



santa monica reads

JUNE 28
THROUGH
AUGUST 22,
2021

WELCOME to Santa Monica Reads!

2021 marks the nineteenth year of this community reading program, one of the longest running of its kind in the United States. Santa Monica Reads provides an opportunity for community members to read and discuss the same book at community wide programs and discussions.

This year's featured selection is *The Pull of the Stars* by Emma Donoghue. Set in Dublin during the 1918 flu pandemic, the novel focuses on three women—a nurse, a midwife, a doctor, and a volunteer helper—and their experiences in a small maternity quarantine ward over the course of three days. They lose patients to the pandemic, but they also shepherd new life into an uncertain world. Set in a city ravaged by war and disease, Donoghue's novel is by turns gripping and tender, and a tribute to caregivers and mothers alike who do impossible work with tenderness and humanity.

Emma Donoghue is an award-winning playwright, novelist, and screenwriter, and is best known for her 2010 novel *Room*. Written in 2018-2019, *The Pull of the Stars* was published earlier than planned due to the COVID pandemic. As the pandemic continues into its second year, the need for libraries and connection remains as strong as ever. Please join us for virtual special events and discussions about themes that *The Pull of the Stars* brings to the fore: survival, resilience, family, love, and hope. Virtual programs will be held during Santa Monica Reads from **June 28 through August 22**.

The Pull of the Stars is available in several formats from the Santa Monica Public Library, including e-copies in the Libby app, or can be purchased at a local or online bookseller. For more information, go to SMPL Online. Thank you for your participation in building a stronger community through literature.

Patricia Wong, Director of Library Services
Santa Monica Public Library

ABOUT THE BOOK

In an Ireland ravaged by war and disease, Nurse Julia Power works at an understaffed hospital in a supply room that's been turned into a three-bed maternity ward and delivery room for fever victims. Two other women squeeze into the improvised ward to work alongside Julia: Bridie Sweeney, an orphan sent by the nuns to do grunt work, and Dr. Kathleen Lynn. In the darkness and intensity of this tiny ward, over three days, these women change each other's lives in unexpected ways. They lose patients to this baffling pandemic, but they also shepherd new life into a fearful world. With tireless tenderness and humanity, caregivers and mothers alike somehow do their impossible work. Meanwhile, a world war and a pandemic rage beyond the hospital walls, and hard feelings linger from the doomed Easter Rising two years earlier. The social tragedies of that time are also laid bare: the indigent forced into workhouses, "fallen women" asylums, and mother and baby homes.

Inspired by the centenary of the Great Flu of 1918, Emma Donoghue began writing *The Pull of the Stars* in October 2018 and delivered the final draft of the novel to her publishers in March 2020, 2 days before COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. In doing a deep dive into the miseries and terrors of the past, Donoghue presciently anticipated the anguish and dread of our present: the claustrophobia of days spent inside, empty schools and cafes, and the ubiquity of masks. In her engrossing and inadvertently topical story about health care workers fighting to preserve life, Donoghue finds the light in the darkness and infuses catastrophic circumstances with an infectious — but by no means blind — faith in human compassion, endurance and resilience.

BOOK DISCUSSIONS

Santa Monica Reads book discussions are hosted by trained facilitators and Library staff. Participants are encouraged to share their thoughts about this year's book selection and its themes, or are welcome to simply listen and learn more about the book.

Sat, July 17 at 11:00 a.m.

Ocean Park Branch & Notable Fiction Book Group

Live via Zoom; register in advance at bit.ly/2QiEwCR

Wed, July 21 at 7:00 p.m.

Montana Ave. Branch Book Group

Live via Zoom; register in advance at bit.ly/3guaVku

Tue, July 27 at 4:00 p.m.

Live via Zoom; register in advance at bit.ly/3dKY9wj

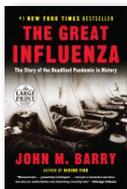
Thu, August 5 at 11:00 a.m.

Live via Zoom; register in advance at bit.ly/3nj6HxA

Tue, August 10 at 7:00 p.m.

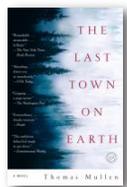
Live via Zoom; register in advance at bit.ly/3euYKRA

RECOMMENDED READS



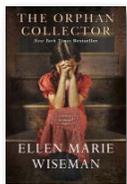
The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History
by **John M. Barry**

Magisterial in its depth, *The Great Influenza* provides a precise and sobering model for confronting epidemics looming on our horizon.



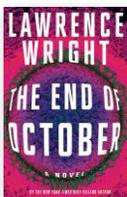
The Last Town on Earth
by **Thomas Mullen**

Inspired by a historical footnote regarding towns that quarantined themselves during the 1918 epidemic, Mullen's debut novel is a tale of morality in a time of upheaval.



The Orphan Collector
by **Ellen Marie Wiseman**

Set in 1918 Philadelphia, a thirteen-year-old German immigrant celebrates the end of the war, as an even more urgent threat arrives: the Spanish flu.



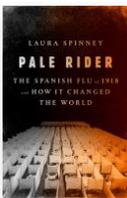
The End of October
by **Lawrence Wright**

In this riveting medical thriller, a doctor races to find the origins and cure for a mysterious new virus as it spreads across the United States and the rest of the world, decimating the population.



Find the Helpers: What 9/11 and Parkland Taught Me About Recovery, Purpose, and Hope
by **Fred Guttenberg**

Guttenberg, whose daughter died in the 2018 Parkland shooting, relays his journey surviving the worst of times thanks to the kindness and compassion of others.



Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How It Changed the World
by **Laura Spinney**

In this narrative history, the Spanish Flu dramatically disrupts – and often permanently alters – global politics, race relations and family structures, while spurring innovation in medicine, religion, and the arts.

THANKS TO:



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THANKS FOR SUPPORTING BOOK DISCUSSIONS AND PROGRAMS, AND THANKS TO THE FRIENDS OF THE SANTA MONICA PUBLIC LIBRARY FOR THEIR ONGOING SUPPORT FOR SANTA MONICA READS.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Voices from COVID's Front Lines: A Healthcare Workers Panel Discussion

Saturday, July 10 at 2:00 p.m.

Live via Zoom; register in advance at bit.ly/2QP08GI

Join us for a virtual discussion about healthcare and resiliency during COVID-19. Panelists include Dr. Dinora B. Chinchilla, a board-certified UCI Health Pulmonary Specialist and Jill Ruiz Carreon, a Ward Clerk Transcriber, who provides nursing staff support at Kaiser West LA. The conversation will be moderated by Lindsay B. Call, MPH, Santa Monica's COVID-19 Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Director.

Author Talk: Emma Donoghue on *The Pull of the Stars*

Saturday, August 21 at 2:00 p.m.

Live via BlueJeans; access program at bit.ly/32FOHUz

Award-winning writer Emma Donoghue's timely story about the Great Flu of 1918 takes place in a maternity ward when Ireland is doubly ravaged by war and disease. Over three brutal days, three women come together to support patients and one another in unexpected ways. Join us for this virtual presentation and discussion about living through unprecedented times.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emma Donoghue (pronounced Donna-hoo) was born in 1969 in Dublin, Ireland, where she grew up as one of eight siblings. In 1990, she earned a B.A. in English and French from University College Dublin, then moved to England where in 1997 she received a Ph.D. in English Literature from the University of Cambridge. After spending time commuting between England, Ireland and Canada, Donoghue moved to Ontario, Canada, where she lives now with her partner Christine Roulston and their two children.

A prolific author across many genres, Donoghue's writing career kicked off in 1993 with *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801*. The nonfiction history book laid the foundation for issues that would recur in most of her work over the next three decades, namely giving voice to the quieter, often-overlooked stories of women, as well as exploring the lives of lesbians. Donoghue also developed a gift for growing compelling stories out of the seeds of true historical incidents and real-life characters.

Donoghue is best-known for her 2010 novel *Room*, the story of a child and his mother held prisoner for years in a backyard bunker by a terrifying predator. Told from the unique perspective of the young child, who knows nothing more of the world than the "room" he was born into, *Room* was both critically-acclaimed, as well as an instant best seller. Donoghue would go on to adapt the book into an Academy Award-nominated screenplay in 2016. In addition to *Room*, her fiction bibliography includes numerous other acclaimed works such as *Slammerkin*, *The Wonder*, *Frog Music*, *Akin* and many more, as well as the middle-grade series *The Lottery*s. She has also been published as a poet, playwright, essayist and short fiction author.

While *The Pull of the Stars* was released just after the first wave of COVID-19, the novel was written with no knowledge of what lurked on the global horizon. Donoghue's inspiration for the story was the centennial of the Great Flu of 1918 and her discovery when reading up on the virus that expectant mothers were among the most vulnerable to catching the virus. From there, the author cast her story with the three central characters—a nurse midwife, a volunteer assistant, and a real-life woman doctor—and nurtured the story from there. As COVID-19 began to unfold, Donoghue's publishers realized how relevant the story was to our current times and pushed the novel ahead of its originally planned release schedule.