



# Season 3, Episode 3: Prequels and Sequels + Non-Fiction That Reads Like Fiction

Mon, 4/12/21 • 49:36

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:10

Hey readers, welcome to the Currently Reading podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about the books that we've read recently. And as you already know, we don't shy away from having strong opinions. So get ready.

**Kaytee Cobb** 00:24

We are light on the chitchat, heavy on the book talk, and our descriptions will always be spoiler free. We'll discuss our current reads, a bookish deep dive, and then we'll press books into your hands.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:33

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas, and I am dreaming of reading vacations.

**Kaytee Cobb** 00:41

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico. And I love reading true stories that feel like novels. This is episode number 35 of season three and we're so glad you're here.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 00:53

That is one of my favorite things, Kaytee, and I'm so glad so when we do our deep dive today, we are going to be talking about nonfiction books that read like fiction. And that is such a happy spot in my reading when I'm when I'm reading something that's true. And yet I am like wanting to turn the pages. I feel really good about it.

**Kaytee Cobb** 01:13

Me too. I'm excited to get into that.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 01:15

Alright, so yes, that's gonna be our deep dive. But before we do that, let's talk a little bit about our bookish moments of the week. How's your week been Kaytee?

**Kaytee Cobb** 01:23

My week has been good. I have decided to bring my third kiddo as my bookish moment of the week this week, because he doesn't get very much podcast play. So Noah is my last boy. And he's about four and a half now. And he decided recently that he wanted to learn how to read. So we got out the book that I

used for both of my older two kids, which is called Teach Your child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons, and just started playing around with it. Because they are very easy. He's like, 30 lessons in now and he loves it so much Meredith... like he wants to be, he wants to read like his brothers. He wants to be like mom, and he gets it out every day. He's like, "Mommy, is it a school day? Can we do reading?". Like he's just so excited about it. And when it's not a school day, he gets it out. And he reads like the previous stories that he already had to read. He just he loves it so much. And it's making me very happy and I and he doesn't get a lot of podcast play time. So I'm excited that I get to talk about him for my bookish moment today.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 02:26

Good for you Noah. And so tell us again what it's called. Because I know a lot of people wonder, they've asked us this question. What did we use? Like I use the Bob books. That's what they're called. Right? The Bob books. Yeah, that's what all my... or my my last two. I used those with them. And super, super effective for that. But it tells us again, what yours is called.

**Kaytee Cobb** 02:47

Yeah, this one's called Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons and like, which sounds like the dumbest thing but it teaches phonics without ever sitting down and being like, "this is a C it makes these sounds" so it just flows really easy for my kids and they've all just really taken to it like a duck to water. It's been really great.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 03:05

Okay, so my bookish moment of the week, let me tell you how it started okay. Let me tell you the context for this bookish moment I was talking to Roxanna as I do all the time because we you know, we have our epic buddy reads. So we're constantly in a conversation. And we started talking about me going to Toronto going to where she lives right now. She was like "you have to come. I can show you all my bookstores. We can go to all my bookish haunts" and then there's this new bar that opened up I think one of her friends actually opened the bar and it's called The Famous Last Words Bar and they have an all literary menu of mixed drinks. So they have like they have the Everyone Brave is Forgiven. They which is Earl Grey infused Bombay, Sapphire gin, Lillet Blanc, lemon and lavender. Does not sound great? They have the Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine. They have the How to Stop Time. They have the Wind-Up Bird Chronicle. Anyway, it goes on and on the menu is absolutely fantastic. But it just got me thinking, you know how we're all in the idea of buddy reads, My idea is this, do a buddy vacation, where one of you where your buddy comes to you, or you go to their hometown, and they take you on all of their readerly hunts, right, all their favorite bookstores, their library, you know, any of the bookish things that you want to do, and you sort of buddy up that way. And so we know whoever you're doing your buddy reads with buddy up and get together for an actual vacation and sort of walk in their bookish shoes in their town. I think it could be really fun once we can all start traveling again.

**Kaytee Cobb** 04:48

I think it could be really fun, too but for some of us who are extroverts, it could get very expensive.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 04:54

Oh, you mean because you have a lot, a lot of friends that you buddy read with right? So you'd have to pick one at a time, and I'm not suggesting that you like pay for them to travel to you, you know, like you would you would sort of go back and forth. But I just think I think there's a nugget of an idea there. That could be a riff on the reading vacation. Because, you know, it's really hard for two readers to go on a reading because I mean, you sort of can with and you end up talking, instead of

**Kaytee Cobb** 05:20

You don't get reading time. I know,

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 05:22

Right. So like a reading vacation really kind of almost needs to be a vacation you take by yourself, but a buddy reading vacation, you sort of forego the notion that you're going to read the whole time, and instead, you just share all your bookish adventures with your visiting friend.

**Kaytee Cobb** 05:38

hm, I like that.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 05:40

Yeah, it's one of many travel related ideas that I have. Now that I am one dose into my two dose Pfizer vaccine.

**Kaytee Cobb** 05:47

Can we please get some more traveling on the calendar?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 05:50

Exactly, exactly. Okay. All right. Well, speaking of all of this reading, let's get into our current reads. Kaytee, what's your first one this week?

**Kaytee Cobb** 05:57

Okay, my first one this week is one that I heard about from Sara at Fiction Matters. It's called Disability Visibility: First Person Stories from the 21st Century, which is edited by Alice Wong. And it has a very, like, it's got a great graphic cover, but she raved about it. And Sara and I do not match up across the board. She's much smarter reader than I am. She's much more literary. She likes a quiet novel. But stuff like this is really bold in both of our wheel houses. So when she talked about it, I knew I was gonna love it. It's a collection of essays memoir style from people who are living with disability in one way or another. So some of them are visibly disabled, as you can see it from the outside. And some are living with chronic illness. Some are some are unable to get around because of accessibility issues, like buildings not being accessible. and everything in between on that spectrum. This collection celebrates the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which was totally groundbreaking at the time, but kind of slid in under the radar. And it's edited by Alice Wong, there's representation across racial lines, the LGBTQ spectrum, the economic spectrum, you know, like anything you can think of, there's representation in here, I listened to this one. And I really wish that they had chosen at least two narrators so that it's easier to tell when you switch from one person story to the next. Ideally, it would

have been narrated by each of those individual authors, I think that would have been even better. But you know, as an as a listener, you take what you can get, I, I do plan to get a paper copy though, because I like to I would like to page back through it. Some of these stories are heartbreaking, some are enlightening, some are just like sparkling. And there are a variety. It was here, I'm gonna do this, even though this is your, your thing that you do, it was like a multifaceted jewel, which really helps me as the reader to see disability through all these different sides of a jewel, right? You know how you can turn a diamond and it looks a little different from one side to the next? This is that book because you get that slight shift in perspective, from one story to the next. Just really well done really incredibly put together. And I love getting to see how disability affects my fellow Americans, which is one in five American citizens are disabled in one way or another. And I loved like getting to know the ways that we can better care for each other. That was Disability Visibility: First Person Stories from the 21st Century, edited by Alice Wong.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 08:31

But I'm so happy that you read that that sounds really, really interesting. sounds really good. And I think your metaphor was really apt because when you can see things through that slightly changed perspective. It's really meaningful. So I think that's a great one. I'm so glad that you brought that one. Okay, well, to a book that I did not like and actually I've been I've, I haven't wanted to I literally have skipped over this book in my current might my lineup of current reads like four times, but I feel like I'm being disingenuous by not talking about it. So I'm just going to put my big girl panties on and talk about it. Because Kaytee, I read and this is not like it's some gigantic spicy take, but I just feel guilty. I read The Magician's Nephew by C.S. Lewis and Kaytee, I hated it. No, I hated this book. And this is so hard for me because you guys all know how much I love The Lion, Witch, the Witch and the Wardrobe.

**Kaytee Cobb** 09:28

So, which is why I haven't picked this up yet.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 09:30

So Right, exactly. So when we did our just give you a little bit of context, when we did our, our buddy read as a group, the Currently Reading Patreon group, we did The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe. And it was so fantastic to reread that and then to all talk about it together. And it was just such a great experience. One of the things we talked about was the White Witch Judas, right. And we talked about her kind of in depth during that conversation. And several people during that conversation and afterwards said you really because I said, I wish we could get a little more below the surface or get a novel just about her backstory. And people said you, you have to go, you have to read The Magician's Nephew, which I must have read at some point in my childhood, but it felt like a complete first read to me this time. So let me just give you a little bit of setup. Remember part of the controversy here? Is, is The Magician's Nephew book one of The Chronicles of Narnia? Or is it book seven? Should it be read first? Or last? Is it a prequel? There's all this you know, right? So I firmly believe that The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe is the first one. And let me tell you why. Here's...

**Kaytee Cobb** 10:39

Even more so now I bet.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 10:41**

100 times more. So now, the setup is so here we have our lead characters are Digory and Polly, and they are like 12 year old ish. And they meet I think, don't quote me on the age exactly. They meet and they become friends during a cold, wet summer sometime around the war, right? No one's got any adults in their life who pay any attention to this. I mean, you know, again, they're just, you know, we're all just wandering around waiting for adventure. So their adventure starts when Digory's horrible uncle Andrew, who's actually an adult who does pay attention to what they're doing. He thinks he's a magician of some sort. And he sends them somewhere else. And then just super briefly, they find their way to Narnia, and they encounter the evil sorceress Judas, the White Witch, yada, yada, yada, okay. Oh, here's why this should never ever be considered the first book, in this in The Chronicles of Narnia, because it is so different in tone, especially in tone, let alone in content that I fear for a generation of readers who believe that who start with this book, and then and then understandably, would have zero desire to move further. And so then they would miss what I believe to be one of the top five books I've ever read in my life, which is The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. And that would be nothing short of a tragedy. So this book is so so much darker. But even more than being dark in content, the tone is there's none of the sweetness that is in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, the kind of wonder, that's there, the little interesting pieces that, you know, 40 years later, you remember reading about, there's none of that here. It's all oh, I can't even it just felt so icky to me, that this the tone the entire way through, just felt so icky, and dour and negative. And there was no sweet childlike deliciousness to grab on to, you know, that kind of magic of storytelling. So, my God, I just, it definitely does add more meat to the bone of the characters of especially the witch and of Aslan, and does provide context for how things came to be that are in The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. But the entire energy is just so different. That for me, it just really has the potential if read first to suck a lot of the joy out of The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe. So this one, I feel extraordinarily upset about saying I did not like The Magician's Nephew by C.S. Lewis. And I know we're going to get a ton of listener feedback here. And we welcome that. Because really, I hope that other people liked it. It was just not a great experience for me.

**Kaytee Cobb 13:47**

Well, now, I'm glad I haven't read it. Because I can totally see, I can see exactly what you're talking about. And the way that that could color, especially a brand new reader coming into that series. Oh, that would make me so sad. Like everybody who puts this as first in the series needs to needs to take it off the list and put it at the back.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 14:08**

You know, when you walk into Narnia, there's everyone remembers that moment where you walk into Narnia, right? You're going through the wardrobe and you're coming. There's kind of a a like moment in The Magician's Nephew. Only the world that they find themselves in is so like, empty and horrible. And I'm just like, oh, get out of there. It's just that comparison is really tough. So anyway, all right. What have you got next?

**Kaytee Cobb 14:32**

Okay, well, unfortunately, I got another spicy take for book number two here.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 14:37

Oh, no, we've had so many episodes where we've only had like, four and five star books. I know we knew this was gonna happen.

**Kaytee Cobb** 14:44

Okay, so this one is called *The Conductors* by Nicole Glover and the premise of this book is so promising that I'm just mad at it. A little bit the worst. So our main character's Hetty. She was a conductor on the Underground Railroad using her smarts, and magic, which exists in this world. Now the Civil War's over, she lives up north in Philadelphia, where she solves mysteries. So this is magic and mysteries, there's murder. Mostly her mysteries are regarding the Black residents of the city because white policemen just ignore murders of Black people. It's post Civil War. Racial tensions are high, of course. Again, this premise is amazeballs. I love it. Right? The problem is the execution. Oftentimes with fantasy, we talk about how you're kind of stuck in a world building, you know, thing for a while, right? The author has to like help you get your feet under you. And sometimes that takes too long. And, and you're bored. By the time the action starts. This is the opposite of that. What happens is she drops you into the story, you have no idea what is happening, you have no idea how magic works, why wands are different from sigils. And signs, like, what are star signs for nothing. It's like, it's like in *Outlander*, when she's just like plopped into two centuries ahead of time. And she's like, I don't know where I am, I don't know what I'm doing. It's like that, except the author isn't helping guide you along. So it was just a really frustrating experience, it took probably 60% of this novel, to really get my feet on me and be like, Okay, I know what's going on. And the whole time, you're also trying to put together clues about a mystery, and a murder and trying to figure out what's happening. So you're trying to, like, keep all these things in your head at once. What I wish is that our debut author here, had either a better editor, or a mentor in the fantasy realm, who could who could have read this alongside her and said, Honey, this is so great, this is a great premise, here's what I want you to do. Give us something different at the beginning, like and, and and, you know, propel your reader by preparing them well, for this world that you're putting her into. So I, I'm hopeful by the end, I was excited about it. So we ended up being like two and a half three stars. For me, I'm hopeful going forward that she has her feet under her. And that this could be a either skip the first book or first book is the price of admission type thing. But for now, I just have to say, unfortunately, this amazing premise was let down in *The Conductors* by Nicole Glover and it's a big fat skip,

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 17:35

what to what kept you reading? How come you didn't DNF it?

**Kaytee Cobb** 17:40

I have a problem with DNFing galley's a lot of times, especially if the writing isn't bad. Like if I'm sitting there and I'm reading a galley and they don't know how to use punctuation and they don't like have continuity of story I can get, I can get off of that train. But when I feel like there's going to be something good in there, I have a really hard time letting go of it. So this is one I got on netgalley. And eventually it was released and I could finish it on audio. So I was able to get through to the end.



**Meredith Monday Schwartz 18:10**

Okay, well, that makes sense. Okay, so I another book that I sort of want to check the box by making sure that I talked about here because I get a lot of questions about it is that I read the third book in The Curse So Dark and Lonely series. This third book is called A Vow So Bold and Deadly. And this is by Bridgid Kemmerer. So you guys know, we have talked about A Curse So Dark and Lonely. It was my best book of 2019. It's on my list of best books I've ever my top 10 books I've ever read. I absolutely love it. The second book in the series was okay, it certainly wasn't bad. It was okay for me, however. So I'm happy to say that this third one, which brings the series to a conclusion was really satisfying. So the setup, as always, is really impossible when you're talking about a book in the series, especially the third one in a series. So I don't want to give any spoilers. So I'll just say again, it's the third book in the trilogy. And the second book focuses really heavily on the Grey character, character I think we all really love. He's a whole snack. And this third book then brings all of the players from the first book back together, which I really, really liked. And it's a story that involves an invading force and magic and Emberfell, which is one of my favorite worlds to jump into, and bad people who really need to get their comeuppance. So again, I thought this was a very satisfying ending, I thought this third book was well done. It isn't for me the same level of fantastic that the first one is, but very frankly, that book is one that I loved so much that I think it would be almost impossible to have an entire series that would be at that same level, but this is well written. I love all the characters here. I love the way they were brought back together. And there's a real focus on brotherhood in this in this story, which is a theme that I really enjoy and I think it's really well done here. And then also there is a really well done theme of forgiveness, which is another theme that I find very satisfying. So overall, I applaud Bridgid for a fantastic ending to what I think is a really solid series. I'm completely satisfied with it. So this was A Vow So Bold and Deadly by Bridgid Kemmerer.

**Kaytee Cobb 20:35**

Perfect. Okay, I have the first in a series for my third book this this week. I'm so excited to talk about Amari and the Night Brothers by B.B. Alston, which I've talked about and gushed about but never brought as a current read and I just need everybody to know about it. So from that second book, I'm going way, way, way, way, way up. I want to talk about Amari. And when I talk I say gosh, and when I mean way way up, I mean to the tippy top of the star system. I'm just so excited about it. I cannot with how much I love this book. It came in my February shelf subscription from Bookshelf Thomasville, and I picked it up for a buddy read with the Bookish Friends which we already talked about once this episode. Drove of them picked it up. Almost like I can't think of anybody, universally beloved four and five stars across the board. Everybody loved our main character is Amari, of course, she and her mom are mourning her missing brother Quinton who went missing a few months back and his disappearance is being largely ignored by police. They assume he was into something illegal, but he is known around town as a golden boy who helps with you know, tutoring for at risk kids. Excelled in school had a great job that made him lots of money, but they don't know much about it, which is why the police are like, yeah, honey, he was dealing drugs. And they're like, no, he was a good kid. So when Amari gets a secret briefcase delivered to her front door that only she can open, that has a message from Quinton, we get pulled into this world where she gets to be invited to try out for the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs. And she's sure that this is where she's gonna find her answers about what happened to Quinton, then all the fun weekends, this has all the magic and world building of Harry Potter without any of the icky feelings about the author. This is the delight and friendship of Nevermoor. This is the fantasy

middle grade that I have wanted ever since I picked up that first Nevermoor book and I was just like, yes, this I want to be back in these worlds. This is amazing. I found it right when it released unfortunately because that means I have to wait until next year for book two, which just makes me so sad. It's a tragedy. B.B. Alston is a Black male author, but he writes this 13 year old girl to perfection, I have to assume he has sisters, or daughters or someone that just completely encapsulates Amari for him. I love this book. I'm so glad I got to buddy read it and discuss it. I may have cried on Crowdcast. It cannot be confirmed or denied about a few of these scenes, it's going on my forever shelf, because I want my kids to enjoy it and I want my grandkids to enjoy it someday. So run do not walk reader to your nearest bookstore and buy a copy because you have to have it in your hands so you can pass it along to the other readers you have. I loved it so much. It's Amari and the Night Brothers by B.B. Alston.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 23:40

Well, Kaytee, before we recorded today, you said that you were going to convince me to read this book. And the problem is that I already read it. And I loved it.

**Kaytee Cobb** 23:51

Oh good.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 23:52

I loved it. I really really did. It took me a little bit longer to get to that place. And just because I think that I was kind of in a weird headspace, but I ended up reading it and then backing back going sort of going backwards and reading the whole second half again and really really doing that part of it really made it land for me in a in a major way. I think you're totally right. B.B Alston has got to have a sparkly Seven Up of 13 year old girl in his life somewhere because she just zips from the pages. She's really really wonderful. So yeah, this is it's a really, really excellent adventure and it's kind of got it's got all those things you talked about, you know, it's got Harry Potter, Nevermoor. You know, definitely Men in Black vibes. It's got a coolness like a not a cool like temperature but like like a cool like a cool kid.

**Kaytee Cobb** 24:47

rad. Cool.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 24:48

Yeah, it's got like that like very shimmery coolness to it. That I really that sort of took it up a notch, which I really I loved. So yeah, I liked it. A lot. Go ahead. I'm so glad this is a great find. Okay. All right. So my third book is a book that I really liked, but boy could not be any different than Amari and the Night Brothers. So I am really sorry for this big left turn that we're about to take because I feel like these two books should not be together at all. But I did like this book. So here we go. So it's a book that I did talk about when we were on Laura Tremaine, but I have to make sure that we've talked about it on the Big Show, too, because I think it's really, really good. So okay, I want to talk about Good Neighbors by Sarah Langan. This book is definitely not for every reader at all, it's definitely not for every reader. It's not for every mood, even for the right reader. So you have to very much kind of be in the right headspace for it. So here's our setup. Our entire story takes place on Maple Street, which is this picture perfect suburban area of Long Island. And in this particular neighborhood, there are about 16 houses and most of them most of the households have kids. And all of them are up in each other's business in



a major way. Right. It's this very, very small kind of cul de sac situation. Well, they have a finely tuned social balance when the Wilde family and that's wild W i l d e when they move in because this the Wilde family does not fit in. The dad's an ex rocker. The mom wears tops that are way too revealing and the kids are not well behaved. They In fact, cuss like sailors and make way too much noise. And this is not okay with Maple Street, all of them. And it certainly is not okay with Rhea Schroeder, the unofficial mayor of Maple Street. And as our story starts a huge sinkhole has opened up in a nearby park and Rhea's daughter Shelly has fallen inside the sinkhole. The search for Shelly brings out the very worst in the neighborhood with accusations flying and rumors spreading like wildfire. And then, my friends, things start to get really, really bad. I love that the book starts out by telling us that this story, the story we're about to read has become one of the most famous incidents in American history, a story so huge that literally everybody knows about it. And it's been turned over and over by journalists and pundits trying to explain how it's possible that things went so very wrong on Maple Street. on Amazon, this is billed as Celeste Ng meets Shirley Jackson. And I think that that's an apt description. All right, Kaytee, what I said to you, and Laura, when we talked about it on her show was that when I finished this book, I was shocked. That's like the only descriptor I could give. I was physically shaking. I read this book really, really fast, because I wanted to know what was going to happen. And also, I did not want to stay on Maple Street. It was one of those books. And I have a pocket of books like this right where I definitely want to be reading them. But I do not want to spend a lot of time with that particular book. So it's the content of this book, yes. But it's really written with this creeping dread that I found to be very well done, because it's very, very unsettling. And then also, the very uncomfortably accurate way that Langan writes the scenes of sort of "happy suburbia", air quotes, the scene where the whole neighborhood is invited to a barbecue, but they haven't invited just one family, the Wilde family. And then when the mom of the Wilde family, marches them all into this barbecue to which they haven't been invited, all of us can understand how that social situation would feel right? It just absolutely gives me the heebie jeebies. And that's just she writes this kind of thing. So well, she really gets into the underbelly of suburbia. So definite trigger warnings for themes of exclusion. Both have children and entire families, which is a trigger for me actually, as a reader, so I want everyone to know that that's definitely here. And then also for alcoholism and alcohol related disease. There's also all manner of violence here. So it was recommended to me by Elizabeth from Fabled, I don't know what it says about me that as soon as she read it,

**Kaytee Cobb 29:33**

she was like, This is perfect for you.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 29:35**

This has got Meredith written all over it. Oh my goodness, absolutely. So it's also interesting that this book is largely set in the near future, and that climate change related temperature differences with the theme that I didn't expect to be as interesting or as scary as it was. I've read a few books lately, including We Are Unprepared, which I talked about on the last episode, that are kind of related to there's some climate change stuff happening on the periphery, which is interesting. I think we're going to see more of that. Langan has written a masterpiece of suburbia gone awry. And I know that I will be thinking about this book for a long time. So this is Good Neighbors by Sarah Langan.

**Kaytee Cobb 30:19**

Yes, that book? I read that because you made me

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:23**

I did as soon as I finished it, right before I went to go grab my copy of one of Ellery Adams cozy mysteries to hold to my chest like a shield because I needed to I needed coziness. Like at my breast. I messaged you and said, Kaytee, you've got to read this book. So now I'm going to ask you, what did you think of this book?

**Kaytee Cobb 30:43**

Well, you did get all my profanity laced messages as I was finished.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 30:48**

As you were finishing. Yes. You had some time to sit with it.

**Kaytee Cobb 30:53**

Yes. I also like I feel exactly how you did about this. It very accurately depicts a neighborhood under stress, suburbia, mom friendships, kid friendships, how those, you know, can interact in not savory ways. And I felt tense the entire time. I finished it within a day. I could not be with this book for very long. I also had a mini buddy read going, and everybody dropped out except for Jess Rumely. It was like, Okay, I'm sticking with it. But everybody else was like, No, I'm out of here. Can you message me and spoil it for me? Because they couldn't. It was it was too much. So and these are not these are not baby sensitive readers. These are readers who are like, you know, I can handle a lot of things. But this one not so much. So definitely know that going in you guys like Meredith who's really good at making a lot of books sound really good. This one like big fat yellow sticker on the front?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz 31:46**

Yeah, well, right. And that's why I want to lead off saying, really, this is not a book that I am saying, oh, every reader run don't walk. I mean, this is definitely not that I really want to say that. I felt like it would tense is such a great word to describe. That's really a great descriptor for this book. But again, if you said, well, Meredith, did you love it? I don't think I could say I loved it. But I was very impacted by it. It had an effect on me. I was very interested the entire time. And for me in my reading, those are things I have to pay attention to because I read to be transported I read to be entertained. And sometimes I read to feel like I am going to throw up and that's a little bit how I felt. I spent a lot of this book kind of nauseous. So there's a ringing endorsement for you. But But again, I say that in a way, like okay, well, why am I saying that? And also saying I think it's really well done? Because I think that's exactly what the author was trying to incite in the reader. Right. You know, you're This is not a book that's made to make you feel good. No, Kaytee, one of the things that I did, one of the reasons I wanted to talk with you about this is because I think I said to Laura, that this is this book is like A Good Neighborhood. Therese Anne Fowler's book, which we've talked about on the show, if it was written by your meaner, darker sister, older sister, right? So if you liked A Good Neighborhood, and you kind of are ready for things to be taken up a notch, then I do think you should try this book, which is confusingly named, Good Neighbors.

**Kaytee Cobb** 33:28

That's unfortunate.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 33:29

Yeah. But if you absolutely hated everything about A Good Neighborhood, I would say stay away from this book entirely. Agree? Yeah. accurate. All right. Okay. All right. So those are our current reads. Alright, so let's get into our deep dive. Our deep dive this week is one of my favorite topics. It's one of the sweet spots in my reading. It's when nonfiction reads like fiction. I, this is such a happy space for me.

**Kaytee Cobb** 33:59

Me too. I love it when I've got a book that I'm learning about a real thing that happened in the world, but I cannot put it down. Right? That's thrilling to me. I love that.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 34:08

Exactly. Okay, so Kaytee, when you were preparing for this, before you even put pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard? What was the first book that popped in your mind?

**Kaytee Cobb** 34:17

The first one that popped into my mind is a book that I didn't even really love. But I could not put down Educated by Tara Westover because her psychotic family and the experiences she had growing up. I could not I was like slurping it up like a milkshake. And then like a milkshake, I was hungry for something substantial of like, two hours later. So

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 34:41

right, the first one that popped into my mind, it will always be in this category, what I think is one of the absolute best which is Into Thin Air by Jon Krakauer. For me that book is as propulsive as any thriller I have ever read. I am not interested in mountain climbing. I am not interested in Everest. I'm not you know what I mean? That whole topic is completely uninteresting to me. This book blew my doors off. So it's always one of those things, especially if a teenage boy or like a dad is like, you know, I need a book to read. This is the book I will press into their hands because it's nonfiction, but it absolutely reads like a novel.

**Kaytee Cobb** 35:21

Which longtime listeners will remember that that was a book that Mindy threw against the wall from our one of our favorite ratatatatouille episodes right ago,

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 35:32

right? I don't remember what her issue was with it.

**Kaytee Cobb** 35:34

As a hiker, she had problems with the way that he would insert himself into the hiking community and like go into things totally unprepared. Oh, right. Right

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 35:42

right. He hadn't done that. That's right. He hadn't done the work

**Kaytee Cobb** 35:45

to say like this is really dangerous to do it this way. So I I'm gonna do it, but you shouldn't like Oh, yeah,

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 35:53

yeah, Krakauer is so ego filled. Well, so then the other book that he that that I always think about when I think of Into Thin Air is Into the Wild, which is a completely different topic. And is a book that I wanted to ratatatouille because I despise the main character so much like literally wanted to strangle the main character in that book, and yet, read it all the way through slurped it up like a milkshake. So Krakauer does, I mean, he's definitely got his issues. But he does this kind of nonfiction really well.

**Kaytee Cobb** 36:28

Yeah, there are other there are other kind of extreme circumstances, books like that, to that like Endurance, that which is the story of Ernest Shackleton's incredible voyage through the Antarctic by Alfred Lansing that it feels like somebody wrote that that is distantly related to Max Brooks and Devolution, right? Where he's like, I'm gonna put together the story that you cannot even believe. And you can't you can't stop reading it. Oh, my gosh, it's amazing. Yeah, like, real people. Yeah, what? Crazy. Same with The Boys in the Boat by Jay... Daniel James Brown. This one's a little different in that it takes 15 to 20% of the book to get yourself kind of seated into the narrative. And I almost gave it up in that 15 to 20%. But once these boys get into the boat, which is of course the main point of the story, it gosh, it just pulls you straight into the water with them. It's just really, really well written and you're just rooting for them the entire time. And then you're like, Oh, yeah, these are real people. That's crazy. Right?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 37:32

Right. Another one that pops into my mind along these lines is The Devil in the White City by Erik Larson. Now, I do have to say, I haven't read. I don't think much more of I haven't read a lot of Erik Larson. But this one I read and absolutely loved. So he's an author, I really want to dip into more, I've tried his most recent one, The Splendid and the Vile. And it was one of those DNF without prejudice, like I'll pick it up again. In the future, it just wasn't the right kind of, he was like mid pandemic, it just wasn't light enough for me right there. Or I couldn't give it what it needed. But The Devil in the White City, if you like a serial killer, who really really is incredibly brazen, which don't we all, that is the book for you. I mean, that is really well written and also tremendously interesting. It's one of those books where you're reading about the serial killer, but also how the world's The World's Fair was created. And that was very, like the architecture elements of that. Absolutely fascinating. I loved that book.

**Kaytee Cobb** 38:32

I'm but I'm guessing you also thought of Bad Blood by John Carreyrou, right? Because that book, Elizabeth Holmes, being the insane psychopath that she is, feels like she was pulled from the pages of a novel. And when you are reading about her, you can't help but think this person has to be made up.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 38:50

Yeah. She's really she's brazen, you know, with a capital B, for sure.

**Kaytee Cobb** 38:55

Yeah, definitely. What else you got?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 38:58

That's, that's a really, really good one. So Five Days at Memorial by Sheri Fink. This covers the five days after Hurricane Katrina hit the Ninth Ward in Louisiana. And it's not so much about the hurricane itself, but the aftermath. And one of the hospitals that really, you know, most affected by the storm and the choices, the incredible service that the doctors nurses there had to, you know, put into play, but then also the choices that they had to make. That book is absolutely fascinating. It's a tough hang for sure. But it's a very, very well written like, you're turning the pages really fast kind of book. Nice.

**Kaytee Cobb** 39:40

I have a few that are the kind of the opposite of the tough hang in that I also love nonfiction memoir that's laced with humor. So like The Body: A Guide for Occupants by Bill Bryson walks you through the systems of the body, you are learning about the human body that you live in and cackling with glee like and it feels like this shouldn't be real because it's so fun and so funny. Same with a lot of stuff by David Sedaris. Calypso, of course, came to mind immediately and Over the Top by Jonathan Van Ness, who's one of the guys from Queer Eye, his life story. And, and the way that he writes it had me cackling and sobbing at varying intervals between the two sides of that coin. It's so fun. And the audiobook is read by him. And so that's definitely the way to go.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 40:25

Yeah, for sure. Right. Well, and I have to put in a plug for my favorite Bill Bryson, which is A Walk in the Woods. We've been talking about the Appalachian Trail recently, because Mindy just got a chance to hike there. That book. That book absolutely slays me. So Kaytee I'm positive we both have on our list, really one of the blockbuster nonfiction that reads like fiction. And we all wish that it was fiction. And that's The Only Plane in the Sky by by Garrett M. Graff.

**Kaytee Cobb** 40:52

Right. I did. I wrote that down. And then I took it off. And then I wrote it down again. And then I

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 40:58

know because it's the ultimate tough hang. It's I mean, it's it's about such a different a difficult topic, for sure. And yet, I challenge anyone to be able to tear themselves away from the stories that he tells him the way, that way that he communicates what the 9/11 was actually like on the day, I think it's an incredibly important perspective. And it is one of those books that once you start reading it, you aren't going to be able to stop. Do not read this book on a plane.

**Kaytee Cobb** 41:29

No, absolutely not.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 41:30

Okay, so we'll just sort of in this with the fact that I think you can't really talk about nonfiction that reads like fiction without talking about a couple really, really amazing True Crime books. And yeah, you were gonna I can't I can't not because again, you know, we want to fly through a book true crime is the the nonfiction that will help you do it. So, obviously, Michelle McNamara's I'll be Gone in the Dark. All the trigger warnings, but man, that one is really hard to put down. It's incredibly well done. And then my ultimate favorite, I will go to my grave, telling people about The Yoga Store Murder by Dan Morse. Now, when you get this book, you're going to realize you can only get it in mass market paperback. And we all turn our book loving snobbish noses up at mass market paperbacks. It's the only way you're gonna be able to read this book you guys or get it on Kindle. This book is about a murder that happened at a Lululemon store on the East Coast. And I challenge you to read more than a chapter and be able to put it down it is other than The Stranger Beside Me one of the most milkshake like, I can't stop drinking this thing books. It's absolutely incredible. That's The Yoga Store Murder.

**Kaytee Cobb** 42:47

And you had to squeak in The Stranger Beside Me too.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 42:49

Yeah, it's just I mean, I hate to say it, but you know, these are this is nonfiction. And they read it reads like fiction. These are really well done true crime.

**Kaytee Cobb** 42:57

Fair enough.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 42:59

All right. Okay, so hopefully we have filled your TBR with some nonfiction that you're going to be able to put into your beach bags, some of them choose them carefully for the right date and time to read them. But I think that you I think that they should have a place on your TBR for sure. Yeah. Okay. Let's press some books into listeners hands. What have you got this week Kaytee?

**Kaytee Cobb** 43:20

All right, Meredith. I will see if you did the same thing here. But I got one more that I have to talk about. And so I'm gonna put on the press list Unbroken by Laura Hillenbrand. Woof, this book, you guys I read this six years ago. I went and checked and I could still tell you about pivotal scenes in it. In this book we meet Louis Zamperini, who was a troublemaker as a kid, but turned into a runner and that's where he channeled all his extra energy. A runner who was so good that he made it to the Olympics. But when he joins up in World War Two as a bombardier and his plane crash lands in the Pacific, he has to find out what endurance really means. I have goosebumps right now. This book gutted me in the best way. This is truer than life nonfiction about an extraordinary young man living an ordinary life. It's World War Two. Yes, I know. I know. But it's so personal. It doesn't feel like what we've come to associate with the with the genre. Laura Hillenbrand only puts out a book every decade or so because she puts so much research into her subject not to overwhelm her reader with facts but to craft this nonfiction story that truly reads like a novel. This book is a marvel. I feel like everyone has read it. But if you have not, I can't wait for you to do so. I will also point out that there's a young readers version of this book and if you're



an HSP, who maybe cannot handle the harrowing parts of Louis' story, or if you have teen that you want to read this with and you want to pass it along after you're done. That's a great option as well. This one, it's so good. It's Unbroken by Laura Hillenbrand.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 44:57

That book is really, really great. I can't believe it's not on the press list already. And it's one of those that Johnny presses into people's hands when people talk about books with him. So I mean, I loved it. He loved it, man. I feel like every person I've ever known has picked it up when they've given the time to it, because Louis Zamperini feels like he's he lived 100 lives. Like he just, what an incredible story. Amazing. Yeah. Okay, well, Kaytee, I did exactly what you did, in that I had one more and it's very, very much in my wheelhouse. I have got to add to the press list. Maybe my favorite true crime of all time. It's The Fact of a Body by Alex Marzano-Lesnevich. So again, all this is true crime. And this is really, really, really, really intense true crime, all the trigger warnings with this one. It is an excellent book, but please do your research before you read it and know that all the triggers are here. So the setup is the author Alex Marzano-Lesnevich begins a summer job at a law firm in Louisiana working to help defend men accused of murder. The child of two lawyers, Alex knows really where she stands. She's against the she's against the death penalty. But as she's faced with the facts of the crime of convicted murderer, Ricky Langley, a 27 year old pedophile who killed a six year old boy, she's immediately struck by how much she wants him to die. Shocked by her reaction, she decides to dig deeper into the case. And as she does the truth about her own family, come to light. This book weaves the two stories about her own life. And this case, the case of Ricky Ricky Langley. Absolutely, brilliantly. This was five stars. This is was on my Top List of 2019. It's absolutely incredibly done. It is interesting all the way through it is the perfect marriage of true crime and memoir, feel like there's a lot of books that are coming out that purport to do that really well. This book does it perfectly, in that there's a reason that those two the connections of those two makes sense. It's not just randomly smashed together in so many cases. That's how it feels. This is it's absolutely incredible. It gutted me, I was interested the entire time. But again, I want to say huge yellow stickers on this book. Please proceed with caution because it is really good, but it is really intense. This is The Fact of a Body by Alex Marzano-Lesnevich. That is it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me I'm Meredith at @meredith.reads on Instagram.

**Kaytee Cobb** 47:43

And you can find me Kaytee at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 47:47

Full show notes with the title of every book we mentioned in the episode, and timestamps, so you can zoom right to where we talked about it can be found at [currentlyreadingpodcast.com](https://currentlyreadingpodcast.com).

**Kaytee Cobb** 47:57

You can also contact us directly at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram, we are so close to 10,000 followers, you guys, or email us at [currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com](mailto:currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com).

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 48:07

And if you really want to help us, support us by becoming a bookish friend, it's only \$5 a month and you get a ton of additional content that I bet you're really gonna love. You can also help us by rating and reviewing us on Apple podcasts and shout us out on social media. Those shoutouts make a huge difference toward us being able to find our perfect audience.

**Kaytee Cobb** 48:28

Yes, your recommendations, your shares and your Patreon support are helping us grow and get closer to our goals. Thanks for doing that.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 48:35

Alright, until next week. Happy reading Kaytee.

**Kaytee Cobb** 48:37

Happy reading Meredith.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 48:45

Hey, readers. Welcome to the currently reading podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about the books that we've read recently. And as you already know, we don't shy away from having strong opinions. So get ready.

**Kaytee Cobb** 48:59

We are light on the chitchat heavy on the book talk and our descriptions will always be spoiler free. We'll discuss our current reads bookish deep dive and then we'll press books into your hands.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 49:09

I'm Meredith Monday Schwartz, a mom of four and full time CEO living in Austin, Texas and I am dreaming of reading vacations.

**Kaytee Cobb** 49:17

And I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom for living in New Mexico. And I did not update my bite sized intro.

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 49:25

Let's leave it Leave it. That's all we get this week Kaytee?

**Kaytee Cobb** 49:28

Really?

**Meredith Monday Schwartz** 49:29

I got nothing. I got nothing for you, listeners.

**Kaytee Cobb** 49:32

Nothing to tell you.