Fun Home
by Alison Bechdel

A Best Book of the Year, "Fun Home" is a groundbreaking best-selling graphic memoir that charts Alison Bechdel's difficult relationship with her late father. This personal history becomes a work of amazing subtlety and power, written with controlled force and made more alive with humor, rich literary allusion and heartbreaking detail.

Alison's father was an English teacher and director of the town funeral home, which the family referred to as the "Fun Home." It wasn't until college that Alison, who had recently come out as a lesbian, discovered that her father was gay. A few weeks after this revelation, he was dead, leaving a legacy of mystery for his daughter to resolve.

Alison Bechdel began keeping a journal when she was 10, and since then has been a careful archivist of her own life.

"If David Sedaris could draw, and if 'Bleak House' had been a little funnier, you'd have Alison Bechdel's 'Fun Home.'"

—Amy Bloom, author of "A Blind Man Can See How Much I Love You"

Anil's Ghost
by Michael Ondaatje

Anil’s Ghost transports us to Sri Lanka, a country with deep roots and struggling by the ravages of civil war in the late twentieth century. The novel introduced us to Anil Tissera, a young woman born in Sri Lanka, educated in New England and America, who returns to her homeland as a forensic anthropologist by an international human right group to discover sources of murder in the country. Unfold a mystery as we follow Anil to uncover stories of the past, feelings of love and the strength of family.

Housekeeping
by Marilyn Robinson

A modern classic, Houskeeping is a story about Ruth and her younger sister, Lucille. Growing up in the care of their grandmother, the novel shares the journey of Ruth and Lucille entering adulthood and the price of loss, survival, love and the deep undertow of transience.

The Known World
by Edward P. Jones

Set in Manchester County, Virginia, 20 years before the Civil War began, Edward P. Jones's novel, The Known World, is a masterpiece of overlapping plot lines, time shifts, and heartbreaking details of life under slavery. Caldonia Townsend is an educated black slave owner, the widow of a well-loved young farmer named Henry, whose parents had bought their own freedom, and then freed their son, only to watch him buy himself a slave as soon as he had saved enough money.

Although Henry Townsend was a fair and gentle master by the standards of the day, he had learned from a former master about the proper distance to keep from one's property. After his death, his slaves wonder if Caldonia will free them. When she fails to do so, but instead breaches the code that keeps them separate from her, a little piece of Manchester County begins to unravel.

It is impossible to rush through The Known World as it is a complex, beautifully written novel with a large cast of characters, that rewards the patient reader with unexpected connections, some reaching into the present day.
New Student Forum

A Good Fall
By Ha Jin

National Book Award-winner and Brandeis alumnus Ha Jin’s new collection of short stories focuses on Flushing, one of New York City’s largest Chinese immigrant communities. With startling clarity, Jin explores the challenges, loneliness and uplift associated with discovering one’s place in America. Many different generational perspectives are laid out, from the young male sweatshop-worker narrator of “The House Behind a Weeping Cherry,” who lives in the same rooming-house as three prostitutes, to the grandfather of “Children as Enemies,” who disapproves of his grandchildren’s desires to Americanize their names.

Anxiety and distrust plague many of Jin’s characters, and while the desire for love and companionship is strong, economic concerns tend to outweigh all others. In "Temporary Love," Jin explores the inevitable complications of becoming a wartime couple, or men and women who, unable to bring their spouses to America, cohabit to comfort each other and also to reduce living expenses. With piercing insight, Jin paints a vast, fascinating portrait of a neighborhood and a people in flux.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao
By Junot Diaz

This book won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for fiction just one month after receiving the National Book Critics Circle Award for best novel of 2007. Junot Diaz spent 11 years writing the tale of teenager Oscar Wao, who lives in New Jersey, haunted by the vision of dictator Rafael Trujillo’s ruthless rule on Wao’s native Dominican Republic.

The story is radiant with the hard lives of those who leave and also those who stay behind; it is a rousing hymn about the struggle to defy bone-cracking history with ordinary, and extraordinary, love.

The Places in Between
By Rory Stewart

This New York Times bestseller tells the story of Rory Stewart, who walks across Afghanistan in 2002 in the midst of war and a typically harsh winter. The author survives by his wits, his knowledge of Persian dialects and Muslim customs, and the kindness of strangers. He meets heroes and rogues, tribal elders and teenage soldiers, Taliban commanders and foreign aid workers. And through it all, Stewart makes tangible the forces of tradition, ideology and allegiance that shape life in the map’s countless places in between.

Old School
By Tobias Wolff

“Old School” is a celebration of literature and a delicate hymn to a lost innocence of American life and art. Set in a New England prep school in the early 1960s, the novel imagines a final, pastoral moment before the explosion of the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War, the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the suicide of Ernest Hemingway.

Yellow
By Don Lee

Set in the fictional California town of Rosarita Bay, Don Lee’s “Yellow” explores what it means to be Asian in America through the post-immigrant examination of identity, race and love.

In this provocative collection, Korean, Japanese and Chinese Americans flirt across and within racial lines, and end up racking not only fears of being ethnically “yellow,” but also the universal terror of failure and abandonment.
**Zabelle**

*By Nancy Kricorian*

“Zabelle” is the story of a family’s discovery of their Armenian heritage and cultural identity through the passing of the family matriarch, Zabelle. The book touches upon the theme of identity, the complexity of human interactions, coming to terms with one’s own identity and finding a place in a larger community.

**Oryx & Crake**

*By Margaret Atwood*

An unforgettable love story and a compelling vision of the future. Snowman, known as Jimmy, is struggling to survive in a world where he may be the last human. Mourning the loss of his best friend, Crake, and the beautiful and elusive Oryx whom they both loved, Jimmy shares a new world and questions of survival. Read with the Brandeis class of 2020! Contact the National Office at 781-736-7588 for details.
How to Read the Bible
Marc Brettler, Dora Golding Professor of Biblical Studies, Brandeis University

Watch the author’s presentation in the student campus center before discussing his questions. Read the interview on NPR’s Fresh Air.

Polio: An American Story
David M. Oshinsky, Ph.D. ’71

Historian David M. Oshinsky, Ph.D. ’71, won a Pulitzer Prize for his portrait of America’s polio scare. Oshinsky dramatically recounts our country’s unparalleled mobilization against the 20th century’s most feared disease. Materials include author’s presentation and questions for discussion.

Blindspot
By Jane Kamensky and Jill Lepore

Professors Jane Kamensky, Brandeis University, and Jill Lepore, Harvard University, have created a romance and murder mystery that takes place in Boston a decade before the American Revolution. Told largely in letters written by the heroine, the novel centers around Stewart Jameson, a Scottish portrait painter who has fled Britain because of a mysterious debt, and the “boy” he hires to clean his brushes. The “boy” is Fanny Easton, a daughter of a Boston Brahmin. Needing to find work, she sees the ad for the job, and presto, her breasts are bound, and Fanny Easton becomes Weston, a boy.

Profiles in Courage
Video and Study Guide
Thomas Doherty, Professor, Film Studies, Brandeis University

Revisit the popular television series based on JFK’s memorable book by Thomas Doherty, professor of American studies.

- Appointment of Louis Brandeis as the first Jew to the United States Supreme Court during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson
- The Leo Frank Story

Episodes are on DVD and accompanied by questions for discussion.