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# BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

## June Newsletter 2010

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Dear Bookclub-in-a-Box Subscriber,



Please visit our new website. We hope you find it attractive, informative and easy to use.

**Bookclub-in-a-Box** is still true to its original mandate which is to provide in-depth, enlightening and enjoyable discussion guides to literary fiction. Our goal is to provide you with information to use in all your conversations about books – in the book club, classroom, library, student circle. **Bookclub-in-a-Box** continues to be a virtual bookclub for both group and individual pleasure. Remember to use **Bookclub-in-a-Box**

discussion guides to complement and extend your point of view. Check out the [membership](#) program for discounts and benefits.

Bookclub-in-a-Box has also expanded into a first-rate literary activity center in mid-town Toronto, Canada. Our programs start with the concept of the “book” and expand into other areas – for example, writing programs, philosophy and business book seminars, author events, book and film reviews, as well as children’s programming. After all, our children are our future readers! Please view our TALKS! event calendar for June. Our summer events will include art and drama for children and an introductory adult writing series. We are working an extensive new program for fall.

*My best regards, Marilyn*

# New Guides

## Someone Knows My Name / The Book of Negroes

by Lawrence Hill

The story of how blacks came north to Canada has traditionally been framed around the Underground Railroad. In his amazing novel, Lawrence Hill gives us another viewpoint and we learn that they also came to Nova Scotia as free men and women, brought British Loyalists.

The story centers around a young slave girl, Aminata Diallo, who was born free in Africa during the eighteenth century. She had a rich and lovely childhood until the day she was captured by slave traders and marched off to the coast in chains. Along with thousands of others, Aminata was destined for North America as a slave to white owners. She was eleven years old.

Hill tracks Aminata's story through the circle of her life. Each step of the way, we learn about the horrors and immorality of slavery. As we look at and listen to these diminished people, we observe how they courageously worked at overcoming the psychological hardships and limitations imposed by their imprisonment.

An unusual feature of this book is that the title changes according to where it is sold. In Canada, the novel is called *The Book of Negroes*. In the United States, it is titled *Someone Knows My Name*. The Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion guide sheds light on the name change as well as many other things, including characterization, themes, and historical accuracy.

## Every Man Dies Alone by Hans Fallada

Hans Fallada was a very famous and popular German writer during the 1930s and 40s. *Every Man Dies Alone* was written and published in 1947, just weeks before Hans Fallada died.

The novel uses fictional characters to tell the true story of Otto and Elise Hampel who were tried and executed for their unique act of resistance. They wrote postcards accusing Hitler of betraying the German people and sending their loved ones to certain death. The postcards, which were dropped in a variety of locations, were meant to encourage people to stand up against Facism and Nazi control. The sad truth was that 99% of the postcards were turned in to the Gestapo. The campaign succeeded only in killing the planners.

Fallada's book is an indictment of the Nazi era and its system of governance. It is all the more extraordinary because it comes from a German voice of some renown. Now, decades after the end of WWII, Fallada's voice is still strong, loud, and clear.

**To purchase these guides, visit the [website](#).**

# Book Exchange

The Book Exchange is a new unique feature of our newsletter. Please share your ideas on these or other books you have read. What are you currently reading and recommend?

If you would like to see a guide on any of these books, please give us a heads up notice.

## **Alice In Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass** by Lewis Carroll.

We had such a good time reviewing this classic piece of literature and becoming reacquainted with memorable characters like the Mad Hatter, the White Rabbit, the Cheshire Cat, and the Queen of Hearts. We rediscovered the origin of familiar slogans and quotes, laughed at the antics of the March Hare and the dormouse, and observed in amazement, how Alice grew and shrank according to what she ate and drank (this in the days before psychedelic drugs.) Most importantly, we were able to really appreciate the new Tim Burton film starring Johnny Depp because it is based on Carroll's original poem, "Jabberwocky", which made its appearance in the Alice stories.

## **The Children's Book** by A.S. Byatt

Using Alice as a launching point, we next explored Byatt's *The Children's Book*. This sprawling, descriptive and enchanting story takes place just at the turn of the 20th century, a time of change and revolution everywhere - in the world of arts and crafts (William Morris), sociology (Fabian Society), politics (Suffragette Movement and the Russian Revolution), and economics (the move to the gold and silver standard). But the most devastating feature of this time was WWI (1914-1918). The images and personalities that Lewis Carroll had created decades earlier went on to inhabit the worlds of music, art, philosophy, medicine, science, mathematics, psychology and psychiatry. All of these elements are present in **The Children's Book**.

## **The Space Between Us** by Thrity Umrigar

The novel tells the story of two women - Sera, a middle-class widow, with a married pregnant daughter, and her servant of many years, Bhima, a grandmother, whose granddaughter is unmarried and pregnant. Umrigar uses these women to explore the idea of spaces, boundaries, and borders in relationships of all kinds. The story is emotionally moving and raises many questions for discussion, including whether or not it is possible for people of differing classes, cultures, education, and economic status to be friends. Can the space between such people be closed?

## **Her Fearful Symmetry** by Audrey Niffenegger

In Niffenegger's iconic novel **The Time Traveler's Wife**, she asked readers to break free from a concrete conception of time. The readers who were able to do so were rewarded with the beautiful love story of Henry and Claire. Niffenegger is at it again in **Her Fearful Symmetry**. As an artist, Niffenegger is used to breaking through barriers of form and content. She is also a novelist who colors outside the lines of literary structure. In her newest book, Niffenegger confronts our notions of death, both inside and outside of life. The book is gripping and presents many intriguing questions for stimulating discussion.

## **Bookclub-in-a-Box Calendar for May and June.**

### **BEA – BookExpo America 2010**

We are headed to New York for two days of meeting and greeting with publishers, distributors, writers, book store owners, librarians, readers, and anyone else connected to the book industry. We are excited, not only because it is New York City, but also because we will have a chance to show off **Bookclub-in-a-Box**. We are putting one of our guides into action. Marilyn Herbert will present and lead a short discussion on Lawrence Hill's wonderful novel **Someone Knows My Name / The Book of Negroes**. Among other things, we will explore why the book has two different names.

If you are headed to Book Expo, please stop by our booth – **5058**.

### **Book Launch and Author Event**

The Bookclub-in-a-Box TALKS! center in Toronto is looking forward to hosting a book launch for **Living Legacies, Volume II** edited by Liz Pearl. This will take place on June 6 at 3 pm.

On June 15, at 8 pm, the center is holding an evening with Michael Redhill, prominent Canadian novelist, poet, and playwright. Among other things, he will be talking about his recent novel, **Consolation**.

If you live in Toronto, [register](#) for these events. We would love to see you.