

Christine

This podcast is produced on the ancestral homeland of the Nooksack and Lummi people. They have been its stewards since time immemorial, respecting the land, river and ocean with the understanding that everything is connected, related and alive. We acknowledge the elders and their collective and individual plights and achievements. We consider the legacies of violence, displacement, migration and settlement that bring us together today. And we pursue ongoing action to build lasting relationships and grow together so that all may prosper.

(Interlude music plays)

Neil

WCLS in Whatcom County presents Library Stories, a podcast to open your eyes to all the ways your local public libraries matter. Join us as we reveal the power of sharing at the library. I'm your host, Neil Mckay, Online Experience Coordinator for the Whatcom County Library System and today...

Here we are once again. I'm here with my boss, Mary Vermillion.

Mary

Hi Neil

Neil

Hi. So you know it's winter. It's the dark days of winter, but.

Mary

Well, it's not officially winter yet.

Neil

It's not winter yet.

Mary

Yeah, but we are recording this on December 7th, so it sure feels like winter out there. It's dark when we arrive, dark when we leave. Maybe not dark when we arrive, but dark when we leave and it's gray today and raining and it just has that feeling of a good old Whatcom County winter.

Neil

But what can we do to cheer things up and brighten up everybody's day?

Mary

A good book.

Neil

A good book and not just a good book. We have a catalog of sorts, right?

Mary

Yeah. No, absolutely, yeah. Today we are, this is a gift to the community. It's the Whatcom County Library Systems 2023 Gift Guide, which of course we're talking about a library here.

So, the gifts are books. Books for people, readers of all ages and we put this together for Open Book, our festival for readers that happened in November, but we have copies available at all the branches and I hope everyone listening to this will go to their local Whatcom County Library System branch and ask for a copy of the gift guide. And if you can't get to your local branch, it's also available online. And I know, Neil, that you'll have the link.

Neil

I'll mention it several times.

Mary

Yes, so people will hear all about it. So, but I'll just quickly say that putting together this gift guide, we leaned heavily on the experts in our library system. They are the librarians who are the selectors, meaning they have the dream job of tracking new book releases, reading reviews, watching what interests are trending among local readers, and they also get lots of book requests from library patrons. And so they gather all that information, and then they apply their expertise to curate the library collection for our community.

So, when you go into a WCLS location, when you look on the library shelves, these are books that our selectors have chosen for the community, based on those criteria and we are so thrilled that they took the time and I know it was a hard job. They're probably going to say it in your conversations with them, but they narrowed down their favorites of books that were published in 2023.

And then in the gift guide we also feature, because I know you'll be curious...what were other people in Whatcom County reading this year? And so we also have a list of the most popular books that were checked out by Whatcom County readers this year. So it's a really great overview of not only what our librarians want to make sure you know and what you might consider either as a gift for someone in your life or for yourself, or just something to be added to your holds list. And then again, we also just wanted to feature and let people know what folks are reading as we celebrate books and this season of giving.

Neil

Right. So this whole episode is, it's not going to be Mary and I talking about.

Mary

No. Heck no. You don't want that.

Neil

We got the selectors and put them in a room and said, "Tell us a little bit about the selection process," but mostly we said tell us a couple of the books off your gift guide list. And so we've got some reading recommendations for all ages, for all tastes. And you know, live in a fun fashion.

Mary

Well, this is going to be a lot of fun, and if you're still out there looking for gifts for the end of the year for the holiday season, this is our little gift to you, help you out with those final gifts or just get out of a pen and a piece of paper and start jotting them down. We've got a great list for you here.

Neil

I already picked a book out to give as a present based on this guide.

Mary

Oh yeah. OK, well, what is it?

Neil

I shouldn't say it out loud because the person I'm giving the gift to might be listening.

Mary

Well, that would be a good way for us to tell who's listening to the podcast.

Neil

So, the book is *Cat's Very Good Day* by Kristen Tracy and David Small, and it's a great little early reader book that is just, you know, really delightful and reminiscent of our cat, Baby. Who is becoming friends with our grandson Jackson.

Mary

Perfect.

Neil

So, I think he's going - I'm not getting it for Baby, for our cat.

Mary

Ohh, OK oh, I know that Baby's reading list is really deep and you know she didn't put in that time to get to it. So yeah, yeah.

Neil

No, no. It's gonna be for Jackson. Well, it's true.

Mary

That was one of Sarah Lavender's picks, wasn't it?

Neil

No, actually, that was Lisa Gresham.

Mary

Ohh, Lisa Gresham. OK, great.

Neil

Put that on her list and.

Mary

Surprising, lots of surprises within the gift guide.

Neil

For sure, you never know what's going to be in these endless catalogs here. So go out and grab it and pick some books out for the people you love and pick one out for yourself because I may end up saving *Cat's Very Good Day* for, just keep at my house for Jackson to come and see. We'll see.

Mary

Well, that sounds like a great memory in the making. So great. I can't wait to hear this episode.

Neil

All right, let's get on with it.

Mary

Right. And happy holidays to everybody.

(interlude music plays)

Neil

So, I'm speaking with our three selectors of adult books. Can we go around the table and introduce yourselves?

Mary K.

Sure, I am Mary Kinser and I am a Collection Development Librarian. I select Adult Fiction and Audio books and DVD's.

Emma

My name is Emma Radosevich. I am also a Collection Development Librarian. I primarily select Adult Nonfiction, and I also select Spanish materials and eBooks.

Lisa

And my name is Lisa Gresham. I'm the Collection Services Manager and I select Large Print and Play aways and some other odd things.

Neil

So, you all three are selectors for adult materials. What is? What is that job? I mean, what do you, what is the job of a selector look like?

Mary K.

Well, a lot of it really is about trying to respond to things that we know that patrons are going to want that are coming out, things that are by recognized authors or on topics that we know are popular. So that's sort of one track, and another track is trying to anticipate what we think is going to be popular. So, to have materials available in the collection, sort of before people know that they want them.

Neil

OK. Anything else?

Lisa

Yeah. And I think, well, and there's so many debut authors and things that booksellers and librarians help bring those books forward for people. And so, I think we're evaluating things based on lots of other cues that we're getting and things that we know about books - does it have a really catchy cover and the title? And are there lots of hooks in the story that we think will make it popular for people so that if we do put it in a library and put it face out, somebody's going to wander by and it's going to grab them and they're going to pick it up and check it out, but it's not an author that they ever would have heard of because it's a debut. The debut work.

Emma

And the vendor that we use provides a lot of tools that kind of help us do this, predicting work months before patrons even know that a book is released. You know, we get lists that say what publishers think the top books of like the next, you know, three months out are going to be. And we also get some information like how many copies other bookstores and libraries have put on order so we can kind of read the numbers ahead of time and know, like, this is going to be the big memoir of May 2024.

Neil

So it's more than just picking your favorite books that you want to share with people, you're picking books that you don't necessarily, wouldn't necessarily read. Is that right?

Lisa

If I did that, our collection would look really strange.

Emma

It would be so small and so weird.

Mary K.

I mean, it's actually like that's really one of the things about the work that's interesting and challenging is you really have to separate out your own feelings about things. There are books that I absolutely love that you know, maybe for whatever reason are not popular in our community, and that book is not

earning a place on our shelf, whereas there are topics and things that I'm not particularly interested in. For instance, I select DVD's. And so I, you know, horror movies are really popular. And I'm not a horror watcher, but boy, I buy a lot of horror movies, so I have to separate my own wants and desires out of that equation. And because I'm really buying for our community.

Lisa

Yeah, this sounds really strange to say out loud, but I always consider it kind of a good sign if I get to the end of putting together a selection cart, and there are only a few books in the cart that I would really want to read, because then I know I've selected for a lot of different reading interest and I'm not biased towards selecting for my own.

Emma

I find like I go on a lot of little research deep dives where I sort of have that initial reaction to a book where I'm like, oh, that doesn't sound very interesting. And then I asked myself, like, OK, well Emma is that because of who you are and what you're interested in? And then I might do, you know, a search on the author and find out, like, what communities is this person popular with? Maybe they're a really, you know, up and coming WWE wrestler and like I don't watch WWE, but a lot of people do. So, then I kind of go on a little deep dive and find out you know who is this person? And who would be interested in this book?

Neil

Do you ever discover an author or a book that you would never have considered through this research process and then all of a sudden you have a new favorite?

Emma

I don't know about new favorites, but there's definitely things that I will add to my own personal holds queue once they get in the catalog. Just because I'm like, I remember ordering that and that seemed kind of interesting and I just like want to see the cover and open it and, you know, kind of experience it like a patron would.

Mary K.

Yeah, absolutely. I mean for me, I always, you know, feel like I'm not, you know, there are certain topics I'm not necessarily interested in. For instance, I'm not a huge fantasy reader. I'm not drawn to that initially, but when I'm selecting fantasy, I'm looking at it, reading the descriptions, and then I find myself, oh well, you know, on the surface, I might not say that I'm a fantasy reader, but this really sounds interesting, and this has some hooks that I think are really interesting. *Legends and Lattes* is a new book by Travis Baldree and that was exactly it, right? On the surface it's about, you know, an orc that opens a coffee shop and that, you know, might not sound really interesting, but looking at the cover reading the description, I thought, oh, this is, this sounds great. And boy, is it great. I absolutely loved it.

Emma

I feel like it helps me connect with readers better. I feel like I understand different readers and different reader tastes as I'm doing selection work. I think it builds a lot of empathy with readers and different styles.

Lisa

Well, and I think one thing that happens too is it bears mentioning that we're doing all this work just digitally. So, we're looking at a picture of the book digitally and maybe there's a little bit of browsing inside the book or reading a sample of the book, but when the books actually do come in and they're sitting on carts and waiting to be catalogued and processed, I think then the selectors have the experience that the patrons do on the shelf. So, we browse through those carts and ohh, I remember ordering this, but boy it...

Emma

Looks like bigger or...

Lisa

So much more beautiful. So much more. Yeah. And I really. I'm gonna take this home. Oh, I'm gonna go put a hold on it, on this now.

Neil

Well, and, you know, talking about covers and such brings up something with me. You know the idea of not judging a book by the cover.

Emma

We do every day, yes.

Mary K.

All the time.

Lisa

It's one of the best ways to judge a book, really.

Neil

One of my favorite books right now is *Nothing to See Here*, which is a great, and I can't remember the authors name.

Mary K.

Kevin Wilson.

Neil

Kevin, I know. All three of you.

Emma

Oh, I've read this one, yes.

Neil

And it was just, you know, what a wonderful book. But I spent a year seeing it and hearing it being promoted about and I just, the cover just didn't do anything for me.

Lisa

And the story is weird. I mean, you have to go on faith when you give that to somebody. It's just like, just read this. Trust me, it sounds like a really strange premise, but if you.

Neil

Well, right, yes.

Emma

You do judge it by its cover. You might look at it and think like, oh, this is like some literary fiction or poetry and like that might not be my usual genre.

Neil

That's exactly it. I looked at it and it did not look like a weird book, which is what I'm interested in. I like the weird books and that one just appealed to me. Just like I fell in love with it and I actually got a couple of copies to give to various people.

Lisa

Did that one keep the same cover between hardcover and paperback?

Mary K.

Yes, it did, yes.

Lisa

Mary K.

Ohh, maybe they should switch the cover and made it more evocative of the type of book it was.

Emma

That is one of our greatest disappointments is when Mary and I select books for the Hot Picks collection, which is a paperback only collection. Sometimes the publisher will change the cover image from the hard cover which we were all in love with to something just a little less flashy, less interesting for the paperback.

Neil

And then so you're purchasing the paperbacks?

Emma



Yeah, for the Hot Picks. And sometimes even that'll be the deciding factor between not, between buying a book for the Hot Picks or not is if the cover changed so drastically that it no longer looks interesting or inviting or unique.

Lisa

Well, the opposite happens too.

Emma

That's true.

Lisa

That there's a book that it gets. This is a great story. It has great hooks.

Emma

Why this cover?

Lisa

You know it would have such broad appeal, but the cover is terrible. And I think they realize that, the publisher realizes that they missed the mark. And when the paperback comes out, they finally put a cover on this that'll actually, yeah, looks like what the book is.

Mary K.

I mean, it is right, sort of the common wisdom like, don't judge a book by its cover, but the covers are there for a reason, right? They are doing that intentionally. They're making cover design choices. They're choosing what blurbs to put on the front and who to feature it by, you know, and they're doing that because they know that we're going to be visually drawn to it. So, it's OK, you know, we teach our staff that it's OK to judge a book by a cover and respond to it that way. But that's not necessarily the whole story behind it.

Neil

Right, OK. Well, so this is fascinating. And I could talk to you guys about your job all day long, but that's not why I brought you guys here. You put out, you along with the Youth Services selectors, put out a gift guide for winter gift buying? And I want to, well, let's talk about that a minute, maybe about what the purpose of putting out a publication. So this is a, what is this 8 pages, 12 pages?

Lisa

At least, yeah.

Neil

And it's, it's just lists of each of the selectors favorite books that they would recommend this year that were, were they all published this year?

Mary K.

Yes.

Emma

Yes, all 2023.

Lisa

Well and it's not exactly like, the books on mine, anyway, are not necessarily my favorites. I think that's one thing that's really interesting about publishing or picking books for a gift guide is that you don't know who your audience is.

Neil

Right, that's true.

Lisa

And so much of the selection and recommendation that we do depends on knowing who our audience is. So, this is a totally different process as far as I'm concerned. I liked all of these books, but they're picked for an audience that has a really broad appeal. Which is different than I might pick for some other list, right?

Neil

I mean, I think that's a really, it's a thing that I don't think we as patrons think about very much. We assume that whoever purchased, whoever selected this book loves it and it's not that it's that whoever selected this book thinks that I will love it and they don't necessarily see eye to eye, and that's what makes you know what makes it a wonderful world, right, is, you know, diversity of thought and diversity of choices. So, you've made these choices, and I want to kind of go around the room again here and kind of pick one or two that you'd like to highlight from the gift guide.

Mary K.

OK. So yeah, like Lisa said, for me choosing these, I mean it's eight titles, right? So, eight titles that were published in 2023 that, you know, this is the sort of project that is ripe for overthinking. And I overthink it a lot. And I always when I have a project like this, I always wait and I'm usually the last to submit my picks because I'm frantically and furiously trying to read a bunch of stuff to figure out what exactly are the best choices.

Anyway, sooner or later the deadline comes and I have to settle on something, but there are a couple of things on here that I'm especially in love with. One of them is a graphic novel. It's called *A First Time for Everything* by Dan Santat. It's really sort of aged at middle grade. It just won the National Book Award for Young People's Literature, so feeling like I made a good choice there, but it's a coming-of-age story about Dan Santat's experience when he was in middle school, traveling for really for the first time and

doing this trip to Europe all by himself. And it's a lovely examination of sort of finding yourself in a world that you've never been to and all of that middle school angst, it's just really, really funny and it's just really very relatable.

So, then the other one I wanted to talk about is *Edisons Ghosts* by Katie Spalding. This is a great example of what's terrific about the library because this book was not even remotely on my radar at all. Until a co-worker, Amiee in Acquisitions brought it by my desk and was like "Have you seen this book? It looks really terrific. I think you might be interested in it." And I checked it out and took it home and she was 100% right. It was one of my favorite books of this last year. So the subtitle of this is *The Untold Weirdness of History's Greatest Geniuses*, and the idea behind the book is Katie Spalding takes people that are really well known, Da Vinci, Thomas Edison and Arthur Conan Doyle, and she peels back, sort of the legends around them to give us like who they, who these people really were like the weird quirks that they had in their lives. And so it's very readable. It's very relatable. She's got a very snarky, funny tone and some terrific footnotes that just bring all of these little accounts to life. If you have a history lover on your gift list this year, this is the book that you're going to want to give them, it's just fantastic.

Neil

I'm hoping someone gets that one for me. Hint hint out there.

Mary K.

Oh, you would love this, Neil.

Emma

But if not, this one's going to be a future Hot Pick based on Mary's recommendations.

Mary K.

Yes, it's so great.

Neil

OK, Emma, how about you?

Emma

So, my two books are the only two books that I actually bought for members of my family for Christmas, so hopefully they're not listening to this podcast. Probably not, unless I link them to it. The first one is called *Start Here: Instructions for Becoming a Better Cook*. My brother, he is 21, recently graduated, got his own apartment. He and his girlfriend like cooking together. And this is definitely one of the chefs that I trust most right now to teach me how to be a better cook. I call her our modern-day Julia Child because she's very funny. She's very forgiving. She doesn't have a show like Julia Child, but she is on YouTube. And this was one of those pleasant surprise books when it arrived in Administration Services because it is so big and there are so many photos, and definitely if you're a visual learner, I would say this is the cookbook of the year for you.

And for my dad, I bought a book called *Paved Paradise: How Parking Explains the World*. He is a cyclist. I am a cyclist. That's something that we bond over. This book is decidedly anti-car. After reading this book, it will change the way that you park. It will change the way that you see parking lots and it will

change the way that you experience the world as a pedestrian. I would definitely recommend this for anybody who likes slightly nerdy podcasts that do like little history deep dives. I would liken this to an episode of 99% invisible, if you know anyone who likes that.

Neil

How about you, Lisa?

Lisa

Well, I'm actually before I talk about mine, I want to talk about one on Emma's list because I just went shopping at Village Books yesterday and bought gifts for every, book gifts for everyone on my list, and one of them was one that's on Emma's list, which is the essay collection by Ross Gay, a book, well, you've got *A Book of More Delights* on the list. And I bought the first one, which is just a book, *The Book of Delights*, but it is one of those books that you can give to almost anybody. Ross Gay sat out, I think, during COVID, during the pandemic, possibly.

Emma

I think it was before. Came in like 2019.

Lisa

If I'm remembering correctly, he was feeling kind of dark, so I was thinking pandemic times, but yeah.

Emma

You can feel dark any year.

Lisa

That's true. And set out to challenge himself to write just a short essay every day of the year on things that he found in the world that were delightful or that delighted him. And they're a page or two or maybe 3 long, so it's not challenging to read it. You can pick it up and read, you know, right from the middle. You don't have to read them in order and they're all just things that feel really uplifting. So, I bought, I think I bought 3 or 4 copies of that.

Emma

That's great. I've read this book twice this year, once on paper and once in audio, because it was just so delightful to listen to his voice.

Lisa

It's so hard to find a book that you can just kind of give to almost anyone. And that I felt really fit the bill for that. I'm going to talk about the book I put on my list with a lot of hesitation was *Blue Skies* by TC Boyle. I read an advance reading copy of that book and that came out before publication and was pretty blown away by it. But some very strange things happen in this book that could be really triggering to people and I really thought twice about putting it on the list. It involves like big snakes, scary snakes. They're a big part of the story.

Yeah, so but it's about climate change and so it should be that kind of provides this background this creepy kind of background that I think Boyle is saying we should all be feeling this kind of sense of elemental fear and dread about what's coming and it's not, it's not explicitly about climate change and that things just start happening in the characters lives. And you're like, oh boy, this is big stuff and it takes them a while to put together that this has never happened before. This is climate related.

So, if you know somebody and it's the, you know, social commentary and the satire is great. So, if you know somebody that likes that kind of thing, it would be perfect for them, but don't give it to just anybody.

The second book, just because we haven't talked about anything that's kind of practical. There are definitely some books that fill in kind of a practical element on a gift list, and one that came out this year is *Firescaping your Home, A Manual for Readiness in Wildfire Country* by Adrienne Edwards and Rachel Schleiger. And because we're contending with fire so much here in Whatcom County, and there are people that live in, in our communities that are very much, you know, kind of wildfire country, I just felt like that would be something that's a very practical, pragmatic gift, but would be a thoughtful gift to give to someone that you know, who's in that situation, who, you know, maybe taking some of the steps in this book could save their home or save their lives.

Neil

OK, that's well, so. But, will you talk about one other book on your list? Because...

Lisa

Which one? You pick.

Neil

My eye caught *Cat's Very Good Day*.

Lisa

Ohh, *Cat's Very Good Day* is so sweet.

Neil

And I have a grandson now, and he's just starting, twenty months old and becoming a real human being with questions and conversations that you can't understand anything, but he loves our cat Baby. So, Baby is an orange tabby. Kind of beautiful, yeah.

Lisa

Ohh this will be perfect. Yeah, well, *Cat's Very Good Day* that it's really just mostly illustrations. There's just a couple of words on each page. So, it would be really good for younger 20 month old kid who's kind of pre reading. It's by Kristen Tracy and then the illustrator's David Small and I absolutely, David Small is from the community that I used to live in and I absolutely love David Small and it's just the story of a cat and everything he does during the day, including getting into trouble, knocking things off tables, but in the end his favorite thing to do is, you know, snuggle with his people and be loved by his people. So yeah, it's so sweet. Yeah.

Neil

That's my cat to a tee.

Lisa

You'll hear probably really more suggestions when you interview Youth Services staff, this is a picture book, but it could be given to even an adult who is a cat lover.

Neil

For sure, yeah. Oh, absolutely. Yeah. So that's definitely on my list too now. Yeah. So there's two books I'm picking so far. Yeah. Well, OK. Was there anything else I needed to ask you? Is there anything else you guys want to say?

Lisa

I'm kind of curious, I know when I was putting my selections together, there were some that I wanted to put on the list, but that I didn't feel like they were a good fit for gift guide.

Emma

Ooh, I have one of those, yeah.

Lisa

And so, I'm wondering if you guys ran into that too. It's like, gosh, I love this book. I really wish I could put this on the list, but it just doesn't fit for kind of a broad-spectrum gift guide and I know Mary read one of the ones I'm thinking about.

Emma

Oooh.

Mary K.

Which one? I want to know.

Lisa

I really wanted to put *Chain Gang All Stars* on here.

Mary K.

Ohh yes yeah.

Lisa

But, it's really dark. I don't know, it just didn't feel, it's got a beautiful cover, but it's really dark.

Emma

I think it's the difference between, like a personal recommendation and also "I'm recommending that you buy this as a gift for someone else."

Lisa and Mary K.

Mhmm

Neil

Right. That's a different.

Lisa

It's like three times removed.

Emma

Yeah, yeah, there's the lack of, you know, personal knowledge.

Neil

But so that's one that you would think about buying for someone?

Lisa

Yes, but even that, I mean I gave it to one person that I know, but it's the, a book that it's hard to find the right reader for. I think I just read another one. I just read *Sun House* by James David James Duncan. James David James Duncan.

Mary K.

Mhm.

Lisa

Which is just a huge tome and it's very dense and I think it took me 4 weeks to read and I was on vacation for two of those weeks. So that tells you how long it takes to read this book.

Neil

I just checked that out.

Lisa

Oh well, good luck with it.

Neil

I opened it up and I -

Lisa

I adored it, but it's really not easy reading.

Neil

I opened it up and I saw how small the font size is...

Emma

Oh no. Yeah, you balked.

Mary K.

And it's huge.

Neil

and it's like I should have got the large print version, but I don't think I could carry it.

Lisa

I don't even. They probably didn't make a large print version. I think it would be too big. They couldn't, they couldn't put it in one volume.

Neil

But it looks I had just, like read the first page of it and it looks fascinating already.

Lisa

But those are the type of books that you just really need. They, they're hand sells. You just really need the right person for the book.

Emma

For me, that book was *Still Life with Bones*, which was absolutely gorgeous, beautifully written, very poetic. But it is also a meditation on genocide and, you know, forensic anthropology and recovering the remains of mass graves and even though it was incredibly poignant, and I think important like, I think a lot of people should read this book because it feels very timely. I wouldn't tell someone you know, give this to your mom as a Christmas present.

Lisa

Mm-hmm.

Emma

You know, definitely talk to your mom about it. And if she's into that kind of thing, you know? Do that personal, I think you called it a hand sell. Yeah, but for a, you know, a random anonymous audience. Maybe give it a skip?

Neil

Right. Yeah. Or even just someone that you don't have such intimate knowledge of their likes and dislikes.

Emma

Yeah, yeah. You don't know what they would find extremely upsetting.



Mary K.

Right.

Emma

Which is, you know, the opposite of the reaction you want to elicit from a gift.

Neil

Yeah, yeah. How about you, Mary? Do you have a...?

Mary K.

Well, I do. And there's two reasons that I didn't. I had it on the list and I bumped it. It was, it's the new book by Jennifer Weiner called *The Breakaway*. Which Jennifer Weiner is fantastic, she writes sort of women's fiction, and she's really, you know, great, highly readable. And I had it on the list. I bumped it for a couple reasons. One, I really wanted to put a mystery, suspense kind of book on the list, so I bumped it for *Everyone in my Family has Killed Someone* by Benjamin Stevenson, which is a really sort of *Knives Out*, Agatha Christie-esque kind of caper. So, I bumped it for that, and I also bumped it because it's super spicy, right at the beginning. I mean, right at the beginning. You know lots of people, that's great and people love that, but again, you have to know the person that you're gifting it to and you have to know if they're going to be OK with, like "Wow, there it all is on the page." And she will, you know, sell hundreds of thousands of copies of this book. So, she didn't need my little bump on the gift guide. It was fine. But yeah, that's again the kind of thing that you really have to think about, is this for everybody, or is this just for you? Right?

Neil

Yeah, wow. Well, so thank you all for being here and for sharing this, you know, your recommendations and I hope that the audience really kind of takes this to heart and picks up the gift guide, which you can pick up in your local libraries. You can also get it online on our website at [wcls.org](http://wcls.org). It's a big picture right in front that'll link you to the online version of this and I want to thank you all for being here.

Emma

Yeah, happy to chat.

Lisa

Yeah, thanks Neil, this was fun.

Mary K.

And you know, remember that if nothing in this gift guide works for your family members or your friends, talk to anybody in any of our branches, they would love to help you find something that's just right for the people on your gift list.

Neil

Yeah, I think that's important to recognize that at any time, any day of the week, any day of the year that the library is open, walk in and say hi to one of the staff members at the desk and say I need a recommendation or what should I be reading or what should I buy for my friend?

Mary K.

Yeah, we'd love to help you.

Neil

Yeah. OK, that's it.

Lisa

Thanks!

Emma

Thanks Neil. Alright, thank you.

(interlude music plays)

Theresa

I'm Theresa Morrison. I'm the Children's Services Coordinator and I select the Picture Books, the Beginning Readers and the Board Books.

Tamar

And I'm Tamar Clark and I'm the Teen Services Coordinator and in that role, I select Teen Fiction, Nonfiction and Digital Materials.

Thom

My name is Thom Barthelmess. I'm the Youth Services Manager and I select Nonfiction for young children and older children and all of the Digital Materials for kids.

Neil

OK, great and I've gathered you three here today to talk about the gift guide that the Whatcom County Library System has put out this year. Can you tell us a little bit about, I mean just real quickly where this gift guide came from? Is this the wrong group to ask the question?

Thom

Well, no. I was actually sort of in charge of pulling it all together. I think it was aligned with our big Open Book event in November, and the idea was that we have among us a pretty profound brain trust. We are the folks who select really all the materials that come into the libraries and at least my experience is that as I'm selecting, I'm noticing things and imagining the reader or user or listener or whatever it is for it and it feels like a real great gift opportunity for us to have an opportunity to share it all with everybody.

So, what we wanted to do was both highlight the work that we do and then showcase a bunch of things that we believe might be really lovely gifts to give to the people that you care most about in the world.

Neil

And this is going to be a continuing...?

Thom

Yeah, I think we're gonna start doing it every week now.

Neil

That would be welcomed I think with our...

Theresa

There's a birthday every day.

Thom

It's true.

Neil

That's right, that's right. OK, well, why don't we just get into it and maybe have each of you talk about a couple of your selections?

Thom

Well, I will say that one of the things that was really interesting about the process was thinking about books that might have appeal to a bunch of different readers. So much of the work we do is working with an individual and having a conversation about what they might enjoy or what they have enjoyed or what kinds of material or story might resonate with them? And here we don't know who our reader is, we're sort of putting stuff out into the ether, hoping that it will be discovered.

So, I was looking for things that functioned on a whole bunch of levels. And the book that comes to mind is *The Swifts: A Dictionary of Scoundrels* by Beth Lincoln because it's a bunch of different books. At the same time, it's like madcap Agatha Christie style on murder mystery, where everybody's trapped in a big manor house and people are dying, and they have to figure out who. And it's a story about identity and self-determination. One of the sort of plot points is that when you're born into this family, they just get out the dictionary and they pick a random word and that becomes your name. And Shenanigan Swift, our protagonist, is stuck with the name Shenanigan and now everybody in the world sees her as someone who is precocious and mischievous and maybe up to no good, and one of her jobs in the book is to figure out if the name that was decided for her at random really has to be who she wants to be in the world, and because it has to do with the dictionary and with language, it's just full of really frolics and word play.

It's so much fun to read and hysterical, and so it's the kind of book that might appeal to a bunch of different kinds of readers because there's the mystery element and there's the language word play element and there's the sort coming-of-age element. It fires on a lot of different pistons.

Neil

OK. And what age group is that? I don't know if you said.

Thom

It's a middle grade novel, so it's sort of early middle, elementary school.

Neil

OK.

Thom

Yeah.

Tamar

Well, maybe I'll use that as a springboard to talk about a book that makes me think about all the different readers when I read it. It's called *Throwback*, and it's kind of a *Back to the Future* meets *Freaky Friday*, but with tons of 80s references. So it's a book, you know, a lot of the books and YA I think of, would be great for teens, but also great for adults, and this is one of those books just because it harkens back to so much of what many of us feel and remember of the 80s.

And so this book is a story where this girl Sam is driving to school. Her car breaks down, has to hop into an Uber, and that Uber transports her back to the 1995 actually, and where her mom was in high school. And so she has to repair her relationship with her mom as a young person before she can move forward with her mom in present day life and the two of them have to kind of figure out what's, you know, how they're going to move forward as mother and daughter and really relate to each other. So it's got, it's got a great cast of characters and it's just something that has a place for everyone in it. You know, like if you're into mystery, there's a little mystery involved. There's a little romance. There's also just this mother-daughter relationship that is at its core, makes it such a special book.

Neil

Yeah, yeah, that sounds great. So, 1995, she goes back into 1995. I'm trying to think back.

Thom

Well, it was only eight years ago, right?

Neil

Yeah, it seems that way. I think I was, I had two kids and was working as a custodian in the schools. That's where I was in 1995. Anyone else want to volunteer where they were?

Theresa

I was in Seattle, hadn't even started library school. That's a long time ago.

Tamar

I was living in Moab, UT, out of my car.

Neil

Really? That's a whole other podcast for another day, I think.

Thom

I had just finished graduate school in Pittsburgh.

Neil

Wow. Wow. Yeah. So that was a long time ago for all of us, I guess.

Theresa

Yeah, I love that book too, Tamar. You know, you recommended it to me. And as, you know, someone who is trying to relate to my own daughter, I found it useful to think about "Ohh" because it really shows the differences in the time periods. 1995 was a very different time to be a young woman compared to now and I love that juxtaposition and seeing the differences that brought that came up and that how when the girl went back to 1995, she just understood her mom so much better, you know? Oh, Mom had to go through this. These people really haven't learned what we've learned in 2023.

Tamar

Yeah.

Neil

That's good. How about you, Theresa? You have a recommendation?

Theresa

So, I tried to stick with the youngest readers. I have two board books on my list and then a bunch of fun picture books. I think that a lot of people like to give gifts of books as, to young children, and so I thought that would be a useful thing to highlight. *I Think My Dad is a Tree* is one of my favorites. It's John Agee and I've loved him for decades. He's just really clever, witty and this one is very simple story about a little girl and her dad and they're outside and she wants to stay outside as long as she possibly can with her father. So, she turns him into a tree so that they can play being a tree, and soon he's stuck there because a bird has made a nest on him and he has to host an owl and all kinds of things. But it's the perfect way to get your dad to stay outside with you all day, and it's just very, very sweet.

Neil

And not scary at all?

Theresa

Not scary at all. Not that one.

Neil

Because in my mind that's a little scary.

Theresa

Well, it does start raining. Mm-hmm. So if you're afraid of the rain...

Neil

So this might not be a book for dads necessarily to read, well.

Tamar

It's also very, very funny, you know, Theresa shared it with me and I...

Theresa

It's very funny.

Tamar

...Was so glad. It's got a great sense of humor at all, you know, and I think it's something that even as an adult, you just read it and you're like, ohh, you see the humor in it.

Theresa

The timing is perfect.

Tamar

Yeah. Just beautifully. Yeah.

Theresa

So I read it to whole schools because our theme, of course, for summer reading was trees and it was a perfect read aloud for an entire school all the way up through 5th grade. Everybody loved it. Teachers, kids. Yeah. Universally delightful.

Neil

How about you, Thom? Do you have another suggestion?

Thom

Well, the other thing I was thinking about as we were putting the guide together was sort of stories about books and reading just because I love getting books as gifts. It feels like that's a, right, it's a way to share something, especially personal with somebody and those of us who like books often like books about books, so there are a couple on my list that are books about books, one of them is ¡*Vamos! Let's Go Read* by Raúl the Third, which is a story about sort of a graphic novel esque picture book about a big book festival, very much like an Open Book was, but I really want to talk about *101 Ways to Read a Book* by Timothée de Fombelle with pictures by Benjamin Chaud which originated in France and has just been translated into English and establishes 101 different readers, each of whom we see reading in a different way. And it's there's just simple and tongue in cheek and there's a contortionist and there's a romantic and there's a sleepwalker and they're illustrated in a way that's bright and funny and charming and a

little bit surprising, but in addition to each of these individual vignettes, the whole book gives us this sense about all the different ways that books and stories and reading come, has a place in our lives and feeds us and helps us. And it just feels like the kind of thing that I would like to share with people like, look, this is what matters to me. This is how I see books as having a place in our lives.

Neil

That's nice. So you're giving yourself to somebody?

Thom

Kinda. Well, I think every gift right, the best gift is sort of finding that spot that unites you and the recipient and.

Neil

Right, right.

Theresa

And it's the kind of book that you would open up and you'd want to share it immediately, like, "Oh, look at this one" or, "Hey, look at this."

Thom

"Ohh that's me."

Theresa

"Yeah, this one's me. Oh, but this is me on some days." And yeah, it's really delightful and easily shareable when you're with your beloved folks on holidays, yeah.

Neil

Tamar, you have a second to...?

Tamar

Well, I think the one I want to share is when we think about really riveting images and the way books now can be so visual, especially because we're reading so many graphic novels, is *Lost Boy* by Jay Martin. It's a survival story of a boy who is in a horrific car wreck in Wyoming and stranded in the wilderness. So, it has these really dark, kind of bleak, somber blues and colors like that, but with bursts of red that kind of give you this sense that there is going to be hope and there is some resilience in his story. And as you follow his journey and try and figure out how is he going to get out of this horrible situation, you realize that there's probably something out there that's going to help him, whether it's outside or inside himself. The drawings are done by Jay Martin and what was interesting was that he is also a music video director and works for the likes of Kelly Clarkson and Shawn Mendes, is actually the one that found him and saw him drawing. He was like, "Oh, your drawings are amazing. You should get those out in the world." So that was the impetus for this book.

Thom

It's a really stunning piece of work. I'll just say before we go on.

Neil

Great.

Theresa

Well, I'm looking at my list and I realize there's a couple of books about the pleasure of being an introvert, really. And I think most readers enjoy alone time, but of course, when you give a gift you're sharing with somebody else and these both also have an element of "wouldn't it be nice to share special things with other people?" *Sometimes It's Nice to be Alone*, is really sweet book by Amy Hest, pictures are by Philip Stead and it's showing this little girl doing all these things alone, she's so happy to be doing whatever she's doing, building a sandcastle, her morning somersaults, whatever she's doing, but then what if a friend comes along and it shows the joy doubled with a special friend sharing in those activities.

So, I just really love that one and then *A Lot like Batman*. We're all a lot more like Batman than we realize and Keith Nagley shows us just how that's true in his book with these bright, bright colors and relatable situations of a little child in a Batman costume hanging out on the periphery of most of the activities and it's mostly takes place at school and he's up at the top of the play structure on the playground, watching all of the other kids. And he's having his special sushi lunch while there's chaos in the lunchroom where everybody else is gathered around the other table. And he's super happy to just be having everything, his wasabi and his ginger and everything with his chopsticks. So, it just shows the pleasure of being alone and also just how doing your own thing, there's nothing wrong with that. That's exactly how Batman got his power by doing his own thing. He didn't have any special superpowers. He couldn't lift cars. He couldn't see through buildings, that Superman stuff, but what Batman could do was enjoy a book, be a special friend and just be himself. And when you share that book with children, they get it right away and they really feel empowered, I think from the message of the book. And it doesn't feel message-y, it feels super fun.

Neil

Well, I wasn't sure where that book was going to go, but that's really, really powerful. Yeah. So we're missing two of the selectors right now. Sarah Lavender, who is also in the gift guide and then Ollie Holm, who has just recently become a selector and...

Thom

They'll be in the gift guide next week.

Neil

Yes, that's great. I'm wondering if there's a book from Sarah's collection though that might be worth talking about.

Thom

Yeah. Well, let's mention *The Book of Pet Love and Loss* by Sara Bader just because again, one of the functions of an anthology like this one is that when you're thinking about sharing books with a broad



public, I think it's easy to fall into the trap of I'm just going to put out really bright and bubbly and happy, sunny, shiny stuff because we all like things that are happy and sunny and shiny, but there's a real place in the world for books that are, shine light when there's darkness and give us an opportunity to think and reflect and feel seen and understand and mourn, and the book of *Pet Love and Loss* is exactly what you think it's going to be, a book for young people about what happens when some of the most cherished beings in our lives are no longer there and I just write shout out to Sarah for taking something like that and including it here because it isn't unnecessarily a book that you would grab and say here, here this is for you, but we have this opportunity to shine a light on some of the greatest stuff that's been written in the past year and there are people, there are people for whom that book will be an important thing and there are people who enjoy reading books that aren't always sunny and shiny and happy. That's the book that I noticed.

Neil

Either of you have a one that you wanted to highlight.

Theresa

Well, *My Baba's Garden* is really special and beautiful. It's by Jordan Scott, illustrated by Sydney Smith and just a really special relationship between a boy and his grandmother. And it's very simple and relatable and Sydney Smith is just very, very talented illustrator and the writing is excellent as well.

Thom

Yes, Sydney Smith has a capacity with light through watercolor that's just astounding. I don't know how he does it, but the way he can illuminate a scene is something else.

Tamar

I can talk about *The Faint of Heart* that's on Sarah's list because it's a teen graphic novel about a young woman who lives in a world where you at a certain age you have to have your heart removed just to help protect you from all this sadness and all the negativity that can happen when you own a heart. So, you know, in this world you no longer will feel grief or depression. All the things that come with the heart, but of course, then you can't feel the sense of love and the same intensity that hearts allow us.

So, she decides to not get the surgery and not have her heart removed, but then finds there are consequences for that decision in this world like there are in every world for decisions we make on our own and to go against a society in a way that feels right to her.

So, it's a beautifully drawn book. It has kind of a Victorian feel. The light plays a role kind of makes me think of what you were just saying about the way Sydney Smith uses light. You can even see on the cover there's a shaft of light that comes over her heart or over her face and her midsection as she's looking behind her trying to wonder what's next. So that's a great read by Kerilynn Wilson. That's *The Faint of Heart*.

Neil

Wow, wow. I wasn't expecting that one either, but that's the great thing. What a great selection of books we have here, that's, you know, available to all of our patrons. They'll find them of course at the library but also on our website at [wcls.org](http://wcls.org). So, thank you all for being here and for sharing these books with me.

Theresa

Yeah. Thanks, Neil.

Tamar

Thank you Neil.

Thom

Thanks for the opportunity.

Tamar

Yeah that was really fun.

Neil

Well, that's it for another show, I want to thank our gaggle of guests, Lisa Gresham, Mary Kinser, Emma Radosevich, Tom Barthelmess, Theresa Morrison and Tamar Clark. And of course, thanks to my boss, Mary Vermillion, "Every gift from a friend is a wish for your happiness." Be sure to pick up a copy of our gift guide at your nearest WCLS library or view it online at [wcls.org](http://wcls.org). Find gifts for everyone in your life, and maybe even a gift for yourself. I'm looking at *Edison's Ghosts* as a possible present for me. If you want to give me a gift just drop me a line and let me know if you liked this episode. Give me the gift of feedback. You'll find my e-mail address on our podcast page at [wcls.org/podcasts](http://wcls.org/podcasts). You'll also find past episodes of the podcast there. That's our gift to you. Until next time this is Neil McKay for WCLS, saying yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift. That's why we call it the present.