ERIN: Oh, man, I nerded out so much whenever I found those. My husband, my poor husband.

[BOTH LAUGH]

[CHEERFUL INTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers. I’m Anne Bogel, and this is What Should I Read Next? Episode 220.

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.

Readers, we have been cranking out book news left and right here at What Should I Read Next headquarters. I’ve got a book coming out in just over a month, and there are HAPPENINGS. Pre-order Don’t Overthink It now wherever new books are sold; we’ve got great bonuses for you when you do that, just take your receipt and go to overthinkbook.com to claim your bonuses. I’m also hitting the road to meet YOU in person and I can’t wait. I’m making public appearances in the northeast for the first time, including stops at R. J. Julia in Madison, CT with former podcast guest Roxanne Coady, and I’ll be at The Strand In New York City. After that I’m heading down to the Atlanta area, and then to Texas. And then more after that. Get all the lowdown on these and ALL my events at modernmrsdarcy.com/events. Thanks so much for your pre-orders—they’re so important to authors in the current publishing landscape and your support of my work. I hope I get to meet YOU and thank you in person this spring.

Readers, in my intro every week, I mention that what we do here is give you the information you need to choose your next read. Sometimes, that means information about a specific title (like the premise, the interesting backstory, the sense of the atmosphere a book has.) But other times, the information you need is only discovered through thoughtful reflection on your reading patterns, and developing personalized adjustments.
Today’s guest Erin Schlesener spent a loooong time experimenting before she found a reading routine that fit her needs. Once she had the how locked in, the question shifted to what she should read. Those of you who consider yourselves “slow” readers, you know this struggle — you know you’ll only get through about a dozen books this year, so how do you narrow them down to what will be most enjoyable to you? Well, Erin and I are tackling that problem today, and I’m recommending 3 titles that won’t frustrate or disappoint.

Let’s get to it!

Erin, welcome to the show.

[00:02:47]
ERIN: Hello, thank you for having me. I’m so glad to be here.

ANNE: Oh, well, it is my pleasure and we’d been really looking forward to the topics of conversation you suggested in your What Should I Read Next guest submission form. Thank you for taking the plunge.

ERIN: You know what, I honestly filled that out for fun and you know, then you guys sent me an email saying hey, we’d love to talk about this more. And I was like oh, wow, okay. Here we go. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Wait, hold on. Tell me about filling it out for fun. Do you mean just like the reflection process of completing it or do you have something else in mind? And this is the form whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/guest ‘cause what we ask guests is to tell us three books you love, one book you don’t, what you’ve been reading lately, anything you’d like help with or input with in your reading life. So tell me what that process was like for you.

ERIN: I mean I have friends who read, but I don’t always get to see them all the time or you know, get to sit down and talk about it for long periods of time or anything. So when I had filled it out, I had just come off reading of the books, and I was so excited about it and so I was like you know what, I just wanna tell somebody. I just wanna write it down somewhere, and so I was just super excited to talk about the experience that I’ve had recently with books that has kinda changed everything for me.

ANNE: Erin, tell me a little bit about your reading life. We know that you went through a period that you called a reading dead zone, which of course just hurt our bookish hearts, but that’s not where you are anymore. Loved to hear about your reading journeys a little esoteric, but you know what I mean.

ERIN: Yeah. Reading was always a part of my life. Like I’d loved it from the get go. I actually had a friend in kindergarten who, he already could read and I was so jealous about that in
kindergarten ‘cause we were just learning these little baby words, but he could like read full books. And just like really. I got this like jealousy about that. You know, he would show me and like teach me some of the words, but then as you know, you start to move on to higher levels of reading, I could notice around me that I was not reading as quickly as my other friends. They would be reading all these books and it would take me forever to read through something.

And I remember sitting in classrooms and kids just flipping pages and for some reason, I just felt this pressure that why can’t I read that fast? Because I would try to almost time myself and it just felt like it would take forever, which became frustrating to me throughout the years but it never deterred me away from wanting to read. I still would find books and you know, get into them and spend time reading, but I just knew that I was not quite up to par for some reason. And in school, yeah, they test for all of this, but I think like maybe where I was at, was kinda … Maybe I was scraping by with test scores and they were like oh yeah, she’s probably okay. But I knew that it just kinda was integrating like bad reading habits into me. I’d try to skip paragraphs and then try to, like, connect the beginning to the end and really not know what happened in the middle.

[00:05:43]
ANNE: Oh, no, ‘cause you felt like you had to keep up.

ERIN: Yes, exactly.

ANNE: Ugh. And did you feel like you were missing out on all these pages your fellow students were reading and you weren’t?

ERIN: I had this huge fear of missing out. That was … I hated feeling behind. I hated feeling like you know, I was struggling with something and my other friends weren’t. At the time, like, I didn’t know how to explain it or just not talk about it. But yeah, I had the fear of missing out on all these stories. Like I remember a girl just raving about the Lemony Snicket series, Unfortunate Events, and I’ve never been excited about a book like that the way that she was and that just really fed a hunger in me.

And I had teachers, too, that she literally had a waiting list for a book. Some like suspenseful little chapter book in middle school and she was like, this is the best book ever, and so there was like this excitement. But then like I couldn’t completely take part of it because I wasn’t gathering all the same information as other people or because you know, other people would be waiting on something that I had, like waiting things from the library put a lot of pressure on me because someone else is waiting for this book. And then I would try to scramble through it and then actually miss a lot about the book.

You know, I’d hear people be talking about it and I’d get embarrassed sometimes in group settings because I had no idea what they were talking about sometimes. And sometimes we’d come in thinking I had this great understanding of the book and I really didn’t, and that also
reflected in test scores. I wasn’t like bombing in it, but I was like getting the average, you know, and couldn’t figure out a way that worked best for me. So rather than just like privately reading on my own, on my own pace, for my own personal like library. [LAUGHS]

[00:07:22]
ANNE: Oh, I hate that, that it sounds like you were stuck in just a really bad spiral because a lot of times when we do feel anxious about something, it kills our ability to actually concentrate, and I can see how in your reading life, that would take a situation from tenuous to bad.

ERIN: They would do like these tests like to see how you were doing reading words out loud, pronouncing words. I always excelled in those really well. But whenever I’d have like those standardized tests, I would do horribly on them.

Freshman year of high school was the only time I really remember being approached about it. She had this test at the beginning of the semester. It was a time test and you had to answer questions about the short little story that you read. And she pulled me aside after class one day, and was like hey, your test score wasn’t so great. Just from me knowing you, I just don’t feel like this really matches, so what’s going on? And I kinda explained to her, I was like, really have a hard time reading something in a short amount of time or under a timed frame. I sometimes just try to grab key words and hope that it’s going to be in those questions. [LAUGHS] And it was like, the only way that my brain could figure out how to scrape by with it I guess.

But then it wasn’t really addressed after that, and a little bit kinda killed my excitement for it, and I would just kinda read books that were required of me in class. And you know, I didn’t really get into fiction for awhile after that. Like I would read the big mainstreams ones that were popular at the time ‘cause all my friends were reading it in the summer or whatever. I wasn’t really finding my own voice of what I truly liked to read and what my heart truly enjoys out of the reading experience.

ANNE: Well I love that you’re talking about it now, Erin, because I know that whenever we have someone that is a self-proclaimed slow reader on the podcast, all we hear in return in a huge chorus of yes, that’s me, too. I thought I was the only one. We always say here and it continues to be true, that whenever it comes to anything in the reading life, it is never just you. And yet if you’re not talking about your reading speed or if you’re looking on Instagram and seeing people like say, oh my gosh, I love this series and I read the whole thing in a weekend, you can think that if you’re on the slow side, that’s not normal.

And I know that you’re saying that you were not formally diagnosed with anything, but I do think it’s worth saying in this context that according to the National Center for Learning Disabilities, 1 in 5 children in the United States has a learning disability of some sort. That includes things like dyslexia, ADHD, processing disorders like dysgraphia, and any short term or working memory struggles. But not everyone knows there is a word for their experience as a reader. For instance, an estimated 40 million Americans adults are dyslexic, but only 2 million know it, so if
Listeners, if you struggle with reading, whether you have a formal diagnosis or simply know reading is not as easy for you as it is for some others, you are far from alone. And Erin, I love that you are talking about your experience because I know so many people are going to connect to it.

ERIN: Yeah. It’s opened up great conversations.

ANNE: At some point, something changed for you. Tell me more about that.

ERIN: You know, after high school, I didn’t really read on my own for fun. It was more of just whatever it was in the course that I had or things like that. I tried to get back into fiction, but then I would like abandon all of these books because I just couldn’t get into it. I really had a hard time kinda with like sci-fi because it has to set up this world in the very beginning, and my brain just … It’s a little bit too hard and overwhelming for me and then I kinda lose interest after that.

And then I just kinda stopped reading, which was really sad because I loved books. I love being around books and I love book related things. And I just, I just didn’t know how to revitalize it, and I actually … I’m not just trying to like fangirl here, but [BOTH LAUGH] I had heard you on the podcast back in like 2015. I had just started getting into podcasts. Then you were saying that you were about to launch one. And so I had never heard of you before, and I was like huh, this could be interesting. So I subscribed and I actually listened to What Should I Read Next for a whole year without reading any books.

ANNE: I love it.

ERIN: ‘Cause I really … Honestly, I was learning and just soaking it up. And I just didn’t really know that, like, there were so many people out there that just gush about books and I loved the enthusiasm. And it was like in school again where all of these people, teachers, friends, that I’d hear on the playground or whatever, talking about books, being really excited, got me excited again. Just hearing, rather than reading like the backs of books or insides of jackets, or reviews on Goodreads or something, listening to people talk about books personally and how they personally meant something to them, made me approach wanting to pick up a book again a little differently, like hey, maybe this will work for me because this person related to it this way and you know, that really stood out to me. I think I could relate to that too.

So it made it easier, and I was like soaking it all up, like a sponge. And then finally when I started picking them back up, it just like changed my world. And then I started keeping track because I heard about people on the podcast doing that. And that really works for me because I do have a struggle with reading comprehension, jotting down notes or you know, things while I’m reading it, which I just never thought to do, really helps kinda make it 3D for me. Like pop off the page or come alive to me in a different way, rather than just reading it to read it. [LAUGHS]
What changed for me in 20… I think it was 18, I loved *Pride and Prejudice* for the longest time, and honestly it’s because I saw the movie first, and then I bought the book and then several times. I can’t tell you how many times I opened this book and I wanted to read it so badly, and you know, it’s a high level book. It’s not an easy read really. I mean, maybe for some people, but [LAUGHS]

[00:13:09]
ANNE: No! The language to modern ears is strange.

ERIN: You know, I abandoned it so many times. And then finally as audiobooks you know, started becoming more available and more popular, I was just scrolling through and it had suggested *Pride and Prejudice* and it was narrated by Rosamund Pike, who plays Jane I think in the movie, in the 2005 movie. And so I was like, well, what if I read along with the book? Because there’s something about … Reading out loud is not a problem. I even tried reading books out loud to myself and it just really didn’t click even then. Because honestly I can almost read it [LAUGHS] and then you ask me questions about it and I have no idea what I just read. It’s like those two separate things that are just parallel with each other and I just had to find a way to be able to find a way to connect them into one continuous line that I could comprehend all at the same time and actually retain it.

How I’m comparing it is like with a piano playing left hand and right hand. I was finally playing them together rather than separately. And so I listened to *Pride and Prejudice* and hearing her voice and like the different accents or whatever that she would have for different characters, like it all was helping me put it together. And I was like laughing out loud and I was having so much fun reading it. I finished it in three days, and I never had that experience before with a book, and I was like wow, maybe this could work for me on other books that I have abandoned or that have seemed challenging to me and maybe that would bring new life to it. And so, I did, and it got me so excited and I just, I started sharing it with people, you know, just around me, who probably didn’t care at all, but I was just so excited about this experience that I had had. [BOTH LAUGH]

ANNE: You’re in the right place ‘cause we all care. [ERIN LAUGHS] I’ve heard it be helpful to a lot of readers to articulate how they retain information best or to articulate how their brain works, like, for a long time I didn’t think I was a visual learner. I don’t paint. I can’t draw, so I thought, I’m not visual, but I remember things in words in place on the page. I like reading a paper book as opposed to an ebook because I can visually see and feel where I am in the arc of the story. Something I’ve noticed in your history here is that despite the fact that reading was not working for you, it kept pulling you back. What was that strong pull? Cause a lot of people would have given up, and I’m so glad you didn’t.

ERIN: It’s the escape. Growing up, the common question around my house is where’s Erin? Because most of the time, I was in my room or was outside. Those were the two places they went to look first was Erin’s outside playing pretend or whatever, or she’s in her room and just in
her own little world. That resonated with me in books and whenever I would come across a book that I liked, I would reread it a lot because I loved being in that world.

And then I guess as I got older, I would want to expand that because for so long like when I was younger, I would just keep rereading the same things ‘cause it was a little difficult for me to try into something new. I loved stories that really just make an impact on my heart, which is how it made it so easy for me to pick my three favorites. I just love being engrossed in a new world or with new people. Characters can feel like people, and friends sometimes whenever they’re like that important to you, and it’s a special thing about books. It really is.

[00:16:36]
ANNE: So, Erin, how did you go about choosing your favorites and not favorites for today?

ERIN: Choosing my favorite books was not too difficult. Whenever there’s like a character or there’s a story or something that just keeps coming up in the forefront of my mind. It’s just kinda a gut feeling, that is something truly impacted me. Some of them have even shaped who I am today or helped me feel like I had something to relate to as when I was younger. Like I have horrible book hangovers. That’s probably another reason why I can’t finish a ton of books a year is because when I just have a book on my brain, I just can’t get over it. It just doesn’t leave me and you know, nothing else can come in to my heart just yet until I feel that I am over it. So [LAUGHS] or that at least until I can take a break from it.

ANNE: Okay. The books you read really impact you deeply.

ERIN: Yes. Exactly. And all three of these definitely did.

ANNE: Okay. I can’t wait to hear your books.

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ANNE: Readers, it’s no secret that I love my Away suitcase. When I was just in New York to record my audiobook, it was super easy to zip around the city and the airport with my bag, but thanks to Away’s interior organization system and compression pad, I could squeeze my new puzzle from the New York Public Library into my suitcase even though I did not pack light for that trip. And when I got flagged for a security check because of said puzzle—really—that organization system meant all my stuff stayed nice and neat when they had to open it up to check it out.

Away products are thoughtful designed, very durable, easy to carry, and always look good. The wheels don’t stick, it’s easy to maneuver, easy to close. The way this suitcase is constructed really solves a lot of the little headaches that come with travel. Away suitcases are designed to last a lifetime—and knowing that Away will fix or replace my suitcase ASAP if anything ever breaks means I never have to worry about my luggage.
Everyone has a unique travel style, which is why Away offers a range of suitcases made of different materials (like polycarbonate, aluminum, and durable nylon), a variety of colors, and two carry-on sizes. So, for whoever you are, and whatever you need to pack, Away has luggage that works for how you travel.

There’s a 100-day trial on everything Away makes: Take the product out on the road and live with it, travel with it, get lost with it for 100 days. If you decide it’s not for you, you can return any non-personalized item for a full refund during that period—no ifs, ands, or asterisks. Away offers free shipping and returns on any order within the contiguous US, Europe, Canada and Australia.

A former podcast guest just reached out to me last week and said, is your Away bag really that much better than the one I’m using now? My answer was YES. To get your suitcase and shop other travel essentials, visit awaytravel.com/readnext20. awaytravel.com/readnext20

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ANNE: Erin, you know how this works. You’re going to tell me three books you loved, one book you don’t, and what you’re reading now and we will talk about what you should read next.

[00:19:38]

ERIN: The first book that I chose is *Anne of Green Gables*, which really this entails the whole series. Some of them I think have eight. I’ve read up to the sixth one, which ends up with *Anne of Ingleside*, I believe.

ANNE: Is there a reason you haven’t read those two?

ERIN: Yeah, because when I finished *Anne of Ingleside*, I really felt like it was transitioning. It was kinda like passing the torch onto Anne’s … I don’t want to give anything away or [ANNE LAUGHS] I mean, I feel like I could talk about it. Anne has children. But she just passes along the story really, it goes into her children and I believe L.M. Montgomery still continued on the story but through one of her children that she had. I just kinda felt like it was a good time for me to stop, and say goodbye to one of my most beloved characters ever, which is Anne. That was a good, you know, stopping point for me. I just really didn’t feel like reading anymore, like, I love Anne, and it was kinda the end of her time.

ANNE: Okay. So confident decision, no FOMO there.

ERIN: Yes. Exactly. [LAUGHS] Good closure. It really was. My mom always tells me how much I’m like Anne. [ANNE LAUGHS] In just how I was as a kid because I was quite a dramatic little imaginative child, and I think that’s why I loved Anne so much. I mean, like I said earlier, I was outside a lot and just in my own little world all the time. So anyway, there’s so many things in
those books that you know, Anne does where she’s just so, sometimes caught up in her own little world that she’ll miss an ingredient in like making the cake or is so obsessed with how she’ll look and try something and it goes horribly wrong. Like these things, they would just get me laughing all the time.

And I also picked this book to talk about because I have listened to the audiobook and I have listened to it twice. This is like a reread for me every year because it is such a good audiobook. It’s narrated by Rachel McAdams, and she does a fantastic job capturing her voice. I love all of the characters. I cry and I laugh and I actually [LAUGHS] my daughter, she’s only one, but I found the most fantastic little books for her to be introduced to them. They’re concept books, so like, you know you’ve got Anne’s alphabet and Anne’s feelings and Anne’s numbers. The illustrations are actually all hand embroidered, and they’re super cute. It’ll be like G is for Gilbert. [ANNE LAUGHS]

And then there’s like her feelings one is hilarious because Anne is ups and downs of all these feelings, so Anne is in the depths of despair, or [LAUGHS] you know, things like that. It just brings such a big smile on my face and I know she has no idea what this means yet but I am just determine that she is going to love Anne of Green Gables as much as me. Oh man, I nerded out so much whenever I found those. My husband, my poor husband. [BOTH LAUGH]

[00:22:34]
ANNE: Erin, what did you choose for your next favorite?

ERIN: Tell The Wolves I’m Home by Carol Rifka Brunt. After I had finally gotten the courage to reapproach fiction again, I started using the Libby app and was kinda scrolling through and this book popped up. What caught my eye was the fact it described the main character as an introverted young girl. Anyway, so that drew me in, so I already know I can relate to this girl.

So a young girl named June Elbus is really close with her uncle. He is actually dying of AIDS. It was set in the ’80s, and AIDS was like a big topic at the time obviously. People at the time misunderstanding it and people thinking that you can … Different ways you can catch it aren’t true. There’s people who will just see him as someone who is dying of AIDS, but she knows him so much more deeply than that. He had already passed away, and so it’s kinda the aftermath of all of that. Her uncle was gay and that was kept a secret. The AIDS thing was kinda kept a secret, and the relationship that he had was kept a secret. And so, her and her uncle’s boyfriend connect and they’re just wanting to talk about memories about him and reconnect that way.

Long story short, just one big love story, not just about AIDS and not just about what it was like to live during that time, but truly just about family, love, and how they get through grief and it was just - just a beautiful story. I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed reading about the characters and I related very much to the main character, but it was just a highly enjoyable story. And actually just kicked in excitement to me to get back into fiction. And so when I finished that book, I thought about it for a long time. It actually opened up conversations with me and my parents. I
asked them what it was like, conversations about AIDS and stuff in the ’80s. And so really good book. It was very well written and it was just a beautiful story I think about love. It surprised me.

ANNE: Erin, I have that book on my bookshelf and I’ve never read it.

ERIN: Well you totally should. It’s very good.

ANNE: I’ve heard wonderful things about it from readers, so when I saw it at a used book sale, I thought, I’m going to want to read that one day, and I shelved it with the Bs and I don’t think I’ve gotten it back out since. But I will. I know exactly where to find it. What did you choose for your final favorite?

ERIN: Jane Eyre. This one I had wanted to read for a long time. I saw the movie first and then I was like, I like that story, and I’m really curious as to what the book would be like. But I was also extremely nervous to approach it like the Pride and Prejudice situation where I opened it, read a few chapters, and then closed it. But then I found the audiobook. It’s narrated by Thandie Newton, and she does a phenomenal, phenomenal job narrating this book. I mean, it just came to life and I actually … I didn’t read the text along with it because it was a busy time in my life at that point. But the way she performed it was just done so well that I could really grab it I feel like. I actually reread this last year. So I’ve done it twice now. I got so much more out of it this second time around. And the first time, I was also pregnant and I remember just bawling. Like literally sitting in my car and I was just a burbling mess, and it probably was because of the hormones or something, but it was also just a beautiful part of the book.

Last year, it just came to life for me again, and Charlotte Bronte is just a master with words and with sentences. I looked back on the notes I had made about it when I had gotten done with reading it last year, and it sounds a lot like a review of like a meal, because there’s no empty calories. Like every word was nutritious, like you know full of vitamin - it was just like fed my soul. It literally was feeding my soul and I was blown away especially with the narrator. Feel like everyone should just listen to it because it was a fantastic, fantastic audiobook.

ANNE: I’m so glad to hear that. Now for changing gears. Tell me about a book that didn’t work for you.

ERIN: So this one, Anne, it was such a mistake. Like it was so horrible. It’s actually the only book in the last three years that I’ve given one star to. [LAUGHS] Because it was just that bad and it was also a reflection of how horrible I was at choosing books for me because it was, I was coming out of that reading rut and like approaching fiction again, but not really understanding you know, the things that really bring life to me when it comes to reading.
I just was kinda flipping through books that was in the stack. Kinda came across this one and I liked the cover, and the title like reminded me of a song. So I was like, you know, maybe this one will be cool and I thought the idea of it sounded neat. It’s called The Look of Love by Sarah Jio, and I’d never heard of this author before either. As I am going, listening to this book, first of all, I did not really care at all for the narrator’s voice and maybe it’s because of the book. I didn’t like the way that her voice sounded on some of the characters and that was like turning me off to it, but also the storyline was so perfect. Like it was this perfect little town and she’s a florist and you know, it was just way too perfect and clean.

And then also just so this was supposed to be these different stories like four different love stories happening here and they kinda are, I don’t know, maybe supposed to match up together in the end, but it just did not work. The plot wasn’t working. The writing wasn’t very good. The love stories had a lot of infidelity in it, which did not sit well with me. There was just so many things wrong with it but I kept listening and listening, hoping that it would get better, and I actually abandoned it at like 70 or 80%. I was really hoping that it would come around. Like oh, they were actually happy with, you know, maybe their marriage. [LAUGHS] And it just wasn’t good in way shape or form.

ANNE: Okay. So this one was all wrong for you. She has a little bit of magic in her stories, a lot of the time, Sarah Jio, is that something you enjoy? Or did that contribute to the not for you-ness of it?

ERIN: Well, the magic element was this girl has this like power, I guess, to see love at first sight, and I thought that concept was neat and whenever I used to read fiction, I read things that had a little bit of magical element to it. But the way it was executed in the book like was not clear. There was things mentioned like, she meet this old lady who helped kinda like explain to her why she has this power, and then she was never mentioned again. It just really did not work out. Like all of the individual stories that were happening were not stories that I felt like were genuine love. It did not sit well with me at all, and the narrator, I could not stand her voice after the-

ANNE: Oh, no! Well the narrators on the that book are actually frequently cited on these are my favorite narrators ‘cause Cassandra Campbell and Julia Whelan

ERIN: Yes, I know. She’s mentioned before I believe on this podcast. And it was funny because I actually have listened to another audiobook narrated by Julie Whelan. I almost didn’t listen to that book because it brought back way too many bad memories [LAUGHS] of the other book. Thankfully, the story that she was narrating I actually really enjoyed. It was Evvie Drake Starts Over by Linda Holmes. The content of the story helped me overcome bad memories I had with her voice.
ANNE: So, sounds like we had some good ingredients, but with the exception of the adultery, and I get that, but that’s incredibly hard to filter for, which is tricky. Which is a good reason we have this podcast, we can talk about it.

ERIN: Exactly.

ANNE: But it sounds like the right ingredients, but the recipe was all wrong for you.

ERIN: Well then I realized too that like I said it was kinda the beginning of me approaching fiction again and trying to figure out what I really enjoy. I’m feeling like more and more just looking back on the books that I’ve read, the whole kinda magical elements, I’m not loving as much. It’s more of something little bit more raw and real, like *Tell The Wolves I’m Home*, which just underneath the surface, kinda love and I feel like within all of my top favorites, like they all kinda have that string through them on the inside, you know. Not just an external situational love. It’s a lot deeper than that.

ANNE: Erin, what have you been reading lately?

ERIN: A lot of romance. [LAUGHS] And I didn’t ever think myself to be somebody who liked a lot of romance.

ANNE: What happened?

ERIN: About a month ago, my dad was in the hospital. He’s fine now. Everything is great. But it was just a really exhausting time for me. I needed something a little bit light hearted and something that would just be a lot easier to read that I could get through, I felt like quickly. And so, I actually, at the end of the year, this was around Christmas time, there was two days left of 2019, and I had one book left on my goal for the year, and I was like all right. I gotta find something, and so, I found this book called *Edenbrooke* by Julianne Donaldson. I had seen it recommended a lot by other blogs that I follow and I saw the number of pages and I was like oh, I think I can do this. It really got me kicked on to reading romance kinda truly enjoyed that book and I read *Blackmoore*.

ANNE: I’m glad you found the right book for that time.

ERIN: Yes. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Erin, what do you want more of in your reading life? What are you looking for right now?

ERIN: I read *The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry* cause it was talked about so much on the show. I really enjoyed that, and i Honestly, I don’t read a lot of books that have like a strong male
character. Most of them, they’re not usually deep or anything. [LAUGHS] But I really enjoyed that one, and I enjoyed another one called Okay For Now by Gary Schmidt.

ANNE: Yeah.

ERIN: And it was a fantastic story. And so, I was like, I think, I want some more of that. Some more good suggestions for a male character and that, I feel like that will have an impact, ’cause those characters had an impact on me.

ANNE: What was the thriller that you read?

ERIN: Oh, it was, Last Time I Lied by Riley Sager. Just don’t enjoy books that well, that read more like a movie. When I’m reading, I want it to be more of, more soul searching I guess, than just like reading a fast-paced story. So I kinda like hit a lull in the middle of that book, but the ending was really exciting and I liked the feeling of reading a thriller like that. It was fun.

ANNE: All right, Erin, you’ve given us lots to work with here.

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Readers, too often I get up and pull on a pair of leggings/yoga pants to get everyone out of the house only to realize hours later when I’m actually read to leave the house, that I’m not actually dressed for the day. Then I have to decide to go a meeting at the coffee shop, or school, or the store looking like I’m going for a run or if I want to stop my day to get myself dressed–again.

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ANNE: So we’re looking for a book that pulls you in, that you want to tell people about. I don’t wish a horrible book hangover on you, but I wish that you read the kind of book that stays with you. I really love that you’ve specifically identified a few genres that you’re interested in exploring, like a book with a great male protagonist, a book that’s a page turning thriller, and we know that you like great characters that you can really root for. What if we tried to serve you up one of each?

[00:36:24]

ERIN: I’m all for it.
ANNE: The way you described *The Look of Love*, the right ingredients, the wrong recipe. I wonder if we may be able to try putting those ingredients together again in a different recipe. Have you ever read the works of Elinor Lipman?

ERIN: No.

ANNE: Okay. She is a prolific novelist. She’s been writing novels for a very long time. The one I have in mind has a very distinctive cover, it might not want you grab it off the shelves, but it’s very true to the 1992 publication date. It’s hot pink. There’s a woman with a knee high black boot and a bare leg and it’s just, it jumps out at you. It takes places in Massachusetts, and we have a 30-year-old woman who’s coming home. She doesn’t feel like she’s coming home from the small town in triumph. She’s not feeling great about what she’s done with her life so far.

You’ve said something about the florist in Sarah Jio’s and when Melinda comes back from California where she’s definitely floundering right now. She’s come back and she takes a job at the Forget Me Not Floral Shop that’s owned by family members and she’s looking around her former high school classmates, most of whom are married. She’s looking around feeling like she’s not keeping up. Not that marriage is the thing, but she hasn’t found what her thing is and she’s not feeling great about it.

So what she does is reestablishes some old relationships that look very different now that she’s 30 and no longer a 17-year-old higher schooler, getting reacquainted with the cute boys from high school and the gossipy small town people who are still doing what they do. Lot of the action take place at a local university. In a nutshell, it’s about a woman seeking to establish meaningful life in a setting that she is very familiar yet is very different now that she has grown up a little bit. So that’s *The Way Men Act* by Elinor Lipman. How does that sound to you?

ERIN: Sounds pretty good. I would be curious to see how that turns out.

ANNE: If you like this, this is her second book, and she has been writing ever since. You will have lots to choose from. I think *The Family Man* might be my favorite that I’ve read. But I do like giving you the idea of a do-over towards.

ERIN: I like that too.

ANNE: How do you feel about a literary kind of thriller?

ERIN: I like the sound of that a lot.

ANNE: One that revolves around the pursuit of a missing manuscript?

ERIN: Yes, sounds good.
ANNE: So there’s two ways to go with this. You could pick up the more modern set in the contemporary world in publishing, *The Accident* by Chris Pavone. This came out about five years ago and the manuscript itself is called The Accident, and it reveals a long buried completely damning secret that’s been kept for I think 25 years now. The new manuscript appears on a literary agent’s desk, no one knows where it comes from, but once it does, everything goes to pieces really quickly. Like beginning with the assistant murdered almost immediately.

This action unfolds over the course of one dangerous day. I think it takes place in New York City predominantly. What’s happening as the big power players involved whose reputations are on the line. Not just reputations, but freedom and ability to keep moving in the world the way they have been are using all their power to try to contain the damage. If you read Chris Pavone’s first novel *The Expats*, you’ll see some of those same characters here, but it’s not essential to read these books in order. Like they’re kinda in the same universe, but they’re not sequential. It’s not even a series. But this is a page turner. It’s fast-moving. For a reader, it’s a book about books.

ERIN: Yeah.

ANNE: And I think it could be really fun.

ERIN: I like the sound of that.

ANNE: This does have a widely available audio version. It’s narrated by Mozhan Marno and it’s about 11 hours. Unlike *The Way Men Act*, which is harder to find on audio through like readily available apps. I know that MP3 recordings and CD copies are available but I don’t believe you can’t download it just from like Audible.

ERIN: Gotcha.

ANNE: Okay. For a different, gentler pace, more old fashioned feeling, one of Charlie Lovett’s literary mysteries could be a good pick for you, and we double up here with a male protagonist. He’s written three literary mysteries. I was thinking *The Bookman’s Tale*, but actually, many readers find his best book to be his 2017 book, *The Lost Book of The Grail*. This one you could probably guess what they’re looking for thanks to the title.

It’s set up like a literary scavenger hunt and your a male protagonist is named Arthur. And he is a stayed, steady, old school British guy. He worries that he might be just a little bit boring to others, but he gets to know a techie American who visits English library because she’s going to digitize his beloved ancient manuscripts. And being an old-fashioned, traditional kind of guy, he is not happy about this, but he’s happy about her. He really likes her. But he’s afraid she is going to get in the way of his personal quest for the grail because he has been on the hunt for a long time. He has a good lead right now and he’s afraid all her snooping through the library is
going to mess things up. So you have a little bit of book love, a little bit of romance and a little bit of literary adventure. How does that sound to you?

[00:41:36]
ERIN: All of that sounds so wonderful. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: And that is readily available with a very highly rated audio version.

ERIN: Oh, great.

ANNE: Okay. You really liked Gary Schmidt.

ERIN: Yes.

ANNE: Have you read anything else by him?

ERIN: I have not and I’ve wanted to, but then I would just get distracted. I would really, really enjoyed Okay For Now. It really surprised me and I also loved all of the Jane Eyre references in that book.

ANNE: Oh. I totally forgot about that.

ERIN: It was so well down and it was just a beautiful story and I loved the point of view that it was told from.

ANNE: I didn’t see our conversation going this direction, but I think his earlier book The Wednesday Wars could be an amazing pick for you. This is a work of historical fiction and it revolves around middle school drama, baseball, and the Vietnam war. The protagonist has a funny name [LAUGHS] that makes me laugh which is probably good because the book can be really sad but his name is Holling Hoodhood, and he’s dealing with bullies, the looming presence of the Vietnam war, and he’s trying to stay out of trouble and keep his parents happy.

But even though the rest of his seventh grade classmates go to religious instruction on Wednesday afternoons, he is stuck spending that time with his English teacher Mrs. Baker. And he’s not real excited about that especially because she’s making him read Shakespeare’s plays outside of class. Which he’s in seventh grade. The poor kid. I was not read for this one when I was a freshman or sophomore in high school. [ERIN LAUGHS]

He thinks this is a huge waste of time. No surprise, and he assumes that his teacher just doesn’t like him and this is her way of getting back at him. As he navigates his life, which is not easy right now. It’s not easy for any of these classmates right now, and as he navigates middle school life, which is never easy for anyone, he starts to see parallels between his life and what he’s reading about in these Shakespearian works, which of course blows his little mind.
So this is a hard book because there's a lot going on, but there is so much joy here as well. I would enthusiastically recommend it to adult readers just as much as the middle grade readers that this was originally aimed at. I mean, you know, what C.S. Lewis say? Any children’s book that can only be read by children is not a good children’s books. This is a Newbery Honor winner and it’s so good. I think you’ll really like it. And it has a readily available audiobook, highly rated in narration. That’s The Wednesday Wars by Gary Schmidt.


[00:44:19]
ERIN: I think that I am going to with The Lost Book of the Grail by Charlie Lovett. I think, you know, I’ve been reading a lot of the same type of book and that one sounds really intriguing to me. It’s a little different than what I’ve been reading lately. It might be a breath of fresh air.

ANNE: Well I hope you enjoy it. Erin, thank you so much for talking books with me.

ERIN: I had a great time, Anne. Thank you for having me on the show.

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

ANNE: Hey readers, I hope you enjoyed my discussion with Erin, and I’d love to hear what YOU think she should read next. That page is at whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/220 (that's 2-2-0) and it’s where you’ll find the full list of titles we talked about today.

Our newsletter subscribers are the first to know all the What Should I Read Next news and happenings; sign up at whatshouldireadnextpodcast.com/newsletter. We recently changed our format to be more like the show. Every week we share three things I love, one things I don’t, and what i’m reading now. It’s a lot of fun.

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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.