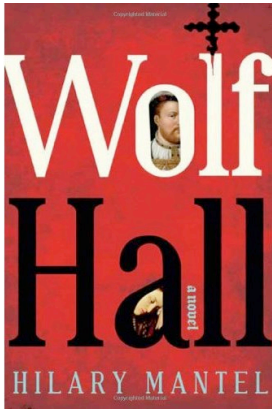


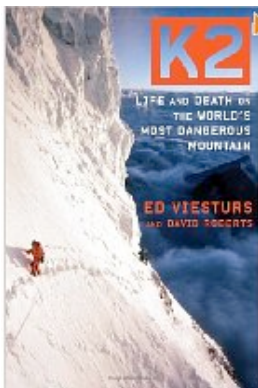
“The Paradox of Choice”

Should I Read Just One or All of Them?



F M292 Mantel, Hillary. *Wolf Hall*. Henry Holt, 2009.

Ginny Gunter (one of our former Study Skills Centers members told me that she wouldn't have lunch with me again until I read *Wolf Hall*. Needless to say, we didn't lunch for about two and half months. Winner of the Man Booker Prize for 2009 and 595 +pages, it is a bit of a read, but well worth it. As Henry VIII's go-to man for his dirty work, Thomas Cromwell (1485-1540) isn't a likely candidate for a sympathetic portrait. He dirtied his hands too often. In the end, Henry dropped him just as he had Cromwell's mentor, Cardinal Wolsey, who counseled the king before him. But as Mantel (*Beyond Black*) reminds us, Cromwell was a man of many parts, admirable in many respects though disturbing in others. Above all, he got things done and was deeply loyal to his masters, first Wolsey and then the king. Nor was Henry always bloated and egomaniacal: well into his forties, when in good spirits, the king shone brighter than all those around him. VERDICT A deserved winner of the 2009 Booker Prize, this is in all respects a superior work of fiction, peopled with appealing characters living through a period of tense high drama: Henry's abandonment of wife and church to marry Anne Boleyn. If you like it, go to your public library and request Robert Hutchinson's biography, *Thomas Cromwell: The Rise and Fall of Henry VIII's Most Notorious Minister*.



796.522 Vie Viesturs, Ed *K2: Life and Death on the World's Most Dangerous Mountain*. Broadway Books, 2009.

If you were riveted by Jon Krakauer's, *Into Thin Air* try this real life climbing adventure by a supreme mountaineer who has successfully summited all of the top peaks in the world and lived to write about it. K2, the second highest mountain in the world next to Mount Everest is by far most treacherous of all of them. At 28,251 feet, the world's second-tallest mountain, K2 thrusts skyward out of the Karakoram Range of northern Pakistan. Climbers regard it as the ultimate achievement in mountaineering, with good reason. Four times as deadly as Everest, K2 has claimed the lives of seventy-seven climbers since 1954. In August 2008 eleven climbers died in a single thirty-six-hour period on K2-the worst single-event tragedy in the mountain's history and the second-worst

in the long chronicle of mountaineering in the Himalaya and Karakoram ranges. Yet summiting K2 remains a cherished goal for climbers from all over the globe. Before he faced the challenge of K2 himself, Ed Viesturs thought of it as "the holy grail of mountaineering." In *K2* he explores the remarkable history of the mountain and of those who have attempted to conquer it. At the same time he probes K2's most memorable sagas in an attempt to illustrate the lessons learned by confronting the fundamental questions raised by mountaineering - questions of risk, ambition, loyalty to one's teammates, self-sacrifice, and the price of glory. Viesturs knows the mountain firsthand. He and renowned alpinist Scott Fischer climbed it in 1992 and were nearly killed in an avalanche that sent them sliding to almost certain death. Fortunately, Ed managed to get into a self-arrest position with his ice ax and stop both his fall and Scott's. Focusing on seven of the mountain's most dramatic campaigns, from his own troubled ascent to the 2008 tragedy, Viesturs crafts an edge-of-your-seat narrative that climbers and armchair travelers alike will find unforgettably compelling. Our wonderful Voyageur faculty give this one five pick axes.

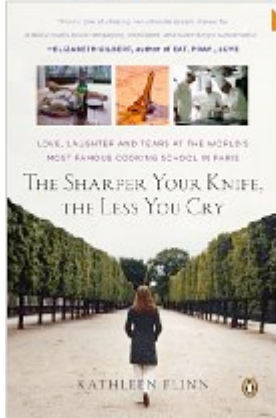


F F Feiyu, Bi. *The Moon Opera*. Houghton Mifflin, 2009.

This slender novel on a rather narrow topic nevertheless resonates with a clear, crystalline bell tone. The Chinese author, in his first novel, brings his admirably, even stunningly, precise and effortlessly metaphoric style to bear ("That slip of paper was a sigh from the wind.") on one aspect of Chinese culture that has transcended the change in regimes over the centuries: the Peking opera. As we, in fascination, observe here, the Peking opera is a tightly ritualized, tradition-bound art form, and the more nuanced and subtle the performance, the more highly regarded the performer. The novel's conceit is that a wealthy factory owner is prepared to endow a new production of *The Moon Opera*, which has not been performed for two decades; however, the factory owner's stipulation is that the production must star the lead female singer who performed it previously. She, though, has essentially retired from the stage after disfiguring her understudy with boiling water twenty years ago and is now a singing teacher. The story, then, becomes the story of this prima donna's attempt to recapture the role and her former fame, and what she learns about her true legacy to the Peking opera. At once a sad and lovely story. Ted Xu was kind enough to send me this beautiful YouTube video showing scenes from the opera. It is truly a masterful performance.

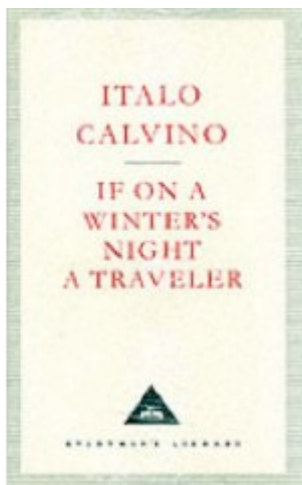
Click on this link:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8DSEsWxxH0&feature=Playlist&p=BC4AB2DB64684782&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=52



641.5 F 622s Flinn, Kathleen. *The Sharper Your Knife, the Less You Cry: Love, Laughter, and Tears in Paris at the World's Most Famous Cooking School*. Penguin Books, 2009.

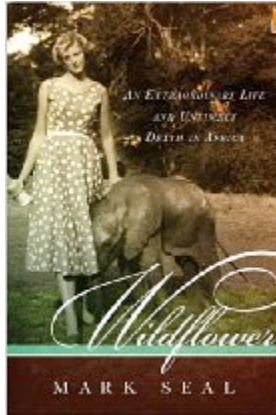
I can never get enough of true stories about people who stop in the middle of their life's journey to ask, "what do I really want?" and then have the guts to actually go get it. Kathleen Flinn's tale of chasing her ultimate dream makes for a really enchanting book: engaging, intelligent and surprisingly suspenseful. After rising to an executive position in the corporate world, Flinn finds herself "redundant" at the age of thirty-six in London. She phones her boyfriend in Seattle who urges her to take her severance pay, cash in her 401k, and attend the Cordon Bleu academy to realize her dream of becoming a chef. He promises to join her shortly. With almost no French Ms. Flinn plunges into the competitive world of the culinary arts replete with students who steal each other's food, hide chickens, and regularly almost amputate various digits in valiant attempts to pass each of the three stages to win a coveted diploma. If you like this delightful virtual cooking book that also contains some great recipes, I'd also recommend *On Rue Tatin Cooking and Living in a French Town* by Susan Hermann Loomis and the DVD *Julie and Julia*.



F C 168if Calvino, Italo. *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. Harcourt Brace, 1981.

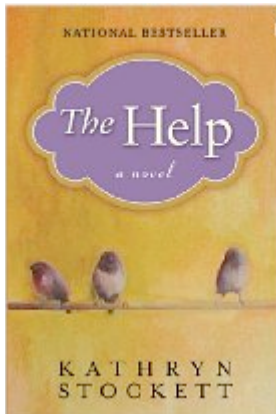
Most people repeat this title and add the words "came or comes", but Calvino (continually shortlisted for the Nobel Prize in Literature until he died suddenly in 1985) deliberately plays with the reader's mind to offer up a marvel of ingenuity, an experimental text that looks longingly back to the great age of narration--"when time no longer seemed stopped and did not yet seem to have exploded." Italo Calvino's novel is in one sense a comedy in which the two protagonists, the Reader and the Other Reader, ultimately end up married, having almost finished *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*. In another, it is a tragedy, a reflection on the difficulties of writing and the solitary nature of reading. The Reader buys a fashionable new book, which opens with an exhortation: "Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade." Alas, after 30 or so pages, one discovers that one's copy is corrupted, and consists of nothing but the first section, over and over. Returning to the bookshop, he discovers the volume, which he thought was by Calvino, is actually by the Polish writer Bazakbal. Given the choice between the two, he goes for the Pole, as does the Other Reader, Ludmilla. But this copy turns out to be by yet another writer,

as does the next, and the next. If you enjoy this classic fable be sure and check out Calvino's, *Invisible Cities* – imaginary conversations between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan.



BR O Seal, Mark, *Wildflower: An Extraordinary Life and Untimely Death in Africa*. Random House, 2009.

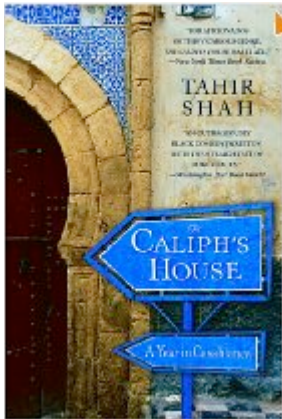
First published as an article in *Vanity Fair*, Mark Seal received so many letters asking for further information that he decided to return to Kenya and write a book of this famous environmentalist. In January 2006, Joan Root, a sixty-nine-year-old naturalist, Oscar-nominated wildlife filmmaker, and staunch conservationist, was murdered by two masked men armed with AK-47s shortly after midnight in her bedroom on the shore of Kenya's beautiful Lake Naivasha. Was it a random robbery gone bad, as the local police seemed to think, or was it a cold-blooded contract killing carried out at the behest of enemies Root had made in her efforts to protect Kenya's wildlife? Veteran journalist Mark Seal set out to investigate this gripping real-life murder mystery-and instead found an unforgettable story not only of a tragic death but of the remarkable life that preceded it. With compassion and an unswerving regard for the truth, Seal lays bare the deeply moving, inspirational history of Joan Root, covering her early days in Kenya as a shy young woman with an almost uncanny ability to connect to animals; her whirlwind courtship with the dashing Alan Root, their marriage, and the twenty years of nonstop adventure, passionate romance, and groundbreaking wildlife filmmaking that followed, both in Africa and around the world; the shattering disintegration of the marriage and partnership; and Joan's triumphant struggle to reinvent herself as the protector of her lakeshore community's fragile ecosystem-a struggle that would lead to her death. *Wildflower* is also the story of Kenya itself. A country blessed with unmatched beauty that is one of the last repositories of rare wildlife on the African continent, Kenya has also been scarred by decades of colonization and a culture of corruption fueled by the frequently competing agendas of conservationists and business interests.



FS865 Stockett, Kate. *The Help*. Putnam, 2009.

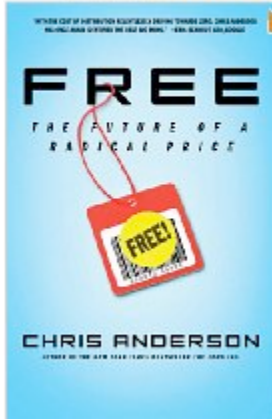
Steadily climbing the *New York Times* bestseller list, this title is a must read for the New Year. The relationships between white middle-class women and their black maids in Jackson, Miss., circa 1962, reflect larger issues of racial upheaval. Still unmarried, to her mother's dismay, recent Ole Miss graduate Skeeter returns home longing to be a serious writer. While playing bridge with her friends Hilly and Elizabeth, she asks

Elizabeth's seemingly docile maid Aibileen for housekeeping advice to fill the column she's been hired to pen for a local paper. The two women begin what Skeeter considers a semi-friendship, but Aibileen, mourning her son's recent death and devoted to Elizabeth's neglected young daughter, is careful what she shares. Aibileen's good friend Minnie, who works for Hilly's increasingly senile mother, is less adept at playing the subservient game than Aibileen. When Hilly, an aggressively racist social climber, fires and then blackballs her for speaking too freely, Minnie's audacious act of vengeance almost destroys her livelihood. Unlike oblivious Elizabeth and vicious Hilly, Skeeter is at the verge of enlightenment. Encouraged by a New York editor, she decides to write a book about the experience of black maids and enlists Aibileen's help. For Skeeter the book is primarily a chance to prove herself as a writer. The stakes are much higher for the black women who put their lives on the line by telling their true stories. Although the expos is published anonymously, the town's social fabric is permanently torn. If you like *The Help*, try *Mudbound*, winner of the Bellwether Prize for 2009.



961.03 S527 Shah, Tahir. *The Caliph's House*. Bantam Books, 2006.

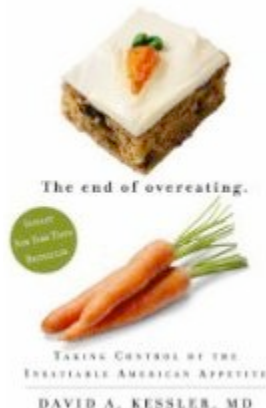
Come with me to the Kasbah where you'll meet a cast of character straight out *The Arabian Nights*. When Shah, his pregnant wife and their small daughter move from England to Morocco, where he'd vacationed as a child, he enters a realm of "invisible spirits and their parallel world." Shah buys the Caliph's House, once a palatial compound, now heavy with algae, cobwebs and termites. Unoccupied for a decade, the place harbors a willful jinni (invisible spirit), who Shah, the rational Westerner, reluctantly grasps must be exorcised by traditional means. As Shah remodels the haunted house, he encounters a cast of entertaining, sometimes bizarre characters. Three retainers, whose lives are governed by the jinni, have attached themselves to the property. Confounding craftsmen plague but eventually beautify the house. Intriguing servants come and go, notably Zohra, whose imaginary friend, a 100-foot tall jinni, lives on her shoulder. A "gangster neighbor and his trophy wife" conspire to acquire the Caliph's House, and a countess remembers Shah's grandfather and his secrets. Passers-through offer eccentricity (Kenny, visiting 15 cities on five continents where "Casablanca" is playing; Pete, a convert to Islam, seeking "a world without America"). There is a thin, dark post-9/11 thread in Shah's elegantly woven tale. The dominant colors, however, are luminous. "Life not filled with severe learning curves was no life at all," Shah observes. Trailing Shah through his year is sheer delight on par with Peter Mayle's, *A Year in Provence*. Buy some dates, make some mint tea and take a virtual trip to marvelous Morocco.



658.8 A545 Anderson, Chris. *Free: The Future of a Radical Price*. Hyperion, 2009.

Did you know that Maret no longer relies on an e-mail server nor does it give students and faculty e-mail addresses? They just simply require everyone to establish a free e-mail account with Google. Did you know that for \$250.00 dollars you can purchase a notebook computer with loads of memory that will fit in a knapsack, relies on the free operating system Linux (or you can use the free, Firefox web browser, Google docs (free word processing software),and free Google spreadsheets? Even your wireless access can be free depending upon the coffee shop you're sitting in. What are the financial and educational implications for schools? Should schools continue to purchase servers when students, faculty, and staff can store all of their files with free Drop.io? Should we require students to purchase these notebook computers and invest in top notch wireless access instead? What types of technologies do we need to invest in and which types might we divest ourselves of? While the best things in life may be free, a business model based on giving stuff away seems a little crazy. But Anderson (editor in chief, *Wired*), who made a big splash with *The Long Tail*, tells us that this business model is already here. In *The Long Tail* he showed how online businesses were making good by selling less of more, that is, by selling a huge range of niche or low-volume products that added up to big bucks. Here he demonstrates that the concept of making money by giving things away has already taken hold in the digital world. VERDICT With explanations of basic economic principles like supply and demand and an analysis of the differences between products in the physical world and those in the digital world, Anderson makes the "Free" premise sound quite reasonable. My only wish is that Anderson had addressed the dilemmas of schools with limited tech budgets schools and given some advice about what they should do rather than discussing the new business model of "free". Thought-provoking, however, to say the very least.

613.2 K42 Kessler, David. *The End of Overeating: Taking Control of the Insatiable American Appetite*. Rodale, 2009.



Alice Waters, the owner of Chez Panisse, believes that David Kessler's fascinating book is essential for anyone interested in learning more about how corporate greed and human psychology have created a national health crisis." I agree with her. Dr. Kessler, formerly Head of the FDA and quite overweight, crawled into various fast food restaurants' dumpsters to retrieve delivery boxes that listed the ingredients that are creating an obesity epidemic in America. His discovery was that

restaurants strive to create a perfect blending of fat, sugar, and oil in each and every course and that a huge percentage of the population is addicted to this magical formula and cannot get enough of it. Kessler surveys the world of modern industrial food production and distribution as reflected in both restaurants and grocery stores. Each of these elements, consumed in excess, has been linked to serious long-term health problems. Kessler also examines iconic foods such as Cinnabon and Big Macs, all of which have skilled marketing machines promoting consumption. Such nutritionally unbalanced foods propel people who already tend to eat more than mere physical need might otherwise warrant into uncontrolled behavior patterns of irrational eating. These persistent psychological and sensory stimuli lead to what Kessler terms conditioned hypereating, which he believes is a disease rather than a failure of willpower. There is hope, however. Kessler identifies the cues that lead to overeating and offers some simple, practical tools to help control ones impulses.

Compiled by K. Craver from various reviews 12/2009.