

# Aelfric's Book List 2020-2021

## September 8

**Dear Edward** by Ann Napolitano

What does it mean not just to survive, but to truly live? One summer morning, twelve-year-old Edward Adler, his beloved older brother, his parents, and 183 other passengers board a flight in Newark headed for Los Angeles. Among them are a Wall Street wunderkind, a young woman coming to terms with an unexpected pregnancy, an injured veteran returning from Afghanistan, a business tycoon, and a free-spirited woman running away from her controlling husband. Halfway across the country, the plane crashes. Edward is the sole survivor. Edward's story captures the attention of the nation, but he struggles to find a place in a world without his family. He continues to feel that a part of himself has been left in the sky, forever tied to the plane and all of his fellow passengers. But then he makes an unexpected discovery--one that will lead him to the answers of some of life's most profound questions: When you've lost everything, how do you find the strength to put one foot in front of the other? How do you learn to feel safe again? How do you find meaning in your life? Dear Edward is at once a transcendent coming-of-age story, a multidimensional portrait of an unforgettable cast of characters, and a breathtaking illustration of all the ways a broken heart learns to love again

## October 13

**Lions of Fifth Avenue** by Fiona Davis

A captivating ode to the power of books, the bonds of family, and the beauty of finding the strength to be ourselves. Fiona Davis's spectacular setting—the iconic New York Public Library—comes alive across the generations as two women—one in 1913 and one in 1993—struggle with their own identities, a compelling mystery, and a tragedy that impacts both of them. What begins as a search for vanished rare books becomes, for both women, a quest to redefine themselves and open their hearts. This is a novel for all those who believe in the transformative magic of the written word

## November 10

**The Vanishing Half** by Brit Bennett

...a stunning new novel about twin sisters, inseparable as children, who ultimately choose to live in two very different worlds, one black and one white. The Vignes twin sisters will always be identical. But after growing up together in a small, southern black community and running away at age sixteen, it's not just the shape of their daily lives that is different as adults, it's everything: their families, their communities, their racial identities. Many years later, one sister lives with her black daughter in the same southern town she once tried to escape. The other secretly passes for white, and her white husband knows nothing of her past. Still, even separated by so many miles and just as many lies, the fates of the twins remain intertwined. What will happen to the next generation, when their own daughters' storylines intersect? Weaving together multiple strands and generations of this family, from the Deep South to California, from the 1950s to the 1990s, Brit Bennett produces a story that is at once a riveting,

emotional family story and a brilliant exploration of the American history of passing . Looking well beyond issues of race, *The Vanishing Half* considers the lasting influence of the past as it shapes a person's decisions, desires, and expectations, and explores some of the multiple reasons and realms in which people sometimes feel pulled to live as something other than their origins...Brit Bennett offers an engrossing page-turner about family and relationships that is immersive and provocative, compassionate and wise.

## **December 8**

### **Florence Adler Swims Forever: A Novel** by Rachel Beanland

The Adlers, a middle-class Jewish family who owns a local bakery, make their annual move in 1934 from their Atlantic City house to an apartment above the bakery for the summer so they can rent the house to vacationers. The apartment houses Joseph and Esther Adler, their 19-year-old daughter Florence, a Hungarian girl named Anna whose mother was a childhood friend of Joseph's (and maybe more), and their seven-year-old granddaughter, Gussie. Gussie's mom, Fannie, is on bed rest in the hospital, trying to safely carry a baby to full term after she recently lost a premature baby boy. The novel opens with Florence, a champion swimmer who that summer plans to attempt to swim the English Channel, drowning. Esther and Joseph decide to keep Florence's death a secret, in fear that if Fannie found out her sister had died, she would go into premature labor and lose another baby. The family mourns in private—physically and metaphorically trapped in this small space—all while pretending with virtually everyone that Florence is alive and well. The few that are brought in on the truth—the medical staff at the hospital; Florence's close friend and coach, Stuart; Joseph's secretary; and Fannie's shifty husband, Isaac—spin increasingly elaborate lies to protect Fannie. As you might imagine, it comes crashing down, but not before these characters all uncover secrets they have been hiding from each other. Beanland deftly weaves various historical events and themes: the rise of the Nazi regime, family secrets, the struggle between classes, religious tensions, sexuality, and familial love.

## **January 11 – Our Non-Fiction Book**

### **Splendid and the vile** by Erik Larson

In *The Splendid and the Vile*, Erik Larson shows, in cinematic detail, how Churchill taught the British people “the art of being fearless.” It is a story of political brinkmanship, but it's also an intimate domestic drama, set against the backdrop of Churchill's prime-ministerial country home, Chequers; his wartime retreat, Ditchley, where he and his entourage go when the moon is brightest and the bombing threat is highest; and of course 10 Downing Street in London. Drawing on diaries, original archival documents, and once-secret intelligence reports—some released only recently—Larson provides a new lens on London's darkest year through the day-to-day experience of Churchill and his family: his wife, Clementine; their youngest daughter, Mary, who chafes against her parents' wartime protectiveness; their son, Randolph, and his beautiful, unhappy wife, Pamela; Pamela's illicit lover, a dashing American emissary; and the advisers in Churchill's “Secret Circle,” to whom he turns in the hardest moments.

## **Alternate choice:**

### **Lady Clementine: A Novel** by Marie Benedict

An incredible novel that focuses on one of the people who had the most influence during World War I and World War II: Clementine Churchill.

## **February 8 - Our Classic Book**

### **Middlemarch** by George Eliot

Set in a fictitious English Midlands town from 1829 to 1832, it follows distinct, intersecting stories with many characters. Issues include the status of women, the nature of marriage, idealism, self-interest, religion, hypocrisy, political reform, and education. Despite comic elements, *Middlemarch* uses realism to encompass historical events: the 1832 Reform Act, early railways, and the accession of King William IV. It views contemporary medicine and examines reactionary views in a settled community facing unwelcome change. Eliot began writing the two pieces that would form the novel in 1869–1870 and completed it in 1871. Initial reviews were mixed, but it is now seen widely as her best work and one of the great novels in English.

## **March 9**

### **All Adults Here** by Emma Straub

A warm, funny, and keenly perceptive novel about the life cycle of one family--as the kids become parents, grandchildren become teenagers, and a matriarch confronts the legacy of her mistakes.,,When Astrid Strick witnesses a school bus accident in the center of town, it jostles loose a repressed memory from her young parenting days decades earlier. Suddenly, Astrid realizes she was not quite the parent she thought she'd been to her three, now-grown children. But to what consequence? Astrid's youngest son is drifting and unfocused, making parenting mistakes of his own. Her daughter is pregnant yet struggling to give up her own adolescence. And her eldest seems to measure his adult life according to standards no one else shares. But who gets to decide, so many years later, which long-ago lapses were the ones that mattered? Who decides which apologies really count? It might be that only Astrid's thirteen-year-old granddaughter and her new friend really understand the courage it takes to tell the truth to the people you love the most...deeply satisfying story about adult siblings, aging parents, high school boyfriends, middle school mean girls, the lifelong effects of birth order, and all the other things that follow us into adulthood, whether we like them to or not.

## **April 14**

### **The Last Romantics** by Tara Conklin

The Last Romantics is an unforgettable exploration of the ties that bind us together, the responsibilities we embrace and the duties we resent, and how we can lose--and sometimes rescue--the ones we love. When the renowned poet Fiona Skinner is asked about the inspiration behind her iconic work, The Love Poem, she tells her audience a story about her family and a betrayal that reverberates through time. It begins in a big yellow house with a funeral, an iron poker, and a brief variation forever known as the Pause: a free and feral summer in a middle-class Connecticut town. Caught between the predictable life they once led and an uncertain future that stretches before them, the Skinner siblings--fierce Renee, sensitive Caroline, golden boy Joe and watchful Fiona--emerge from the Pause staunchly loyal and deeply connected. Two decades later, the siblings find themselves once again confronted with a family crisis that tests the strength of these bonds and forces them to question the life choices they've made and ask what, exactly, they will do for love. A novel that pierces the heart and lingers in the mind, The Last Romantics is also a beautiful meditation on the power of stories--how they navigate us through difficult times, help us understand the past, and point the way toward our future.

## **May 12**

### **Nothing to See Here** by Kevin Wilson

Told in first person, our main character and narrator Lillian travels to see her friend, Madison, who has a job offer for her. It isn't until after she accepts the job as governess to Madison's step-children that Madison tells her the kids burst into flames when they feel angry or frustrated. Kevin Wilson is an American writer from Sewanee, Tennessee and his novel is dedicated to fellow Tennessean writer Ann Patchett