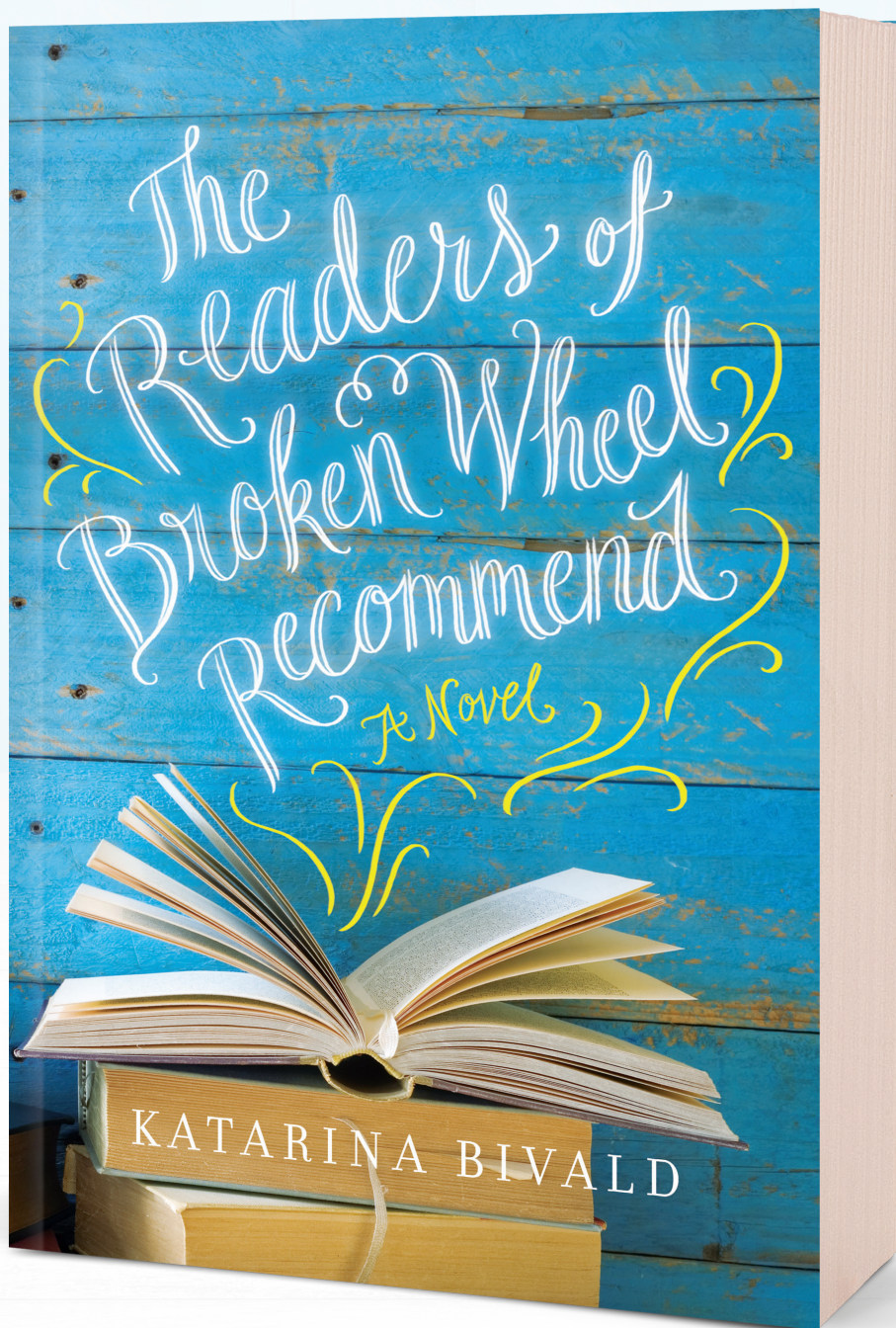


Event Guide



THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

A Note to the Book Club Leader

In the spirit of *The Readers of Broken Wheel Recommend*, please allow us to recommend some festive ideas that will engage and delight the members of your book club at your next gathering. Featuring great locally “grown” recipes (the Midwest isn’t called the Breadbasket of America for nothin’), cool summer cocktails, fun literary-themed crafts and activities, and an event discussion guide.

Recipes

Mini Corn Dogs

<http://damndelicious.net/2014/08/11/easy-homemade-mini-corn-dogs/>

Ingredients

- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1 (12 ounce) package of hot dogs, halved
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup yellow cornmeal
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- ½ cup milk
- 1 large egg



Instructions

- Heat vegetable oil in a large dutch oven or skillet over medium-high heat.
- Thread beef franks onto lollipop sticks; set aside.
- In a large bowl, combine flour, cornmeal, sugar, baking powder, and salt and pepper, to taste. In a large glass measuring cup or another bowl, whisk together milk and egg. Pour mixture over dry ingredients and stir using a rubber spatula until moist.
- Working in batches, dredge beef franks in the batter until completely covered.
- Add corn dogs to the skillet, 4 or 5 at a time, and cook until evenly golden and crispy, about 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to a paper-towel-lined plate.

THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

Sloppy Joes Pull Aparts

<http://www.manwich.com/recipes-Sloppy-Joe-Slider-Pull-Aparts-2361>

Instructions

1. Cook beef in large skillet over medium-high heat 7 minutes or until crumbled and no longer pink, stirring occasionally; drain. Stir in sloppy joe sauce; heat through.
2. Remove attached rolls from package; do NOT separate. Cut in half horizontally, leaving bottom half slightly thicker than top half. Spread beef mixture evenly over bottom of rolls. Place top of rolls over beef.
3. Place on serving platter. Have fun pulling sliders apart following roll indentations or cut apart using serrated knife.



Corn Casserole (with extra bacon)

<http://lovegrowswild.com/2015/08/creamy-bacon-corn-casserole/>

Ingredients

- 8 ounces cream cheese, room temperature
- ¼ cup unsalted butter
- ⅓ cup milk
- ½ cup cheddar cheese, shredded
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 18 ounces frozen corn kernels
- 1 pound bacon, cooked and crumbled

Instructions

Preheat oven to 350°F. Add the cream cheese and butter to a large saucepan set over medium-low heat and stir until melted. Pour in the milk and stir until mixture is completely smooth and creamy. Add the cheese, salt, and pepper and stir until cheese is melted. Stir in the corn and bacon and pour mixture into an 8x8-inch baking dish. Bake for 20 minutes until heated through and bubbling.



THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

Bacon Macaroni and Cheese Bites

<http://www.popsugar.com/food/Mini-Macaroni-Cheese-Appetizer-Recipe-5876505>

Ingredients

- ½ pound elbow macaroni
- 1½ tablespoons unsalted butter, plus melted butter for greasing the tins
- ¼ cup freshly grated parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup whole milk
- 4 ounces cheddar cheese, shredded (about 1 packed cup)
- 4 ounces deli-sliced American cheese, chopped
- 1 large egg yolk
- ¼ teaspoon smoked Spanish paprika
- 2 slices thick-cut bacon (about 3 ounces), cooked and chopped

Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 425°F. Brush the wells of four 12-cup, nonstick mini muffin tins with melted butter. Sprinkle with 2 tablespoons of the parmesan cheese, pressing it up the sides of the wells.
2. In a large pot of boiling salted water, cook the macaroni until al dente, about 5 minutes. Drain, shaking off the excess water.
3. Meanwhile, in a large saucepan, melt the 1½ tablespoons of butter over medium heat. Whisk in the flour and cook for 2 minutes. Whisk in the milk and cook, whisking constantly, until boiling and thickened, about 5 minutes. Add the cheddar and American cheeses and whisk until melted. Off the heat, whisk in the egg yolk and paprika. Fold in the bacon and macaroni.
4. Fill the wells of the muffin tins to the top with macaroni, using damp fingertips to pack the macaroni into the tins. Sprinkle the remaining parmesan on top.
5. Bake the mini macs in the upper and middle thirds of the oven for about 10 minutes, until golden and sizzling, rotating the pans halfway through cooking. Let cool for 5 minutes. Using a spoon, carefully loosen the mini macs, transfer to a platter, and serve.



THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

Wagon Wheel Pasta Salad

<http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/food-network-kitchens/wagon-wheel-pasta-salad-recipe.html>

Ingredients

- 6 ounces wagon wheel pasta
- 1 heaping cup very small broccoli florets
- ½ cup corn kernels, fresh or frozen
- 1 small garlic clove, minced
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt and a few grinds of freshly ground black pepper
- 2 ounces reduced-fat cheddar cheese, shredded
- 2 ounces thick-sliced ham, cut into small cubes
- 1 scant cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley (optional)
- 2 scallions, sliced (optional)



Instructions

Bring a medium pot of water to a boil. Add the pasta and cook according to package directions. About 30 seconds before the pasta is done, add the broccoli florets and corn kernels. Cook for 30 seconds and then drain into a colander. Run cold water over the pasta to stop the cooking. Keep the pasta draining in the colander while you make the dressing.

Whisk together the garlic, red wine vinegar, olive oil, ½ teaspoon salt, and a few grinds of black pepper.

Add the well-drained pasta, broccoli, and corn to the bowl, along with the ham, cheese, tomatoes, parsley, and scallions, if using. Toss together. Refrigerate in an airtight container for up to 5 days.



THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

Fantastic Rum Cake

<http://www.food.com/recipe/rum-raisin-cake-170150>

Ingredients

- 2 large bananas
- 1½ cups sugar
- 3 eggs
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup dark or light rum
- 1 cup walnuts, coarsely chopped
- ¼ cup milk
- ¾ cup butter, softened
- 2½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon allspice
- 1 cup raisins



Instructions

1. Mash bananas to make 1 cup.
2. Combine with milk.
3. Cream sugar and butter until light and fluffy. Beat in eggs until blended.
4. Combine flour, baking soda, baking powder, salt, and allspice.
5. Beat ⅓ flour mixture into egg mixture until blended.
6. Beat ½ banana mixture until blended. Repeat ending with flour mixture.
7. Beat in rum until well blended. Stir in raisins.
8. Pour into 2 well-greased or parchment-paper-covered loaf cake pans.
9. Bake in 350°F oven for 50 minutes. Invert on wire rack to cool.



THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

Apple Pie Crescents

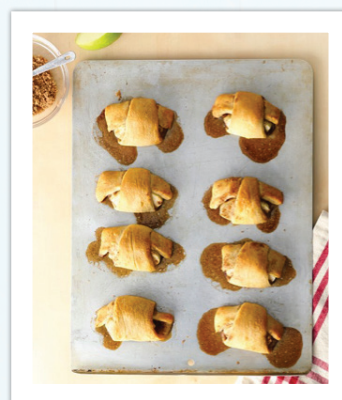
<http://www.pillsbury.com/recipes/apple-pie-crescents/bebb6148-6e4a-441d-9212-f435d974dcc6>

Ingredients

- 1 small Granny Smith apple, peeled, cored, cut into 8 (½-inch) slices
- 3 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 can (8 ounce) Pillsbury™ refrigerated crescent dinner rolls
- ⅓ cup packed brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon apple pie spice

Instructions

Heat oven to 375°F. Line cookie sheet with cooking parchment paper or grease cookie sheet. Set aside. In small bowl, toss apple slices in 1 tablespoon of the melted butter; set aside. Separate dough into 8 triangles. In small bowl, mix brown sugar and apple pie spice. Divide mixture evenly among triangles. Top each triangle with an apple slice. Starting at short side of each triangle, wrap dough around apple. Place on cookie sheet. Brush with remaining 2 tablespoons melted butter. Bake 10 to 12 minutes or until crescents are a deep, golden brown and apples are softened. Cool 5 minutes before serving.



Barrel-Aged Beer Ice Cream:

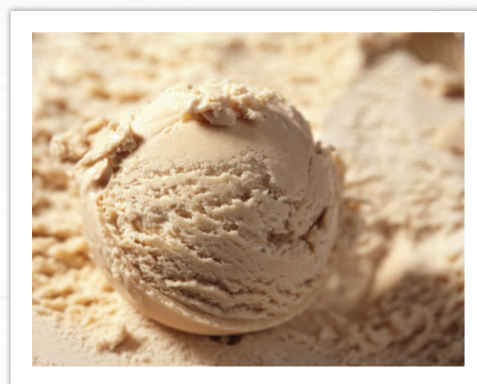
<http://draftmag.com/recipes/detail/228>

Ingredients

- 4 egg yolks
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 cup barrel-aged beer
- 1 cup heavy cream

Instructions

In a medium bowl, quickly whisk the egg yolks and sugar until the mixture is pale yellow. In a heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat, bring the beer and cream to a simmer. Slowly pour the beer mixture over the egg mixture, whisking constantly to temper the yolks. Return the mixture to the pan and cook over low heat, stirring frequently, until it thickens. Pour the mixture through a strainer into a mixing bowl set over ice and stir until cool. Freeze in an ice-cream maker according to the manufacturer's directions.



THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

Drinks & Cocktails:

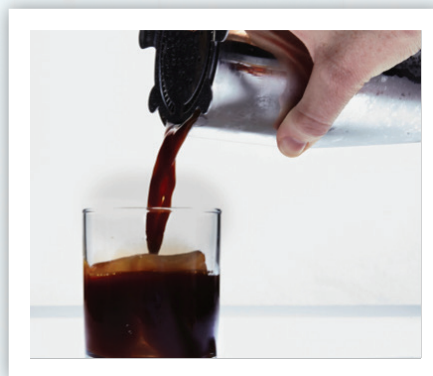
Espresso Old Fashioned

<http://www.bonappetit.com/recipe/espresso-old-fashioned>

Ingredients

Servings: 1

- 1 double shot espresso (about 2 ounces), room temperature
- 1 ounce bourbon or rye whiskey (optional)
- ¼ ounce simple syrup
- Dash of Peychaud's Bitters
- 1 one-inch piece lemon peel



Preparation

Combine espresso; bourbon, if using; simple syrup; and bitters in a cocktail shaker and fill with ice. Stir until outside of shaker is frosty, about 30 seconds; strain into a lowball glass filled with ice. Twist lemon peel over cocktail to release oils, then rub over the rim of glass; discard peel.

Rum Beer Float

<http://allrecipes.com/recipe/233089/rum-beer-float/>

Ingredients

- 1 (12 fluid ounce) can or bottle root beer
- 1 (1.5 fluid ounce) jigger spiced rum
- 2 scoops vanilla ice cream

Preparation

Pour root beer into a mug; stir in rum. Spoon ice cream into root beer mixture. Let ice cream melt slightly into the liquid, about 5 minutes.



THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

Whiskey Slush

<http://allrecipes.com/recipe/20219/whiskey-slush/?internalSource=recipe%20hub&referringId=1744&referringContentType=recipe%20hub>

Ingredients

- 1 (12 fluid ounce) can frozen lemonade concentrate
- 1 (6 ounce) can frozen orange juice concentrate
- 2 cups strong, brewed black tea
- 1 cup white sugar
- 2 cups whiskey
- 7 cups water
- 1 liter ginger ale soda
- 2 lemons—cut into wedges, for garnish



Preparation

1. In a large plastic container, combine lemonade concentrate, orange juice concentrate, tea, sugar, whiskey, and water. Mix well and freeze for 24 hours.
2. Scoop into a tall glass, $\frac{3}{4}$ full, and pour ginger ale to fill the glass. Stir and garnish with lemon wedges.

Classic Boilermaker:

http://cocktails.about.com/od/whiskeyrecipes/r/boilermaker_sht.htm

Ingredients

- 15 ounces draft beer (lighter is best)
- 1½ ounces blended whiskey

Preparation

Drop shot of whiskey into beer and enjoy!



THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

Blackberry Lemonade

<http://paintchipsandfrosting.com/2013/05/22/fresh-squeezed-blackberry-lemonade/>

Ingredients

- 7 lemons (1½ cups lemon juice)
- 1½ cups sugar
- 7 cups water
- Zest of ½ lemon
- 1 pint blackberries

Preparation

1. Juice the lemons. Remove seeds. Strain pulp, if desired.
2. Heat sugar and 2 cups water to boiling and stir to dissolve all of the sugar. Let cool to room temperature, then refrigerate for at least a half hour.
3. Puree ~1 cup blackberries and strain seeds, if desired; you will end up with about ⅓ cup blackberry puree.
4. Mix lemon juice, sugar water, remaining water, and blackberry puree and refrigerate until chilled.
5. Serve over ice.



Literary-Themed Games

<http://www.picador.com/blog/december-2014/our-top-five-literary-party-games>

1. The paperback game

Collect a stack of paperbacks—romance, crime, and other genre novels make the best candidates. The first person picks one out and reads the book's description from the back of the book. The other players have a go at writing the first sentence of the novel, while the first person writes out the real first sentence and then reads them aloud to the group. Players must decide for themselves which is the real first sentence. 1 point if their fake sentence is voted as the real one, and 2 points if they correctly vote for the real first sentence.

THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

2. Consequences

It may be a game of your long-lost childhood, but it gets better as you get older. As the leader, choose a line from a novel that marks the beginning of a dramatic scene and write it down. Pass it on to the next player, who writes the next sentence and passes it on. And so on. When your creative depths have been plumbed and no more tales can be spun, read it aloud. Stories will be enhanced by using names of other fictional characters as you go, and each one may go around the room as many times as possible before nothing more can be written.

3. Whose Line Is It Anyway?

Pick a player to read quotes by or about various characters—they could be from classic novels all members know or from your latest book group read. Others must guess who said what and when, and about whom, where relevant. This could be a quiet way of passing the time and patting yourself on the back at your astounding literary knowledge, or things could get competitive by dividing members into teams and keeping score. (From litlovers.com.)

Activities:

Book Brackets

Each member will be given a bracket (like used with March Madness NCAA basketball) with 32 different books listed. (As the leader, pick your favorites or go out on a limb and pick random titles, but make sure to include some of the titles you have read in your book club!) Have each member fill out their bracket according to which book they like best until each member has selected a champion. Get your brackets here: <http://printyourbrackets.com/fillable-brackets/32-team-single-fillable.pdf>

Book Swap

Since *The Readers of Broken Wheel Recommend* started with Amy and Sara being pen pals and basically swapping books they loved, why not have all the members of your book club come bearing gifts? Have each member bring a copy of their favorite book. (It doesn't have to be a new copy—it could be from an old stash, a garage sale find, or a paperback version of a hardcover). Each member draws a name out of a hat to see who they will give their book to. Or make it really fun and make a game of

THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

it. Ask members to bring their book giftwrapped or in a bag. Have each member draw a number and whatever number each draws is the order in which they get to pick a wrapped book. So if a member draws #1, that member picks first and upwraps the book for all members to see, and so on. Books can be stolen, but it must be that member's turn, or they can steal a book if their book has been stolen by another. Books can only be stolen twice before they are safe and cannot be stolen again.

What Is My Literary Name?

The first letter of my first name is:

A: Moby	J: Ichabod	S: Forrest
B: Hannibal	K: Lolita	T: Ponyboy
C: Sherlock	L: Pip	U: Severus
D: Huckleberry	M: Atticus	V: Eeyore
E: Scarlett	N: Ebenezer	W: Uriah
F: Varuca	O: Hester	X: Beloved
G: Svengali	P: Dorian	Y: Boo
H: Robinson	Q: Pippa	Z: Fudge
I: Jeeves	R: Beezus	

The month I was born:

January: Frankenstein	July: Garp
February: Wonka	August: Lindqvist
March: Eyre	September: Fu Manchu
April: Havisham	October: Fowl
May: Mindbender	November: Golightly
June: Ratched	December: Potter

Combine the two and get your literary character name!



THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

Crafts

Farmhouse chic adds whimsy to any decor

Upcycled Mason Jars with Glass Knob Tops:

<http://lollyjane.com/mason-jar-glass-knobs-tops/>

Supplies

- Acrylic paint
- Foam brushes
- Sealer
- Old food jars or mason jars
- Drill and bit
- Assortment of knobs (we got most of ours at Hobby Lobby)



Directions

Paint the jar lids an assortment of colors. Two to three light coats will cover them. Tip: Paint the sides first, then hold the lid with you thumb and index finger to keep your hands clean. When dry, seal with a foam brush. Drill into the middle of the jar lid with a metal drill bit. Screw the knob into place.

DIY Chalkboard Frames:

<http://doitdarling.com/2013/05/08/buy-cheap-frames-paint-the-frame-and-paint-the-glass-with-chalkboard-paint/>

Supplies:

- Metal picture frames
- 180-grit sandpaper
- Colorful latex paints
- Paintbrush
- Chalkboard paint



Directions:

1. Remove the backing and glass from the picture frames.
2. Paint the top of each glass surface with the chalkboard paint. Set them aside to dry.
3. Use the sandpaper to rough up the metal surface of the picture frames.
4. Paint each frame a different color with the latex paint. Set them aside to dry.
5. Reassemble the frame, glass, and backing. Find the perfect spot to hang them for display.

THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

Read an Excerpt

Books 1–Life 0

The strange woman standing on Hope's main street was so ordinary it was almost scandalous. A thin, plain figure dressed in an autumn coat much too gray and warm for the time of year, a backpack lying on the ground by her feet, an enormous suitcase resting against one of her legs. Those who happened to witness her arrival couldn't help feeling it was inconsiderate for someone to care so little about their appearance. It seemed as though this woman was not the slightest bit interested in making a good impression on them.

Her hair was a nondescript shade of brown, held back with a carelessly placed hair clip that didn't stop it from flowing down over her shoulders in a tangle of curls. Where her face should have been, there was a copy of Louisa May Alcott's *An Old-Fashioned Girl*.

She didn't seem to care at all that she was in Hope. It was as if she had just landed there, with book and luggage and uncombed hair, and might just as well have been in any other town in the world. She was standing on one of the most beautiful streets in Cedar County, maybe even the prettiest in east central Iowa, but the only thing she had eyes for was her book.

But then again, she couldn't be entirely uninterested. Every now and again a pair of big gray eyes peeped up over the edge of the book, like a prairie dog sticking its head up to check whether the coast was clear. She would lower the book further and look sharply to the left, then swing her gaze as far to the right as she could without moving her head. Then she would raise the book and sink back into the story again.

In actual fact, Sara had taken in almost every detail of the street. She would have been able to describe how the last of the afternoon sun was gleaming on the polished SUVs, how even the treetops seemed neat and well organized, and how the hair salon 150 feet away had a sign made from laminated plastic in patriotic red, white, and blue stripes. The scent of freshly baked apple pie filled the air. It was coming from the café behind her, where a couple of middle-aged women were sitting outside and watching her with clear distaste. That was how it looked to Sara, at least. Every time she glanced up from her book, they frowned and shook their heads slightly, as though she was breaking some unwritten rule of etiquette by reading on the street.

She took out her phone and redialed. It rang nine times before she hung up.

So Amy Harris was a bit late. Surely there would be a perfectly reasonable explanation. A flat tire maybe. Out of gas. It was easy to be—she checked her phone again—two hours and thirty-seven minutes late.

She wasn't worried, not yet. Amy Harris wrote proper letters, on real, old-fashioned writing paper, thick and creamy. There wasn't a chance in the world that someone who wrote on proper, cream-colored writing paper

THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

would abandon a friend in a strange town or turn out to be a psychopathic serial killer with sadomasochistic tendencies, regardless of what Sara's mother said.

"Excuse me, honey."

A woman had stopped beside her. She gave Sara an artificially patient look.

"Can I help you with anything?" the woman asked. A brown paper bag full of food was resting on her hip, a can of Campbell's tomato soup teetering perilously close to the edge.

"No, thank you," said Sara. "I'm waiting for someone."

"Sure." The woman's tone was amused and indulgent. The women sitting outside the café were following the whole conversation with interest. "First time in Hope?"

"I'm on my way to Broken Wheel."

Maybe it was just Sara's imagination, but the woman didn't seem at all satisfied with that answer.

The can of soup wobbled dangerously. After a moment, the woman said, "It's not much of a town, I'm afraid, Broken Wheel. Do you know someone there?"

"I'm going to stay with Amy Harris."

Silence.

"I'm sure she's on her way," said Sara.

"Seems like you've been abandoned here, honey." The woman looked expectantly at Sara. "Go on, call her."

Sara reluctantly pulled her phone out again. When the strange woman pressed up against Sara's ear to listen to the ringing tone, she had to stop herself from shrinking back.

"Doesn't seem to me like she's going to answer."

Sara put the phone back in her pocket, and the woman moved away a little.

"What're you planning on doing there?"

"Have a holiday. I'm going to rent a room."

THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

"And now you've been abandoned here. That's a good start. I hope you didn't pay in advance." The woman shifted the paper bag over to her other arm and snapped her fingers in the direction of the seats outside the café. "Hank," she said loudly to the only man sitting there. "Give this girl here a ride to Broken Wheel, OK?"

"I haven't finished my coffee."

"So take it with you then."

The man grunted but got obediently to his feet and disappeared into the café.

"If I were you," the woman continued, "I wouldn't hand over any money right away. I'd pay just before I went home. And I'd keep it well hidden until then." She nodded so violently that the can of tomato soup teetered worryingly again. "I'm not saying everyone in Broken Wheel is a thief," she added for safety's sake, "but they're not like us."

Hank came back with his coffee in a paper cup, and Sara's suitcase and backpack were thrown onto the backseat of his car. Sara was guided carefully but firmly to the front seat.

"Go on, give her a ride over, Hank," said the woman, hitting the roof of the car twice with her free hand. She leaned toward the open window. "You can always come back here if you change your mind."

...

"So, Broken Wheel," Hank said disinterestedly.

Sara clasped her hands on top of her book and tried to look relaxed. The car smelled of cheap aftershave and coffee.

"What're you going to do there?"

"Read."

He shook his head.

"As a holiday," she explained.

"We'll see, I guess," Hank said ominously.

She watched the scenery outside the car window change. Lawns became fields, the glittering cars disappeared, and the neat little houses were replaced by an enormous wall of corn looming up on either side of the road,

THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

which stretched straight out ahead for miles. Every now and then it was intersected by other roads, also perfectly straight, as though someone had, at some point, looked out over the enormous fields and drawn the roads in with a ruler. As good a method as any, Sara thought. But as they drove on, the other roads became fewer and fewer until it felt as though the only thing around them was mile after mile of corn.

“Can’t be much of a town left,” said Hank. “A friend of mine grew up there. Sells insurance in Des Moines now.”

She didn’t know what she was meant to say to that. “That’s nice,” she tried.

“He likes it,” the man agreed. “Much better than trying to run the family farm in Broken Wheel, that’s for sure.”

And that was that.

Sara looked out of the car window, searching for the town of Amy’s letters. She had heard so much about Broken Wheel that she was almost expecting Miss Annie to come speeding past on her delivery bicycle at any moment or Robert to be standing at the side of the road, waving the latest edition of his magazine in the air. For a moment, she could practically see them before her, but then they grew faint and whirled away into the dust behind the car. Instead, a battered-looking barn appeared, only to be immediately hidden from view once more by the corn, as though it had never been there in the first place. It was the only building she had seen in the last fifteen minutes.

Would the town look the way she had imagined it? Now that she was finally about to see it with her own eyes, Sara had even forgotten her anxiety about Amy not answering the phone.

But when they eventually arrived, she might have missed it entirely if Hank hadn’t pulled over. The main street was nothing more than a few buildings on either side of the road. Most of them seemed to be empty, gray, and depressing. A few of the shops had boarded-up windows, but a diner still appeared to be open.

“So what d’you want to do?” Hank asked. “You want a ride back?”

She glanced around. The diner was definitely open. The word *Diner* was glowing faintly in red neon letters, and a lone man was sitting at the table closest to the window. She shook her head.

“Whatever you want,” Hank said in a tone that implied “You’ll only have yourself to blame.”

She climbed out of the car and pulled her luggage out from the backseat, her paperback shoved under her arm. Hank drove off the moment she closed the door. He made a sharp U-turn at the only traffic light in town.

THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

It was hanging from a cable in the middle of the street, and it was shining red.

...

Sara stood in front of the diner with the suitcase at her feet, her backpack slung over one shoulder, and one hand firmly clutching her book.

It's all going to be fine, she said to herself. *Everything will work out. This is not a catastrophe...* She backtracked. As long as she had books and money, nothing could be a catastrophe. She had enough money to check in to a hostel if she needed to. Though she was fairly sure there wouldn't be a hostel in Broken Wheel.

She pushed open the doors—only to be confronted by a set of real saloon doors, how ridiculous—and went in. Other than the man by the window and a woman behind the counter, the diner was empty. The man was thin and wiry, his body practically begging forgiveness for his very existence. He didn't even look up when she came in, just continued turning his coffee cup in his hands, slowly around and around.

The woman, on the other hand, immediately directed all her attention toward the door. She weighed at least three hundred pounds and her huge arms were resting on the high counter in front of her. It was made from dark wood and wouldn't have looked out of place in a bar, but instead of beer coasters, there were stainless-steel napkin holders and laminated menus with pictures of the various rubbery-looking types of food the diner served.

The woman lit a cigarette in one fluid movement.

"You must be the tourist," she said. The smoke from her cigarette hit Sara in the face. It had been years since Sara had seen anyone in Sweden smoking in a restaurant. Clearly they did things differently here.

"I'm Sara. Do you know where Amy Harris lives?"

The woman nodded. "One hell of a day." A lump of ash dropped from her cigarette and landed on the counter. "I'm Grace," she said. "Or truth be told, my name's Madeleine. But there's no point calling me that."

Sara hadn't been planning on calling her anything at all.

"And now you're here."

Sara had a definite feeling that Grace—who-wasn't-really-called-Grace was enjoying the moment, drawing it out. Grace nodded three times to herself, took a deep drag of her cigarette, and let the smoke curl slowly upward from one corner of her mouth. She leaned over the counter.

THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

"Amy's dead," she said.

...

In Sara's mind, Amy's death would forever be associated with the glow of fluorescent strip lighting, cigarette smoke, and the smell of fried food. It was surreal. Here she was, standing in a diner in a small American town, being told that a woman she had never met had died. The whole situation was much too dreamlike to be scary, much too odd to be a nightmare.

"Dead?" Sara repeated. An extraordinarily stupid question, even for her. She slumped onto a bar stool. She had no idea what to do now. Her thoughts drifted back to the woman in Hope, and she wondered whether she should have gone back with Hank after all.

Amy can't be dead, Sara thought. She was my friend. She liked books, for God's sake.

It wasn't quite grief that Sara was feeling, but she was struck by how fleeting life was, and the odd feeling grew. She had come to Iowa from Sweden to take a break from life—to get away from it, even—but not to meet death.

How had Amy died? One part of her wanted to ask; another didn't want to know.

Grace continued before Sara had time to make up her mind. "The funeral's probably in full swing. Not particularly festive things nowadays, funerals. Too much religious crap if you ask me. It was different when my grandma died." She glanced at the clock. "You should probably head over there now, though. I'm sure someone who knew her better'll know what to do with you. I try to avoid getting drawn into this town's problems, and you're definitely one of them."

She stubbed out her cigarette. "George, will you give Sara here a ride to Amy's house?"

The man by the window looked up. For a moment, he looked as paralyzed as Sara felt. Then he got to his feet and half carried, half dragged her bags to the car.

Grace grabbed Sara's elbow as she started off after him. "That's Poor George," she said, nodding toward his back.

...

Amy Harris's house was a little way out of town. It was big enough that the kitchen and living room seemed fairly spacious, but small enough that the little group that had congregated there after the funeral made it seem

THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

full. The table and kitchen counters were covered with baking dishes full of food, and someone had prepared bowls of salad and bread, laid out cutlery, and arranged napkins in drinking glasses.

Sara was given a paper plate of food and then left more or less to herself. George was still by her side, and she was touched by that unexpected display of loyalty. He didn't seem to be a particularly brave person at all, not even compared to her, but he had followed her in, and now he was walking around just as hesitantly as she was.

In the dim hallway there was a dark chest of drawers on which someone had arranged a framed photograph of a woman she assumed must be Amy and two worn-looking flags, the one of the United States and the other of Iowa. *Our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain*, the state flag proclaimed in embroidered white letters, but the flag was faded and one of the edges was frayed.

The woman in the photograph was perhaps twenty years old, with her hair pulled into two thin braids and a standard issue, stiff camera smile. She was a complete stranger. There might have been something in her eyes, a glimmer of laughter that showed she knew it was all a joke, that Sara could recognize from her letters. But that was all.

She wanted to reach out and touch the photograph, but doing that felt much too forward. Instead, she stayed where she was in the dark hallway, carefully balancing her paper plate, her book still under her arm. Her bags had disappeared somewhere, but she didn't have the energy to worry about them.

Three weeks earlier, she had felt so close to Amy that she had been prepared to stay with her for two months, but now it was as though every trace of their friendship had died along with her. Sara had never believed that you had to meet someone in person to be friends—many of her most rewarding relationships had been with people who didn't even exist—but suddenly it all felt so false, disrespectful even, to cling to the idea that she and Amy had, in some way, meant something to each other.

All around her, people were moving slowly and cautiously through the rooms, as though they were wondering what on earth they were doing there, which was almost exactly what Sara was thinking too. Still, they didn't seem shocked. They didn't seem surprised. No one was crying.

Most of them were looking at Sara with curiosity, but something, perhaps respect for the significance of the event, was stopping them from approaching her. They circled around her instead, smiling whenever she accidentally caught their eye.

Suddenly, a woman materialized out of the crowd and cornered Sara halfway between the living room and the kitchen.

“Caroline Rohde.”

THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

Her posture and handshake were military, but she was much more beautiful than Sara had imagined. She had deep, almond-shaped eyes and features as pronounced as a statue's. In the glow of the ceiling lamp, her skin was an almost shimmering white across her high cheekbones. Her hair was thick and streaked with gray. Around her neck, she wore a black scarf made from thin, cool silk that would have looked out of place on anyone else, even at a funeral, but on her it looked timeless—almost glamorous.

Her age was hard to guess, but she had the air of someone who had never really been young. Sara had a strong sense that Caroline Rohde didn't have much time for youth.

When Caroline started talking, everyone around her fell silent. Her voice matched her presence: determined, resolute, straight to the point. There was, perhaps, a hint of a welcoming smile in her voice, but it never reached as far as her mouth.

"Amy said you'd be coming," she said. "I won't claim I thought it was a good idea, but it wasn't my place to say anything." Then she added, almost as an afterthought, "You've got to agree that this isn't the most...practical situation."

"Practical," Sara echoed. Though how Amy was meant to know she was going to die, she wasn't sure.

Others gathered around Caroline in a loose half circle, facing Sara as if she were a traveling circus making a brief stop in town.

"We didn't know how to contact you when Amy...passed away. And now you're here," Caroline concluded. "Oh well, we'll just have to see what we can do with you."

"I'm going to need somewhere to stay," said Sara. Everyone leaned forward to hear.

"Stay?" asked Caroline. "You'll stay here, of course! I mean, the house is empty, isn't it?"

"But..."

A man in a minister's collar smiled warmly at Sara, adding, "Amy specifically told us to let you know that nothing would change in that regard."

Nothing would change? She didn't know who was madder—the minister or Amy or the whole of Broken Wheel.

"There's a guest room, of course," said Caroline. "Sleep there tonight, and then we'll work out what we're going to do with you."

THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

The minister nodded, and somehow it was decided. She would stay, alone, in dead Amy Harris's empty house. She was hustled upstairs. Caroline went first, like a commander at war, followed closely by Sara and then George, a supportive, silent shadow. Behind them, most of the other guests followed. Someone was carrying her bags, she didn't know who, but when she reached the little guest room, her backpack and suitcase miraculously appeared.

"We'll make sure you've got everything you need," Caroline said from the doorway, not at all unkindly. Then she shooed the others away, giving Sara a brief wave before pulling the door closed behind her.

Sara sank onto the bed, suddenly alone again, the paper plate still in her hand and a lonely book lying abandoned on the bedspread next to her.

Oh hell, she thought.

Discussion Guide:

1. Sara and Amy develop a close relationship through exchanging letters. Have you ever had a pen pal? How might a friendship conducted entirely through writing be different than an in-person relationship?
2. Even though we never meet Amy in person, we get to know her through her letters to Sara. How did her letters influence your understanding of Amy and Sara's relationship?
3. How might Sara's visit have been different if Amy had been alive when she arrived?
4. Why do you think everyone in Broken Wheel felt so responsible for looking after Sara when she arrived?
5. Broken Wheel is a dying town, and a bookstore brings it back to life. How accurately do you think *The Readers of Broken Wheel Recommend* portrays small-town America? Have you ever been to or lived in a place like Broken Wheel?
6. There is a strong rivalry between Broken Wheel and Hope. How do you think the residents of Hope viewed the people of Broken Wheel? How were their perceptions changed once the bookstore opened?

THE READERS OF BROKEN WHEEL RECOMMEND

Book Club Ideas

7. Sara arranges the books in her shop through unconventional genre names, including SEX, VIOLENCE AND WEAPONS and FOR FRIDAY NIGHTS AND LAZY SUNDAYS. What are some creative categories you might use to group your favorite books together?
8. Why do you think Sara was so reluctant to return to Sweden? What was missing from her life that she found in Broken Wheel?
9. How did you feel about the progression of Sara and Tom's relationship? Were you happy with the status of their relationship at the end of the book?
10. Why do you think Caroline and Josh felt so much pressure to keep their relationship a secret?
11. *The Readers of Broken Wheel Recommend* focuses on how books can change lives. How have books affected your life? Is there one book in particular that changed the way you see the world?
12. If you were to open a bookstore, what are some of the books you would absolutely have to have for sale?
13. Where do you think Sara, Tom, and the rest of the residents of Broken Wheel will be in five years? What do you think will have changed, and what will stay the same?