

319 - 21 Books for Your Summer Reading

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is episode 319 - 21 books for your summer reading.

It's already the middle of June, but there are still a solid eight weeks left of summer reading, and if you're still on library hold lists for new releases or had great intentions about summer reading and have watched it fall to the wayside because you didn't have a great book in hand, hopefully this episode will help!

I've compiled a list of 21 books I've read over the past six summers, and they all *feel* like summer books. And they're all backlist titles, so it shouldn't be hard getting them immediately at the library or even at a used bookstore for cheap. They're easy to find.

I'm going to share the books in the order of the summers I read them, and I'll try and give you some good book words to help you know if they're a good pick for you. In fact, we have done a lot of reading episodes over the years, a lot of which are meant to help you figure out your reading style and the types of books that are best for you. We'll have a link to a playlist of some of our favorite reading episodes including 267 - Find Your Summer Reading Rhythm, 268 - 10 Summer Reading Ideas for Your Kids, 213 - Create a Summer Reading Club, 227 - How to Know What to Read Next with our beloved book genius Anne Bogel, and the bonus episode from this past December, How I Read 120 Books This Year. And, y'all, I'm on track to read more than that this year which is absolutely bonkers. Figuring out how to add reading to your life and the right kind of reading is one of my favorite things to do for myself and here with you.

So all that said, if you need help on reading rhythms, I've got you. And if you need specific titles that are easy to come by, I've got that, too, in this episode today.

Let's start with two books I read in the summer of 2017 that feel like great summer reads.

The first is *A Study in Charlotte* by Brittany Cavallaro, and I still remember the feelings I had reading this book. It was such a fun, exciting, quirky read. It's about the teen descendents of Sherlock Holmes and John Watson, you guys. Amazing. Jamie Watson is the great-great-great-grandson of John Watson, and Charlotte Holmes is the great-great-great-granddaughter of Sherlock. They connect when someone they both know dies under suspicious circumstances, and of course it is so fun to see the next version of the crime-fighting Holmes and Watson duo. It's such a blast. I don't remember it being too objectionable in any way. Technically, it's a YA novel and a really great one. I honestly still think about six years later. So that's *A Study in Charlotte* by Brittany Cavallaro.

The other great summer book I read in 2017 was *Jane Steele* by Lyndsay Fay. The book asks the question, what if *Jane Eyre* was a serial killer? Something we've all wondered, right?

This is such a fun, smart read, and it pays homage to the classic without disrespecting it. I wondered if I'd be annoyed by the loose retelling because I love *Jane Eyre* so much, but *Jane Steele* felt like a separate story seen through a snarky mirror. It's fabulous and surprisingly fun. Plus the cover is great if you end up finding a physical copy somewhere. If you tend to be tender about classic retellings, skip it. Know yourself. It's okay. So that's *Jane Steele* by Lyndsay Fay.

In the summer of 2018, three of the novels I read still feel like summer to me even though they are decidedly very different.

The first is *The Hazel Wood* by Melissa Albert. Also a fantastic cover. If you've been around awhile, you know my love for this book. It's the story of 17 year-old Alice whose grandmother was the author of some cult favorite fairy tales. Well, the fairy tale characters, many of them super dark, start to show up in Alice's real life. When Alice's mother goes missing, presumably at the hands of some of these characters, she's got to figure out why and find her mom. It's so weird and amazing. This book was one of the first to really get me into dark fairy tales. I haven't really read one I actively disliked in quite awhile. It's a favorite subgenre of mine for sure. If you don't mind a little bit of spooky, give this a try. It's great. So that's *The Hazel Wood* by Melissa Albert.

The second book from my 2018 summer and the fourth on our list is *The Likeness* by Tana French. This was my first Tana French novel and probably still my favorite. I've actually read it twice which is unheard of for me. It's the story of a detective who has a shocking likeness to a dead girl in the woods, so she actually becomes that girl, going undercover in this girl's actual life to find the killer. It's so amazing. Plus, Tana French isn't gruesome. Her crime writing isn't cozy by any stretch, but it's more psychological and fascinating. There's very little gore or things to be overtly grossed out by. So that's *The Likeness* by Tana French.

And the final 2018 book is one that still makes me laugh when I think about how obsessed I was with it, and that's the book *Seabiscuit*. Yes, that *Seabiscuit* by Laura Hillenbrand. This book is an actual doorstop. Enormous. I don't read enormous books. It's not my vibe. It's also about horse racing, something I do not have any interest in whatsoever. I don't even remember why I picked this up actually. It defies logic. I think I heard it was good, and it was probably a dollar at a book sale. I started reading it one day in the summer of 2018 and couldn't put it down. It just grabbed me so hard and would not let go. I loved it so much and did not skim a lick of it. I'd say if you enjoy history, you'll love this book, but I do not enjoy history and I also loved this book. It was a fabulous reading experience, minus the hand cramps because it was so hard to hold because - again - enormous. So that's *Seabiscuit* by Laura Hillenbrand.

We'll be right back...

Over the years, my reading has increased, and things really took a turn in 2019. I think this was when I really identified that reading was my hobby. I genuinely love doing it more than just about anything, so I started reading more because I gave myself permission to. In the summer of

2019, there are four books that felt perfectly suited for summer reading that I'll obviously share with you now.

The first is a book that I think is almost a perfect novel. *The Lost Man* by Jane Harper. *The Lost Man* is a story about a set of brothers in the Australian outback. One is estranged from the family but comes back when another brother is found dead. Jane Harper writes settings, especially these dry Australian environments, like they're another character. She's a master. And this feels like the perfect novel because of mastery of a number of things: the setting, the story itself which is compelling but not forced, the pace which moves at a great clip but doesn't feel like it's rushing, the characters which are so believable and complex in a way that makes you immediately care for them, and it's just written so well with a fantastic ending. It's still a favorite novel ever because of how perfect it is. At least in my opinion. But I remember talking to Jamie Golden, one of the hosts of *The Popcast* which is my favorite podcast, and she also loves this book for the same reasons. It's just weirdly perfect and so good in the summer. So that's *The Lost Man* by Jane Harper.

Okay, I've got to speed up. We still have a lot of books left.

Next is *A Short History of the Girl Next Door* by Jared Reck. I never saw this on Bookstagram but instead picked it up at the library because I loved the cover. It's about Matt and Tabby, childhood best friends who live across the street. But then when they become teenagers, Matt realizes he loves Tabby, but Tabby is into somebody else. It's sweet, heartbreaking, and so relatable. Has Rainbow Rowell vibes and so good. So that's *A Short History of the Girl Next Door* by Jared Reck.

Next is *The Book of Speculation* by Erika Swyler. I'm just going to read you the online synopsis because it's perfect. "Simon Watson, a young librarian, lives alone in a house that is slowly crumbling toward the Long Island Sound. His parents are long dead. His mother, a circus mermaid who made her living by holding her breath, drowned in the very water his house overlooks. His younger sister, Enola, ran off six years ago and now reads tarot cards for a traveling carnival.

One June day, an old book arrives on Simon's doorstep, sent by an antiquarian bookseller who purchased it on speculation. Fragile and water damaged, the book is a log from the owner of a traveling carnival in the 1700s, who reports strange and magical things, including the drowning death of a circus mermaid. Since then, generations of "mermaids" in Simon's family have drowned--always on July 24, which is only weeks away.

As his friend Alice looks on with alarm, Simon becomes increasingly worried about his sister. Could there be a curse on Simon's family? What does it have to do with the book, and can he get to the heart of the mystery in time to save Enola?

In the tradition of Sara Gruen's *Water for Elephants*, Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus*, and Elizabeth Kostova's *The Historian*, *The Book of Speculation*--with two-color illustrations by the author--is Erika Swyler's moving debut novel about the power of books, family, and magic."

I mean. Is that not perfection? I loved this book. It was a little sadder than I expected but so good. So that's *The Book of Speculation* by Erika Swyler.

The final book from the summer of 2019 was *Recursion* by Blake Crouch. I love all Blake Crouch books, and this one is maybe my favorite. What's wild is I don't really remember what it's about, but I remember how it made me feel. Isn't that how all books go? There's a detective and a scientist trying to figure out why there's an epidemic of people who are driven mad by memories that aren't even theirs. He's the master of the sci-fi thriller, and I loved it. But frankly any Blake Crouch is a great choice. So that's *Recursion* by Blake Crouch.

In the summer of 2020, I launched *The Lazy Genius Way* into the world during a pandemic, so when I look back at my reading that summer, it was sparse. Very sparse. But there was one that stands out as a fantastic summer read, and that is *Mexican Gothic* by Silvia Moreno-Garcia. This book was hot during that summer, and I think for good reason. It is for sure a gothic novel, super moody set in this old house that is a character all its own. Noemi is tough and smart and a debutante and an unlikely heroine in this setting. Her cousin writes her an unhinged letter, saying she's in danger, so Noemi goes to this creepy mansion where her cousin lives with a weird husband and tries to figure out what's going on. It's so creepy and weird and awesome. I mean, the definition of a gothic novel if you like those. It is hit or miss. People either love it or hate it. Not a lot of middle ground there. But if you love it, it's also being made into a series. We'll see if that sticks because of the writers strike, but it's very cinematic and compelling. I loved it. Which is great since it's one of the only books I read that whole summer. So that's *Mexican Gothic* by Silvia Moreno-Garcia.

Now 2021 was a different story. I have seven books from that summer that are still some of my favorite books, not just summer reads. Just so great. I'll zoom through them.

The first is *Hannah Coulter* by Wendell Berry. I love Wendell Berry. Wendell Berry is a treasure. His book, *Jayber Crow* is one of my favorite books of all time, and *Hannah Coulter* is touching that book, they're so close. It's a quiet, beautiful novel about a woman who takes care of her family on a farm. I'm so bad at describing Wendell Berry novels because I don't know how to do it. I don't know how to explain to you how this small little book full of small little moments in this fictional woman's life will change you as a person, but it does. It's just what happens, so just accept it. I love this in the summer too because of how much of the story takes place outside. It's a treasure. So that's *Hannah Coulter* by Wendell Berry.

Next is *Love Lettering* by Kate Clayborn. This is not going to change your life, but it's super fun. It's a rom-com that I imagined Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling being the leads, and that was the correct choice. But Emma - we'll skip the actual characters' names - Emma is a hand-letterer in New York City, mostly doing rich people's wedding invitations. But she also has this skill where she knows how long a marriage is going to last based on the invitation. She makes a cavalier choice in one particular invitation to include almost a word of warning in the invitation, and the groom - Ryan - sees it. When his marriage falls apart a year later, he goes to find Emma to find out how she knew. And of course she has her own issues she's trying to figure out, and they go

on a journey to figure out their stuff together. It's an enemies-to-lovers trope which is my favorite of the rom-com tropes. It's really good, y'all. It's a solid summer choice that won't have a wait list at the library. So that's Love Lettering by Kate Clayborn.

Next is The 7.5 Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle by Stuart Turton. This one took me a minute to get into because I didn't quite understand what was happening, but I'll tell you what's happening now. The main character, Aidan, is at this fancy house with all these fancy people, and he keeps repeating the same day in order to find the killer of Evelyn Hardcastle. It's a locked-room mystery which is something Agatha Christie perfected where all the people involved are all there, so somebody has to be the killer. That's why I love the movie Gosford Park. It's a locked room mystery in a Downtown Abbey upstairs downstairs sort of setting. It's so good. I love a locked-room mystery, and this is a really good one. Super creative and a little magical because of the whole time travel thing. Really fun. So that's The 7.5 Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle by Stuart Turton.

Next from that summer was Malibu Rising by Taylor Jenkins Reid. I adored this book. Taylor Jenkins Reid is at the top of her game, and this is my favorite of hers by a significant margin I think, and I love her other stuff. But Malibu Rising is about four siblings in California who are at their annual epic beach party, and all kinds of family drama just explodes. I loved the main character, Nina. I related to her a lot and their family situation, so it felt oddly personal to me. This book made me cry and laugh and gasp. It was so perfectly read in the summer because it takes place over one day in a California summer. Just really really good. So that's Malibu Rising by Taylor Jenkins Reid.

We'll be right back...

Three more from the summer of 2021 which I think was my best reading season maybe ever. Like, all home runs. Bangers, y'all. So good.

I read Project Hail Mary by Andy Weir this summer which was the summer it came out, and it was the most fun, delightful reading experience about aliens a human could have ever. It was alive and so sparkly. I loved it. I think people who don't like sci-fi would love it. What's fun is when I read it, it had already been optioned for a movie, and Ryan Gosling is cast as the lead already. He was then, and he still is. I don't know where this movie in development, and again the writers strike could impact that timeline, but I imagined Ryan Gosling as the lead as I read, and he is perfectly cast. Perfectly. That was part of what made the reading experience was how much he added to the character on the page, just imagining him saying the words. It was excellent. Excellent. I loved that book with my whole heart. I kinda want to read it again now. So that's Project Hail Mary by Andy Weir.

Another book that's great to read again because of the twists is Who Is Maud Dixon by Alexandra Andrews. This is about a woman down on her luck and sad after a breakup who gets a job working for a reclusive author, Maud Dixon. I can't remember who I cast in this story, but I know Jennifer Lawrence was one of them. I think she was Maud, and the woman who works for

her was Anya Taylor Joy. I think. Or maybe Jennifer Lawrence was the girl, and Kate Winslet was Maud? That would also be a good call. I remember the ages being a little murky, but Jennifer Lawrence is in this book. Anyway, all that to say, this book was a trip. It was so good. It was a wild ride. A thriller for sure. A summer page-turner. If you didn't read it then and you like that kind of book, give it a try now. So that's *Who Is Maud Dixon* by Alexandra Andrews.

And my final book from the perfect reading summer of 2021 was *The Book of Lost Things* by John Connelly. This is technically middle grade, I think? It's great for kids over 10. But it's one of my favorite novels of all time. It just hit me at the right time and place. The story is about a young boy named David whose mom has died, and books are his only companion. He finds himself inside these stories and experiences grief as he tries to save himself and others and fight evil people and is it real is it not... it's just beautiful and heartbreaking and human and so well written. I wept at the end. Wept. Like a baby. My sister told me to read that book for years, and I just for whatever reason didn't. I took a long time. So when I did read it and was like "Have you *The Book of Lost Things*" and she practically yelled at me "Yes I've been telling you to read that book forever!" If you like the same books I do, particularly books like *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* and *The Night Circus*, you'll love this. It's really special. That's *The Book of Lost Things* by John Connelly.

And now this brings us to last summer, the summer of 2022, where four of the books I read were solid summer picks, a couple of top reads of the whole year.

First is *Remarkably Bright Creatures* by Shelby Van Pelt. It is still a top-selling book over a year later. People are reading this thing like crazy. I listened to it on audio because the narrator is Marin Ireland who is my favorite audiobook narrator probably of all of them. Now, I really liked this book. I didn't love it. But I'm not surprised by that because it's not in the dead center of what I love. It's a lot about character, and while I like characters and how they interact, I prefer a stronger story. This story was great but played a supporting role in the reading experience. The characters are where this book shines. And it shines really well. So I share it even though I just liked it because so many people love it. And I can see why. I can see why. If you like a character-driven novel, I can't imagine you not liking this if not loving it. It's really excellent. It's still selling for a reason. So that's *Remarkably Bright Creatures* by Shelby Van Pelt.

Next was *One Italian Summer* by Rebecca Serle, and I listened to this one, too. It was narrated perfectly by Lauren Graham of *Gilmore Girls* fame. She nailed it. In fact, I think this book opens with a *Gilmore Girls* quote. I think? So that was a fun little beginning to have Lauren Graham read that. Anyway, this is a perfect summer book. Summer is literally in the title. It's about a woman who has lost her mother who was her most formative, favorite relationship, and she can't cope. She pushes away her husband, she wonders what her life means anymore, and so travels alone to Italy. She and her mom were supposed to take this trip together, but her mom died. So she went alone. And a day into her trip, she meets a woman who is her age, but it's her mom. And it's really stunning. It's a beautiful story about relationships and grief and finding joy in life. I actually didn't have to look this book up to remind myself of the story which I have to do most of the time. This story is burned into my brain in the best way. It's set up so well. I can see the

Italian seaside. The story is so vivid and really enjoyable. So that's a winner for sure. Again, that's *One Italian Summer* by Rebecca Serle.

Next up is *Taste* by Stanley Tucci. Listen to this on audio so you can hear him read it. It's clever, he can drop an f-bomb out of nowhere like cool rain on a hot day, he describes spaghetti like no human should be able to, and he tells the story of his family in such a profoundly beautiful way. This is such a good book, and if you haven't listened to it or read it yet, this summer is a great time to do it. I think because he talks about setting so much and because Italian food especially feels more summery and outdoors, this just fits in the summer months. That's *Taste* by Stanley Tucci.

And finally from the summer of 2022 is *Book Lovers* by Emily Henry. I've read all Emily Henry books, and *Book Lovers* - frankly, I don't know how anything would ever be better to me. I really love Emily Henry's writing and stories, and even if I don't love it, it's still great. But *Book Lovers* is top tier. Top of the mountain. I think it's my favorite rom-com ever. Yeah, I think that's a safe assumption. It's just so stinking good. I imagined Blake Lively and Ryan Reynolds as the main characters, and that tracked so well. Blake is a stereotypical New York power girlfriend. She's the person the boyfriend dumps when he goes home to his family's Christmas tree farm or whatever and meets the sweet country girl in an apron and dumps his mean New York girlfriend? She's the mean New York girlfriend. This is an enemies to lovers story which I already said is my favorite. Blake is a literary agent who goes to a little town to be with her sister and loosen up after her breakup, and in this little town is an editor who she hates but they end up having to work together on a project. And of course they fall in love, and the journey to get there is so good. I really hope I didn't give *Book Lovers* away to anybody, because I seriously want to go grab it right now and start reading again. It is just sharp as a tack. Sharp as a samurai sword. It's so daggum good and perfect in the summer. Rom-coms just are. So that's *Book Lovers* by Emily Henry.

So that's 20 books. My 21st book is my favorite novel of the year so far I think, at least top three, and I read it in April, but I'm going to make it a perfect summer read for anybody who wants it. It's called *Hidden Pictures* by Jason Rekulak. I don't know how to say that, but he's a very good writer. It's a story that takes place during a summer in a fancy house with a fancy family. Mallory is the main character. She has just gotten out of rehab and is looking for a job which is hard to find just coming out of rehab. She gets a job as a nanny for this rich family in this rich house, and she stays in the guest house on the property. Well, the kid she's taking care of likes to draw, but sometimes this kid draws pretty scary pictures. And you need to get the physical copy of this book because it has the pictures in it. But the story is Mallory trying to figure out what is hidden in these pictures. It's so good. It's the perfect amount of creepy and exciting and heartfelt and interesting. It's just great. I loved it. Loved it. So that's *Hidden Pictures* by Jason Rekulak.

We will have all of these titles linked up for you in the show notes. I hope that you are excited about at least one book from this list so you can quickly get your next summer read. And don't forget about the links to those summer reading podcast episodes if you need a little extra help, too.

Before we go, let's celebrate The Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Michele Eischeid. I know I'm saying that wrong, Michele, but on the chance I'm right, I love that your last name Eischied sounds like iced chai. Moving on. Michele writes this: "I have two rings I always wear, and at home they go directly on a decorative ring holder when I take them off. But when I'm traveling, it was more of a problem. I tried my makeup bag and a little compartment in my luggage, but I hated rummaging through to find them and also hated that second of panic when I didn't see them immediately. So now, I keep them on until I'm ready to charge my phone, string them on the cord, and then plug it in. Presto! No rummaging, and no panic because I see them right away. That first morning when I put them on, I thought "Now I really am a Lazy Genius. Thanks for everything!" Michele, this is so great. First, what a great tip. And I want to highlight something in particular here. Remember a couple of weeks ago in our Office Hours episode where I talked about solving annoying problems instead of overwhelming ones? This is a great example. Finding a place for your rings while traveling where you don't forget them is for sure an annoying problem. It isn't overwhelming at all, but it *is* worth paying attention to. I think the more we kindly solve annoying problems, the fewer overwhelming problems we'll actually have. Or at least they won't feel as overwhelming because we've learned to make things smaller and solve what's actually solvable. So thanks for this idea, Michele, but more for the reminder to think like a Lazy Genius for even the tiniest of things, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

Alright, thanks so much for listening, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week!