anthony Doerr."

[00:14:19]

ANNE: Okay, Raeleen, first of all, I totally hear you in being disappointed in the recent selection of thrillers. And there's really not much in that genre in this year's guide, but there are a few and they're good, but I'm going to let you choose most of them for yourself. Also I want to say, this thing about the five star rating, I totally hear you. We want all our books to blow us away, right? I don't know it works like that, though. Brenna, does it work like that?

BRENNA: Um, no, I don't think so.

ANNE: I mean if you consistently read five star reads, then how does anything ... I guess every book is special in its own way.

BRENNA: Yeah, there would be inflation. [ANNE LAUGHS] There's going to be six star reads and seven star reads.

ANNE: Oh, and I will say that I went through a loong period of months where I felt like I had read a lot of books I liked and very few that I loved. Oh, I want more books to blow me away. And that brings us to my first like seven star book in a long time. It's *The River* by Peter Heller. It's not brand, brand new. It came out in March. Oh, it was so good. It hooked me from the very beginning and the opening line is something like, "on the second day, they smelt smoke." Which is the first hint that these two college boys, they're Dartmouth students, they are taking this leisurely adventurous, canoeing and fly fishing and reading books in the boat trip down the river to the Hudson Bay. They're in northern Canada. They have long planned for this outdoorsy adventure. But when they smell smoke, that's the first hint that there is danger on the horizon. But it far from the last. [SIGHS]

So I think you can really fall in love with these characters because they're two college kids, one is from Colorado, a rancher's son, one is from Vermont, he grew up in a bookish family, and they bonded in school over their mutual love of reading. One is more of a realist and one is very gentle and they just have this really wonderful relationship.

The prose is so gorgeous and lyrical and well crafted. And they are on the river, so even though it's an action adventure, there's something very calming about the natural setting. This book combines things that I don't think of as going together. It's an action adventure. It's a lyrical mystery. It's also this really touching story of friendship. Oh, I was so nervous for these boys. And mostly, my friend Raeleen, I want you to read it and tell me what you think.

BRENNA: While you were talking, I was on my library website putting a hold on the downloadable audiobook because that sounds right up my alley.

ANNE: We tell people not to do that, Brenna.

BRENNA: I'm sorry! [LAUGHS] I know.

[00:16:50]

ANNE: I couldn't hear you typing. [LAUGHS]

BRENNA: See, I hold the editing key, I can kinda do what I want, but that's beside the point. [LAUGHS] Let's move on to this comment from Danielle, who's a patron, and Danielle says: "The last two books I loved are *Becoming* by Michelle Obama and *House of Dreams: The Life of L. M. Montgomery* by Liz Rosenberg, which is pretty interesting since I don't usually read nonfiction. I love fiction, historical fiction, and anything set in England. I also really enjoy beautiful descriptions."

ANNE: Ooh. I can work with that. So the book I have in mind for you, historical fiction, anything set in England, beautiful descriptions, is a January 2019 release that kinda flew under the radar. It's called *The Orphan of Salt Winds*. It's by Elizabeth Brooks. It's set in England. It begins in 1939 when a 10-year-old orphan arrives at Salt Winds. This is a childless couple's home on the edge of a beautiful, but dangerous marsh in rural England. And it's the story of what is not quite right in this family. What kind of situation this 10-year-old girl stepping into? What kind of hazards, again, echoing *The River*, of the human and natural variety are just in the distance.

Brooks does such an incredible job creating this like really creepy gothic atmosphere. It's not a plot-driven book, but if a book could be driven by the setting, this one is. Oh, it's just atmospheric. Just thinking about it, I feel wrapped up in the fog that I experienced when I was reading there. I mean, the literal fog rolling off the marsh. I think you might really enjoy it.

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BRENNNA: All right. And next we have a voicemail from Melanie.

[00:21:51]

MELANIE: Two books I read recently that I loved are *The Great Believers* by Rebecca Makkai and *Everything I Never Told You* by Celeste Ng. *The Great Believers*, I adored that book. I adore the characters, even when they were breaking my heart. It was one of those books where you see what's about to happen, you know what's going to happen, but you still hold out hope that everything's going to be okay. And I felt the same way about *Everything I Never Told You*.

I loved the family so much in that book and I really was hoping for their healing. I wanted to hug everybody. [LAUGHS] And reading those two books made me realize that I need books that are plot-driven and have characters that I love and I want to care for. And it's really hard for me to read books about people I don't like. So that means I don't care reading about rich people, or about a bunch of privileged white men. I want family dramas where everybody is just kinda mean to each other.

So this summer I'm looking for books that are more like *The Great Believers* and *Everything I Never Told You* where I just love the family and the characters, the people in the book. I just really want to take care of them and I hope the best for them. So that's something I'm looking for this summer.

ANNE: Melanie, I love the way you described those. You love books that are character-driven, that have characters that you love and want to care for. I can tell that you're okay with the books having heavy themes, and also being on the long side. That's okay with you and I think that there are some family sagas and literary fiction that are coming out this summer that is going to make you very happy.

The first book that springs to mind is coming out May 28th, it's by Mary Beth Keane. *Ask Again, Yes*. If you love a good dysfunctional family story, oh this is so good, but I have to tell you when I started reading it, I thought, I can see that Keane is an incredible storyteller, but oh, this is so hard to read. Like all these terrible things are happening to these people that I really care about and this isn't just a bunch of rich people or privileged white men. This is the story of two families that become extractibly bound together from shortly after the two fathers meet in the New York City police academy. They would see themselves as regular people, just trying to make it, in a difficult world.

So really hard things happen in this book and triggers abound if you're a sensitive reader, you may just want to look into things. But I was so interested in seeing what would happen next between them. The way they're brought together, the bond between the families, is so powerful and ineludible even though one family may very much [LAUGHS] wish that they had gotten out while they still had a chance. I don't want to spoil anything. I would be very careful reading reviews about this just because I think so much of the reading experience is seeing how life can change on you so quickly and wow does it change in the pages of this book.

I wasn't sure if I was going to keep reading it or enjoy reading it, probably for the first 75%, but I couldn't believe what the author did in the last 75 pages. Totally vaulted it to like my best books I've read this year list. I do love a good redemption story and this novel delivers. So we go to deep, dark places, but Keane doesn't leave you there. Grace, forgiveness, redemption, this novel checks all those boxes.

And Melanie, I noticed that you included novels and only novels, but when you talk about how you want characters you can root for and books that are character-driven, I really loved Lori Gottlieb's nonfiction book *Maybe You Should Talk to Someone*. This is in the guide. It came out in April, and I enjoyed Gottlieb's take on a subject that I thought I kinda understood in her first book *Marry Him* that came out a little less than ten years ago. And I wondered what she had done in the meantime. And the answer is she became a psychotherapist, so this book is really unusual because it's a little bit memoir, but it's an education to the reader on what it's like to be in and to be the one giving talk therapy. And I just found the behind the scenes take on this is fascinating.

But the reason we're talking about right now is that you want to see characters that you love and want to care for. In this book, Gottlieb goes to therapy herself, and that's a real interesting twist on the professional narrative that we often get from people when they're writing about their work. She also takes us on a journey with four individual patients she sees in her profession, and they're all dealing with their own junk. They all have their own issues, and they all have their own breakthroughs working with her. But oh, in every chapter, I was just leaning forward, going like oh, what are they going to do next? I was so concerned for and rooting so hard for her patients.

if you enjoy a good story, this is a great book for you. But if you're also one of those readers who really likes to feel like you learned something in the process of reading a great book, this would be an excellent choice.

[00:26:27]

BRENNNA: That's such a funny choice for somebody who loves *Everything I Never Told You* because the year I read *Everything I Never Told You* was my favorite book of that year. I cried during it. I almost never cry when I read books, but I remember very clearly, thinking oh, these characters, I want them to be okay. They really need to go therapy. [BOTH LAUGH]

All right. Let's pivot to an email. This email is from Paula.

"I would love to read something this summer that was a book of its time. Such as *The Thorn Birds*, or *All The President's Men* in the 1970s. Something that impacted its culture and what everybody was reading. I so remembered seeing the orange jacket of *The Thorn Birds* and paperbacks of Benchley's *Jaws* in many friends' houses growing up. All that said, it has to be a solid read and nothing that is fluff or vapid or trite."

[00:27:24]

ANNE: So you mentioned two titles from the '70s. Let's go to the '80s with *The Shell Seekers* by Rosamunde Pilcher. This book came out in 1987 and I was a kid in 1987 and I still remembered seeing it everywhere. It had a very distinct cover. I'm not sure if it wasn't a good cover, Brenna, or if it just didn't age well.

But this book was number one on the New York Times Bestseller list for more than half the year. It was a BBC top 100 novel. I mean, this book certainly counts as a cultural phenomenon. I am pleased to say that while the 1980s cover may not have held up, the book itself has.

Rosamunde Pilcher has written four different books set in different seasons, and summer is obviously a great time to go to *The Shell Seekers*. So what Pilcher does so well is she tells family stories that are focused on relationships and how people's past lives influence their present situation. When the story opens, we have an older woman, I think she's in her 60s. She's just a medical scare. She's just gotten out of the hospital, but that event is a launching off point for her to look back over what has unfolded in her family over the course of her life.

Pilcher is also one who writes characters whose lives you get wrapped in, that you really want to root for.

BRENNNA: Okay, so I have a question. What do you think is a book like that? Like a book of its time for this decade.

ANNE: That is such a good question. For this decade-

BRENNNA: And what makes it that book? Like is it just content? Is it a mix of content and that cover that you remember on somebody's coffee table?

ANNE: I want to say it's not the visual, but maybe I just want to. That doesn't make it true. [BRENNNA LAUGHS] When I think about modern classics, something like *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver comes to mind. That was 1998. But we have so much more perspective. I'm really wondering about a book like *All The Light We Cannot See*. So it's a Pulitzer winner, so it'll keep being on those lists, and people will read it because it is one, but I think even without that, I can see it being the kind of book people come back to.

I also think maybe a book like *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

BRENNNA: I was kinda thinking about *Americanah*.

ANNE: Were you? That makes me so happy.

BRENNNA: Yes.

[00:29:41]

ANNE: If you're thinking it, and I'm thinking it, then maybe we're both right and the whole world wins.

BRENNNA: All of you have to tell us in the comments. [ANNE LAUGHS]

Whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/185, tell us what you think is going to be that iconic book or just that iconic cover for the 20-teens.

Okay, next we have a patreon comment from Sierra: "I've been trying to diversify my reading lately while also tackling an ever growing TBR. However, one category I'm struggle with is thriller and mystery. The past couple of years, I've read some Agatha Christie, love, and several thrillers with unreliable narrators. Overdone and over it. [ANNE LAUGHS] I would love some recommendations in this realm, preferably without a lot of gore."

ANNE: Oh, yeah. Okay you got it. There's some good stuff coming out this summer. Agatha Christie makes me think let's go for a classic mystery. Kate Atkinson has a new one coming out in June this year. It's called *Big Sky*. I saw the title of her new book before I read the description earlier this year, and I was surprised to learn that after a long hiatus, she is returning to her Jackson Brodie series, a beloved classically written mysteries. I haven't read all the Jackson Brodie mysteries, but I read and enjoyed this one.

So, Brodie used to be a detective. Now he's a private investigator and in this new book, some of his personal interests, he just saw something. It looks suspicious. He started making notes, and professional interests, when he's hired by a woman who has something creepy going on in her life and she needs to figure it out. Eventually, they come together. Not a spoiler. It'll be very obvious to the reader, but these are set in England. They have a really wonderful internal dialogue. This is a classically written mystery, but Atkinson manages to address timely issues without it feeling forced at all. It feels very natural. Of course this is what a P.I. should be investigating these days. Oh, she's got great narrative drive.

For a change of pace on that mystery thriller front, beloved southern fiction author Joshilyn Jackson is doing something a little different for her this year. In late July, she has a new domestic suspense novel coming out. It's called *Never Have I Ever*. It begins in a book club in a sleepy southern neighborhood, but then a new visitor shows up and you quickly find out she has a score to settle, because she knows something about somebody's past that that person does not want getting out. But this new guest has motivations for making this woman pay for what she did way back then.

I thought it was really fun to see Joshilyn Jackson, whose works I really enjoyed, write the same kind of thing you know, like she writes great, southern fiction that just feels so steeped in its setting, but this was a new genre for her. And it worked and I loved it.

BRENNA: That sounds like a quintessential summer read to me.

[00:32:40]

ANNE: Doesn't it, though?

BRENNA: Okay. Let's do another patreon comment. Janine says, "I love literary and contemporary fiction that is primarily character-driven, but it still moves along at a reasonable clip. I strongly prefer top-notch writing rich in symbolism with layer upon layer of meaning. Favorites from previous summer reading guides include *The Ensemble*, *The Female Persuasion*, *The Great Alone*, *This is How It Always Is*, and *Bear Town*.

In terms of subject matter, I gravitate toward complicated families or groups of people, like in *The Ensemble* or in *Daisy Jones and the Six*."

ANNE: Definitely *Ask Again, Yes* again by Mary Beth Keane. And to that, I would add another family saga. It's *The Last Romantics* by Tara Conklin. This is one of those books that was published in February, but I had to put it in the summer reading guide because not enough people are reading it yet. And I think we need to change that, Janine. So this totally counts as a sweeping family saga. It covers nearly a hundred years in the life of the Skinner family. And the set up is really interesting. I liked the way that the author launches the reader on a flashback that takes us back to the early years of the four Skinner siblings.

This book really hinges on two different moments of deep grief in the Skinner family. When the kids are little, their father dies and their mom just checks out for a bit. Drops out of her own life. So the kids at the time were so young. They were like four, two, 11. And they were left to basically raise themselves for a while. It made them close and it made them strong. But then another tragedy happens, 25, 30 years later. It becomes apparent that the pause may have brought them together, but it also broke them in ways that weren't immediately apparent, but are oh. So, have such tragic repercussions now. But I love the way that she tells the story that moves, but it also very literary.

Serious themes. It does them well. It has prose that's obviously carefully constructed, and it supposed to read like really beautiful writing. This would be the kind of novel that's good for again fans for *Ask Again, Yes*, *The Ensemble* would be a good comp. Also Anne Patchett's *Commonwealth* for that family story that has a looong scope.

BRENNA: All right. Now we have a voicemail from Liz.

[00:35:06]

LIZ: Two books that I've liked recently are *The Love and Lies of Rukhsana Ali* by Sabina Khan and that is a book based on a girl that is in the LGBTQ community, but her Muslim parents do not approve, and she ends up going to Bangladesh for a little while. So it's about her journey and it's also has some international flair to it. I also really enjoyed the book *Sissy* by Jacob

Tobias. They were recently in Wichita, and they spoke, and I got to hear them speak, which made me love the books even more. And this is also a LGBT memoir, and the other one is fiction.

So this summer I would like some books that are not too fluffy. I struggle with beach type of reads. I don't really get fully into them. And I also have the summer off of work, so I would like to have something to chew on a little bit more. I'm really wanting to up the books I'm reading that are from a global perspective and there's bonus points if they do have an LGBTQ character in them."

[00:36:00]

ANNE: Hi, Liz. The book I am thinking of is *Under The Udala Trees* by Chinelo Okparanta. This book has emotional angst, solid writing, and international flair, and it gets bonus points, too. This is set during 1968, and you know, we were just talking about Chimamanda, who also is the author of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a novel set during the Biafran War in Nigeria. Okparanta's book is also set in the same time period, so it's set in 1968. It's set during that war between Biafra and Nigeria.

So up close, this story is about two girls who meet because of the conflict and they become good friends and then something more. But because of the cultural mores, something more is forbidden. That is an excellent set up for a novel that wrestles with what it means to love and what does it mean when your love needs to be a secret, and should love be a secret? And that drives the girls to make difficult decisions that make for very compelling reading.

BRENNA: I actually have a recommendation for this one. If you're interested in branching out a little bit format wise, I would recommend two books that could sorta be companions for each other, by a graphic memoirist MariNaomi. The two books are *Dragon's Breath and Other True Stories*, and her previous book, *Turning Japanese*. *Turning Japanese* is halfway a travel log, learning more about her Japanese heritage and beginning to connect to it more in her 20s. *Dragon's Breath* digs a little bit deeper into her childhood memories. You not only get a little bit more from her about her biracial identity, but also her experience being bisexual.

It's not the full focus of the memoir, but it is a presence. If you need a nudge to be really able to enjoy graphic memoirs, I think the really beautiful thing about it is that you can really get inside of people's heads because the art is exactly how they want you to experience that story. They're drawing their fridge and their grandpa and their cat exactly the way they want you to see it, the way they remember it.

ANNE: Brenna, this sounds so obvious, but I never thought about the fact that with a graphic memoir, yes the artist is illustrating their own story.

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*Readers, as people debate deleting their Facebook accounts and they wonder about losing all those photos and memories, have you thought about all of those memories you've lost to the shoe boxes in your basement?*

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*At my house, we've done two rounds of cleaning up old photos and a few high school performances on tape. The first time, we wondered what was on these negatives and old tapes and debated what was worth preserving. The second time, we just threw it all in, because it was so easy.*

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BRENNNA: Okay, next we have a voicemail from Patty.

[00:39:44]

PATTY: My name is Patty and, Anne, I would looove your help finding a book that is similar to Abby Geni's two novels. I read her first novel *The Lightkeepers* when it came out, and I recently read her second book, *The Wildlands*, and both of her books she writes beautifully and has atmospheric settings. Those books have an element of suspense, though the suspense is just part of the books. They also have well-drawn characters and an interesting plot. The last thing I love about her books, which isn't a requirement for the recommendation, but would be a nice bonus if you can find it, is a connection between people and animals slash nature. I'm eagerly awaiting for her to write the third book, and in the meantime, I hope you can find me something similar.

ANNE: Patty, this is a great question, whether you've read all of Abby Geni's work or you have never heard her name before, what you need to know is just what Patty says. She has vivid atmospheric settings with an element of suspense and nature is often a big part of her books. Which is why I would recommend anything by Jane Harper if you love Abby Geni novels.

These books are so atmospheric. They're set in Australia. They're always set in the heat or sometimes in the forest. Nature there feels not just restorative and interesting, but oppressive and sometimes like the enemy. I mean this in a really, really wonderful way. The setting is such an important part of the reading experience and also the plot.

You like books that have an element of suspense, so Jane Harper writes really excellent crime novels. Her first, *The Dry*, is where I would start. It's my favorite, and it is a straight up procedural about a crime that is more mysterious than it appears at first glance. All her books are quite good. They stand on their own. They can be read in any order, but ah, *The Dry* would make excellent summer reading. And I have to quote Ginger of the Modern Mrs. Darcy book club who said that she just kept wanting to down lemonade when reading this because it made her so hot and thirsty. It's that convincing.

[00:41:44]

BRENNA: Next, let's go to an email. This one's from Tessa: "Two books I have loved are *Shadow of the Wind* and *The Historian*. They tie-in well with the theme of summer to me. I love to travel, but since having my son almost two years ago, we haven't been able to travel as much as we used to. This summer I would love to indulge my interest in travel by reading books that take place in foreign countries. I also love books about books, especially when there's a mystery element and or some sort of quest. I don't mind darker books, and I really love fast paced plots that keep you turning the pages."

ANNE: Well that is really interesting, Tessa, because when you name *Shadow of the Wind* and *The Historian*, I thought ah, now this is a reader who is okay with a book that takes it time. Two spring to mind here. One is older, one is newer. The first is *Possession* by A.S. Byatt, an author who I really love for the way she writes female characters.

This is a book about books. It's a literary mystery. It's about two scholars who are researching the lives of poets from the Victorian era and they are trying to solve a mystery by piecing together the documents they have. Letters, poetry, journals. They are on the hunt, and pretty quickly you have them racing what feels like all over England, trying to trap down a suddenly time sensitive answer about this long past history.

There's a plot line in the present day as well, and what you have is two separate love stories unfolding. So you have the literary mystery, you have a love story, and you have England.

Another book I think you may find interesting is a previous summer reading guide pick. It's called *Hum If You Don't Know the Words* by Bianca Marais. It's set in 1970s Johannesburg during the time of Apartheid. This is a story about what happens during and in the aftermath of the 1976 Soweto uprising. There is a young girl, third or fourth grade age, and an older woman who are brought together and forge an unlikely friendship that changes both their lives.

You like plots that move. It took me a little bit of time to get oriented in the story just because the history and the setting at the time were unfamiliar to me, but once I got far enough to really get to know the characters, I just flew through it.

[00:44:02]

BRENNNA: And lastly, we have an email from Elyssa. "My recently read favorites are *Us Against You* by Fredrik Backman and *Inheritance* by Dani Shapiro. I loved both of them because they take a deep dive into a tough subject. Trauma and identity. Told through beautiful, well written thoughtful prose. For this summer, I'm looking for something that hits both of those marks in a lighter way."

ANNE: Oooh. Oh, that's a really good question, but wow does my brain go to different places when I hear those titles, *Us Against You* and *Inheritance* and then in a lighter way, especially from the Fredrik Backman. Two spring to mind. One is brand new, one is two years old. *Ginny Moon* by Benjamin Ludwig I think would be a great pick, and this is not a light book. It could definitely break your heart, but it's also maybe equal parts a feel good story.

This is a story of a girl who's removed from her mother's home when she was nine. And she's been going through adoptive homes -- Ginny is autistic -- and these families just do not know how to give her what she needs. So I think what makes this story maintain some levity is that it's told through Ginny's perspective, and to have a young girl narrate the often tragic circumstances of her life, is both heart wrenching, but also disarming. It is difficult to read. I mean this is a book about surviving abuse and about living through very difficult things. But it's also very touching and I think it might be a good pick for you.

Another book that I have in mind is coming this summer. It's in the summer reading guide. It is called *Gravity is the Thing* and it's by Jaclyn Moriarty. This is a book that addresses serious issues: Grief and loss, those kinds of losses that are considered for whatever the reason outside the bounds of normal. You can picture my air quotes there. It's about characters experiencing losses that are unconventional and unusual that people can't relate to, that don't have closure, so they just don't know what to do with them. And for the person experiencing that loss, that is really difficult.

So heavy themes, but the voice and the style is so quirky and it has this rye sense of humor that also gives it some levity and keeps it from being just all heavy all the time. Abi is an Australian girl whose twin brother disappears the night before their 16th birthday. They don't know what happened to him. They never find out what happens to me, so when I talk about a loss outside the bounds of normal, with no closure, that's where Abi is 20 years later. 20 years later, she receives this invitation and this is where it starts sounding like *Nine Perfect Strangers*, she gets this invitation to an all expenses paid retreat where she is going to learn the truth about a mystery that has been plaguing her for 20 years.

Shortly after her brother died, she started receiving chapters in the mail of this odd little self-help book called The Guidebook and the chapters arrived at erratic intervals, and they didn't arrive in order. Abi's not sure if she's even seen the whole thing. But when she gets this opportunity to learn the truth about The Guidebook, she can't say no.

So, this is a book that is sad, but it also has a lot of feel good factor to it. For you structure geeks out there who really like to see an author tell a story in unusual ways, this is an original kind of telling. And that is coming July 23rd.

[00:47:26]

BRENNA: I'm looking forward to that one. I think anytime there's like mystery communication ... that really grabs me. That's like reading candy-

ANNE: Brenna, I like that you have very specific reading requests. [BRENNA LAUGHS] Okay, so readers, if you can send recommendations to Brenna. Also are you still on the hunt for dystopian novels where gardening's a prominent to the plot?

BRENNA: Yes, I am. I feel like we need a little background. I recently got into gardening, and I have this like little food garden on my apartment balcony, and it's ridiculous.

ANNE: She means adorable.

BRENNA: I want to find a book to read this summer where it's after some sort of apocalyptic event and like our normal structure forgetting food is broken down, and people are gardening. Like a very old fashioned way for their food and they rely on that, and that deep involvement of the land and with growing their own food and the amount of labor it takes. Like I just want the strategy that goes with that in an apocalyptic setting, and I never read it before. So if anyone has a recommendation. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: You know what to do.

BRENNA: Email me: [Brenna@modernmrsdarcy.com](mailto:Brenna@modernmrsdarcy.com)

ANNE: Okay, so, readers, send Brenna your recommendations because she needs to scratch her readerly itch, but also if you are on the hunt for a very specific kind of book, super, super niche, we may not be able to help you, but we want to hear about your weird, bookish quests, so please tell us in the show notes.

BRENNA: I think someone out there will always have the answer and we have a lot of readers on our side.

ANNE: Well then, Brenna, we should have taken your situation to the readers sooner.

[00:48:55]

BRENNA: [SIGHS] Next time.

ANNE: Next time. Brenna, this is only amped up my enthusiasm for the summer reading season ahead.

BRENNA: Yeah, I want to go to the beach right now. I want to hit the library and go to the beach.

ANNE: Uh-huh. Just a big tote bag full. I mean, books and snacks. That's really all I need. I'll figure out the bathing suit and clothes thing later. What is the first novel you're going to tackle this summer?

BRENNA: I am reading a nonfiction book to start off my summer. I'm reading *Emergent Strategy* by Adrienne Marie Brown.

ANNE: Wait, from Phimy and Erika's episode?

BRENNA: Yes! I read the first chapter and I set it aside for a little while because it hit me really hard. It's a very good book. It feels like one of those books that heals you from the inside out. That's how I want to start my summer as feeling healed.

ANNE: I love it. I want to start my summer making up for loss time because *The River* was my first Peter Heller novel, and my best book of the year so far, and I haven't read anything on his backlist. So I'm just going to get myself a little checklist and going to start checking those boxes.

BRENNA: So make sure to get your copy of the summer reading guide. It'll be on [modernmrsdarcy.com](http://modernmrsdarcy.com). You will not be able to miss it. Many books that we talked about on this episode as well as many, many more.

ANNE: And this is not the end of our summer reading content. We have some great stuff lined up this season on What Should I Read Next. Brenna, thank you so much for coming on the podcast again. It's been a delight.

BRENNA: It is always fun.

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers, I hope these summer recommendations get your reading seasons started off right. You can find even more books for your summer TBR list on the Modern Mrs. Darcy Summer Reading Guide. [Whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/185](http://Whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/185).

Next week, I'll be talking to Lamar Giles, a reader whose favorites range from a Dr. Seuss book, our first, to a Stephen King book. But there's still a definite throughline in the books he's drawn to. Here's a sneak peek.

ANNE: No one has ever chosen a Dr. Seuss book before as a favorite.

[00:51:00]

LAMAR: Really?

ANNE: This is a big moment.

LAMAR: I'm happy to be the first. It's a book that just appealed to all of what would become my sensibilities. It's a fantasy. You've got talking animals. There's a little bit of terror involved if you think about it from the Who's perspective. [ANNE LAUGHS] You know, when you think about it.

ANNE: Yes!

LAMAR: If you are a Who, it's like the apocalypse. It ... People have laughed when I said stuff like this before, but I'm like, if I take it from their perspective, it's the end of the world and Horton is the God that can save them. That's a little darker than probably what Dr. Seuss intended, but that's the way I took it. And then you got the humor of everybody who Horton runs into that don't believe him.

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

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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.