WELCOME to Santa Monica Reads All Summer. 2020 marks the eighteenth year of this community reading program, one of the longest running of its kind in the United States. Santa Monica Reads All Summer provides an opportunity for people to engage, read, and discuss the same book at discussion groups and special programs. This year, however, is unlike any other. During COVID-19, we are living in unprecedented times. The need for libraries and to connect with community is more important than ever.

This year’s featured selection is The Library Book by Susan Orlean. In this bestseller, Orlean reopensthe unsolved mystery of the most catastrophic library fire in American history while paying homage to all public libraries. The book presents an intriguing history of the City of Los Angeles, as well as the 1986 Central Library fire. The fire reached 2,000 degrees and burned for more than seven hours. It destroyed 400,000 books and damaged 700,000 more, shutting the library down for seven years. To this day, the mystery of whether the fire was arson remains.

Susan Orlean, an award-winning journalist and New York Times bestselling author, presents a uniquely engaging story. Please join us for a series of virtual discussions about topics that The Library Book brings to the fore, local history, civil service, democracy, and wellbeing. Virtual programs will be held during Santa Monica Reads All Summer, from June 22 through September 7. Sign up for the Library’s annual Summer Reading Program to join a community of readers.

The Library Book is available in several formats from the Santa Monica Public Library or can be purchased at a local or online bookseller. You can access free e-copies with a library card, through the Overdrive/Libby app. For more information, go to SMPL Online. Thank you for your participation in building a stronger community through literature.

ABOUT THE BOOK

On April 29, 1986, the Los Angeles Central Public Library caught fire. The flames pervaded the stacks with a fury that no Los Angeles City firefighter had seen before. It was the most catastrophic library fire in American history, burning and damaging over a million books, and forcing the library to close for seven years. In The Library Book, Susan Orlean delves into the mystery of the fire and its aftermath, including reexamining the case of Harry Peak, the man long suspected of setting fire to the Central Library. Orlean’s investigation also includes a detailed history of the Los Angeles Public Library and extends into the lives of the individuals who played a key role in its history and restoration. She details these characters and brings to light the fascinating and unique roles of their work and their contribution to such a vibrant institution.

Above all, Orlean manages to beautifully weave together the story of the fire, the library itself, and its staff, while paying tribute to the roles of public libraries and librarians in the communities of the past, present and future. It is an extremely rich and eloquent chronicle of their evolution across history and their essential place in communities. Susan Orlean’s The Library Book will have you fervently reading from beginning to end.

BOOK DISCUSSIONS

Santa Monica Reads book discussions are hosted by trained discussion facilitators. 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 11 at 11:00am Live via Zoom
Register in advance at tinyurl.com/y9ddwvg4

Wed, July 15 at 7:00pm | Montana Branch Book Group Live via Zoom
• Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451 will also be discussed
Register in advance at tinyurl.com/y72qyvumk

Tue, July 21 at 4:00pm Live via Zoom
Register in advance at tinyurl.com/vcts8w6f

Wed, August 5 at 11:00am Live via Zoom
Register in advance at tinyurl/ydbene6f

Mon, August 17 at 7:00pm | Main Library Book Group Live via Zoom
Register in advance at tinyurl/y9wtpj86

Sat, August 29, at 2:00pm Live via Zoom
Register in advance at tinyurl.com/y7n3352

Thu, September 3, at 4:00pm Live via Zoom
Register in advance at tinyurl.com/ybo5k98j

Patty Wong, Director of Library Services
Santa Monica Public Library
RECOMMENDED READS

Fahrenheit 451
by Ray Bradbury
This long-standing classic work of dystopian fiction imagines a future society gone awry, in which firemen burn books and the state suppresses learning.

This Book Is Overdue! How Librarians and Cybrarians Can Save Us All
by Marilyn Johnson
A romp through the ranks of information professionals – from the blunt and obscenely funny bloggers to the quiet law-abiding librarians fighting for information freedom and standing up to the Patriot Act.

The Yellow-Lighted Bookshop: A Memoir, A History
by Lewis Buzbee
A proud and unrepentant biblio-addict explains how he got that way, and weaves a fascinating historical account of the bookseller trade.

Patience and Fortitude: Power, Real Estate, and the Fight to Save a Public Library
by Scott Sherman
A riveting investigation of how citizen action saved the New York Public Library.

I Work at a Public Library: A Collection of Crazy Stories from the Stacks
by Gina Sheridan
Stacked high with hundreds of strange-but-true stories, this book celebrates librarians and the memorable patrons that roam the stacks every day.

The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu: And Their Race to Save the World’s Most Precious Manuscripts
by Joshua Hammer
A band of brazen librarians pulls off a movie-worthy heist to save ancient Arabic texts from Al Qaeda.

The Shadow of the Wind
by Carlos Ruiz Zafón
A love letter to literature, this epic story is one of murder, madness, and doomed love.

SPECIAL EVENTS

🔥 Author Talk: Susan Orlean on The Library Book
Saturday, July 25 at 2:00pm | Live via BlueJeans
Access program at tinyurl.com/ybgcbgyt

In her bestselling book, Susan Orlean reopens the unsolved mystery of the Los Angeles Central Library fire, the most catastrophic library fire in American history, while simultaneously paying homage to public libraries and their impact on individuals, communities, and society. Join us for this virtual presentation and discussion about the essential role libraries play in our lives.

🔥 The Architecture of Los Angeles Central Library
Saturday, August 15 at 2:00pm | Live via Zoom
Register in advance at tinyurl.com/y93wcn7

Join us for a discussion and visual presentation on the architectural history of the Los Angeles Central Library. Learn about the unique history of the building and the role the 1986 fire played in its redesign. Panelists include Kenneth Breisch, Associate Professor of Architecture at USC; Margaret Bach, founding member of the Los Angeles Conservancy; and Stephen Gee, author of Los Angeles Central Library: A History of Its Art and Architecture.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

“The reading of the book was a journey. There was no need for souvenirs.”
- Susan Orlean, The Library Book

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Susan Orlean began her writing career as a journalist in Portland, Oregon after receiving a literature and history degree at the University of Michigan. Despite her lack of experience and credentials, Orlean got a job with the local alternative newsweekly, crediting her ‘abiding passion for storytelling and sentence-making’ for the launch of her career. During her time in Portland, Orlean’s work was also published in Rolling Stone and The Village Voice.

After writing for The Phoenix and The Globe in Boston, Orlean landed in New York City in 1986. While serving as a staff writer at The New Yorker, she began writing her first book, Saturday Night, which was published in 1990.

Over the years, Orlean’s catalog of intriguing nonfiction work has grown to include The Bullfighter Checks Her Makeup: My Encounters with Extraordinary People, My Kind of Place: Travel Stories from a Woman Who’s Been Everywhere, Rin Tin Tin: The Life and the Legend, and the book she is most known for, The Orchid Thief: A True Story of Beauty and Obsession.

Orlean’s writing is included in several prestigious essay collections and she continues to write for The New Yorker. Her unique take on interesting topics has drawn the attention of Hollywood. The Orchid Thief was the basis for Spike Jonze’s 2002 award-winning film Adaptation. Additionally, her 1998 Women’s Outside article on Maui surfer girls, “Life’s Swell,” was the basis for the 2002 film Blue Crush. With The Library Book, Orlean channeled her childhood passion for libraries into five years of research and writing to produce a fascinating account of the 1986 Los Angeles Central Library fire and a cultural history of libraries. Orlean is set to adapt the book for an upcoming television project. She lives with her husband, son, and a ‘small menagerie of animals,’ and splits her time between Los Angeles and New York’s Hudson Valley.