

Hadassah Book Club Reading List 2020-2021

Wednesday, May 27, 2020

The Girl from Berlin by Ronald Balson, historical fiction.

This book tells of Ada, daughter of the first violinist and concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic, who is herself a gifted violinist. She is a Jewish girl in Berlin in the 1930s, using her extraordinary talent to save herself and her family. In some way Ada is connected to Gabi an older woman in 2017 who is threatened by a powerful corporation that wants to evict her from the Tuscan villa where she has lived all her life. We learn Ada's story as we follow two lawyers determined to keep Gabi in her villa. **Discussion Leader: Lois Rosen**

Wednesday, June 24, 2020

The Liar by Ayelet Gundar-Goshen, fiction translated from Hebrew.

The story of a 17-year-old girl, Nofar, who gets swept up in a lie she didn't really mean to tell. Nofar accuses a popular singer of sexually assaulting her and he is disgraced and imprisoned. This becomes a gripping psychological thriller and a meditation on the lure of lying and the lure of the fame it can bring. **Discussion Leader: Liz Kaufman**

Wednesday, July 22, 2020

An Odyssey: A Father, a Son and an Epic by Daniel Mendelsohn, memoir.

81-year-old Jay Mendelsohn, a retired research scientist, enrolls in an *Odyssey* seminar his son teaches at Bard College. Throughout the course, Jay persistently challenges his son's interpretations. After the course ends, they take a trip together retracing the *Odyssey's* voyage, in which the son begins to understand his difficult father at last. The book says many complicated things about *The Odyssey*, but is also a moving story about fathers and sons.

Discussion Leader: Claire Berkman

Wednesday, August 26, 2020

On Division by Goldie Goldberg, fiction.

A rare look inside Brooklyn's Chasidic community, shown through the eyes of Surie, a 57-year-old Chasidic woman, mother of 10 children, who finds herself pregnant with twins. It is a shock and an aberration, an embarrassment and a public display of private life. Surie's is a story of her awakening in middle age to a better understanding of herself through this pregnancy and of her life in such an insular community. It is also a portrait of a long, happy marriage.

Discussion Leader: Barbara Hyman

Wednesday, September 23, 2020

The Last Flight of Poxl West by Daniel Torday, fiction.

A 15-year-old boy named Eli worships his uncle Poxl, who tells him stories of his adventures in WWII and then writes a well-received memoir about his heroic exploits as an RAF bomber pilot flying bombing missions over Nazi Germany. But in the wake of the book's success, Eli discovers that Poxl is not exactly who he has pretended to be. Through uncle Poxl, Eli learns the tragic story of Jewish life in Europe during WWII and the pain uncle Poxl must bear within.

Discussion Leader: Bev Wiener

Wednesday, October 28, 2020

Open Your Hand: Teaching as a Jew, Teaching as an American by Ilana Blumberg, non-fiction.

In examining her life as a teacher — from her initial years at the progressive New York-based Jewish day school Beit Rabban (which translates to “Our Teacher’s House”), to her time as a professor at Michigan State University, to her stint serving in an American inner city public school, to her current position as a professor of English at Bar Ilan University in Israel — Ilana Blumberg meditates on questions that strike at the core of contemporary education. The title, alluding to the verse in Deuteronomy that instructs, “you shall open your hand to your brother, your suffering, and your poor in your land,” is taken by Blumberg as a guidepost in her quest to position education as a call for care. Called “a moving memoir.”

Discussion Leader: Ellen Pollak

November no meeting—Thanksgiving

December—note date change due to the holidays

Wednesday, December 2, 2020 (for November & December holiday conflicts)

A Replacement Life by Boris Fishman, fiction.

Explores the world of aging Russian Jewish immigrants in South Brooklyn. The story centers on a NY writer from a Russian family who is asked by his grandfather to write for German reparations for his now-dead grandmother. He forges a story and soon finds himself collaborating with dozens of other Soviet Jews to forge “tales of woe and deceit” for restitution claims. Finalist for Sami Rohr Prize and National Jewish Book Award. We can host a live chat with Fishman through the Jewish Book Council. ***Discussion Leader: Gloria Epstein***

Wednesday, January 27, 2021

The Alice Network by Kate Quinn, historical fiction.

A book about women spies in WWI and WWII. Set in 1915 and 1947. Based on the reality of The Alice Network in WWI. By spring 1915, the Alice Network involved 80 men and women of all social classes spying and relaying information. A spy story—the search for a missing aunt by pregnant out-of-wedlock socialite and former Alice Network spy. Not especially Jewish other than the setting in the world wars but highly praised. ***Discussion Leader:***

Wednesday, February 24, 2021

Here All Along: Finding Meaning, Spirituality, and a Deeper Connection to Life—in Judaism. (After Finally Choosing to Look There) by Sarah Hurwitz, memoir.

Sarah Hurwitz was Michelle Obama’s head speechwriter. In this memoir, Hurwitz leads you along as she rediscovers Judaism, finding torah’s wisdom relevant to today in its age-old wisdom. A lapsed Jew at age 36, she re-discovers the value of Judaism. Critics and reviewers say she writes beautifully. ***Discussion Leader:***

Wednesday, March 24, 2021

The Song of the Jade Lily by Kirstie Manning, historical fiction.

A gripping historical novel that tells the little-known story of Jewish refugees who fled to Shanghai during WWII. In 1939, two young girls meet in Shanghai. Beautiful local Li and Jewish refugee Romy form a fierce friendship, but the realities of WWII prove to be too much for these close friends as they are torn apart. In 2016, after her grandfather dies in Australia, Alexandra flies to Shanghai, determined to trace her grandparents' past. Peeling back the layers of their hidden lives, she is forced to question what she knows about her family and herself.

Discussion Leader: Fern Griesbach

Wednesday, April 28, 2021

The Female Persuasion by Meg Wolitzer, fiction.

This novel is about Greer Kadetsky, a young woman coming of age and finding inspiration in feminist icon, Faith Frank, who evolves throughout the novel from abstract celebrity, to boss, confidante and challenger, who pushes Greer to confront reality. The novel touches on many timely issues--sexual identity and feminism, color and economics in feminism, workplace harassment, ambition versus values, the hollowness of some philanthropic organizations--and concludes with a chapter about the Women's March of 2017. Ironically, the biggest and most admirable feminist in the novel is a man--Cory--who does what needs to be done for his mother with love and respect and doesn't foist responsibility for her on female relatives.

Discussion Leader:

Wednesday, May 26, 2021

Killing a King: The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and the Remaking of Israel by Dan Ephron, non-fiction.

Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli Prime Minister who initiated a groundbreaking peace process with the Palestinians, was assassinated by a young right-wing law student who decided he had a divinely sanctioned duty to kill the premier as an aggressor against West Bank settlers. Ephron argues that the killer got exactly what he wanted, leading to the hard right and the situation in Israel today. The book is described as “an electrifying narrative and crime story.”

Discussion Leader:

Wednesday, June 23, 2021

Rav Hisda's Daughter, Book 1: Apprentice: A Novel of Love, the Talmud, and Sorcery by Maggie Anton, historical fiction, historical romance.

Hisdadukh, beautiful and learned, is the youngest child of Talmudic sage Rav Hisda. Her goal is to become an enchantress. Based on actual Talmud texts and populated with its rabbis and their families, this is a historical drama of a third century family in Babylon and Israel. The world of the Talmud comes to life from a woman's perspective. Previously, the Hadassah Book Club read and enjoyed Anton's historical novels *Rashi's Daughters*

Discussion Leader:

Wednesday, July 28, 2021

The Mathematician's Shiva by Stuart Rojstaczer, fiction.

When the greatest female mathematician in history passes away, her son just wants to mourn his mother in peace. But rumor has it the notoriously eccentric Polish émigré has solved one of the most difficult problems in all of mathematics, and has spitefully taken the solution to her grave. A ragtag group of mathematicians from around the world descends upon Rachela's shiva, determined to find the proof or solve it for themselves. An unexpectedly moving and uproariously funny novel. **Discussion Leader: Liz Kaufman**

Wednesday, August 25, 2021

Paper Love: Searching for the Girl My Grandfather Left Behind by Sarah Waldman, memoir.

Years after her grandfather's death, the author found a cache of her grandfather's letters from before he fled pre-WWII Vienna. Included were letters from his love who stayed behind after the Germans annexed Austria. Letters describe her growing desperation as German decrees made life difficult. Sarah Waldman traveled to Germany, Austria, and England to piece together **Discussion Leader:**

Wednesday, September 22, 2021

The Montreal Shtetl: Making Home After the Holocaust by Zelda Abramson & John Lynch, non-fiction.

Tens of thousands of Jewish refugees arrived in Montreal after WWII and the Holocaust. Drawing on more than 60 interviews with survivors, hundreds of case files from Jewish Immigrant Aid Services and other archival documents, ***The Montreal Shtetl*** presents a portrait of the daily struggles of Holocaust survivors who settled in Montreal, where they encountered difficulties with work, language, culture, health care, and a Jewish community that was not always welcoming to survivors. "Delivers a strikingly personal yet analytical account."

Discussion Leader: