

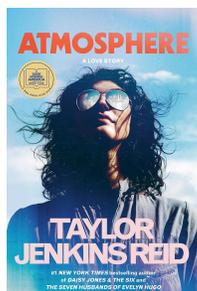
2026 Texas Lariat Adult Fiction Reading List Annotations



Since 2009, the goal of the Lariat Adult Fiction Reading List has been to highlight outstanding fiction that is simply “a pleasure to read.” This year, 30 exceptional fiction titles were selected by a nine-member committee.

Each year, authors from past and current lists are invited to speak at the Lariat List Adult Fiction Author Event held at the TLA Annual Conference.

(*) Denotes a top ten title



Atmosphere: A Love Story by Taylor Jenkins Reid (Ballantine Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2025)*

Joan Goodwin has been mesmerized by the stars since she was young and jumps at the opportunity to apply to be a NASA astronaut as soon as the Space Shuttle program opens to women. Joan is finally selected and in the summer of 1980 joins her fellow ASCANS at Houston's Johnson Space Center. As Joan and her class become unlikely friends and prepare for their first flights, Joan discovers a love she never saw coming that makes her question everything she thought she knew about herself and her place among the stars. Everything changes in an instant when a mission turns tragic. Starred reviews in Kirkus Reviews and Library Journal.



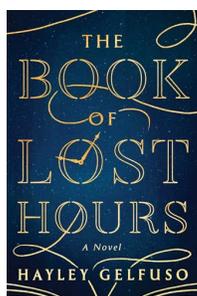
Back After This: A Novel by Linda Holmes (Ballantine Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2025)

Cecily Foster is a struggling podcast producer whose career and love life are both on shaky ground when she's given one last chance to prove herself. Tasked with producing a show for famous relationship guru Eliza Cassidy, Cecily must also follow Eliza's dating advice in her own life, turning her love life into public content. As the experiment unfolds, Cecily begins to question what she really wants from love. Reviewed in Kirkus.



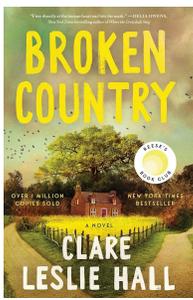
The Blackbirds of St. Giles by Lila Cain (Dafina, an imprint of Kensington Publishing, 2025)

In 1780, two Black siblings land in London after escaping enslavement on a Jamaican sugar plantation. Daniel is a former soldier, promised an English inheritance; his younger sister Pearl hopes to find work as a singer. A Dickensian tale that takes readers into a sordid underworld below the rookeries of St. Giles, this well-told debut historical adventure will keep you guessing until the end. Reviewed by The Times and Daily Mail in London.



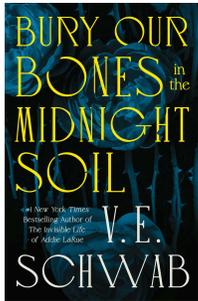
The Book of Lost Hours: A Novel by Hayley Gelfuso (Atria Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2025)

It's 1938 and 11-year-old Lisavet Levy finds herself trapped and alone in the time space, a massive library filled with books containing memories of those who have passed and which can only be accessed with a specially made watch, most of which are now in government hands. Lisavet grows up among the books and memories, and evades government agents entering the time space to destroy memories and perpetuate their version of history. In 1949, Lisavet meets an American spy named Ernest who offers her friendship, love, and glimpses of the world she left behind, setting her on a course to change history. Reviewed in Library Journal.



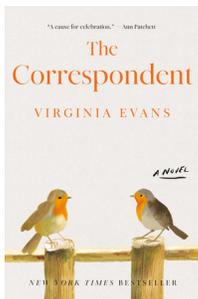
Broken Country* by Claire Leslie Hall (Simon & Schuster, 2025)

Beth and her husband Frank live a quiet life on a sheep farm in the English countryside until Beth's wealthy first love Gabriel returns. The love triangle that results unearths buried secrets and leads to a tragic crime. A romance, mystery, and courtroom drama all rolled into one moving portrayal of love and loss. Reviewed in Booklist.



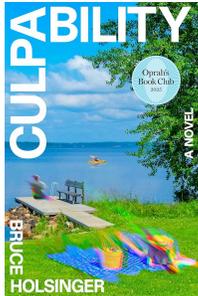
***Bury Our Bones in the Midnight Soil* by V.E. Schwab (Tor Books, an imprint of Macmillan, 2025)**

At its heart, this book is a queer vampire tale, but it's so much more. Epic in scale and covering centuries of time, the book transports you between a small town in 15th century Spain, Victorian London, and modern-day Boston, with many other times and places in between. Focusing on three main characters linked to those locations, the story considers desire, love, isolation and more. I was sucked in from the beginning, pun intended. Starred reviews in Kirkus and Publishers Weekly.



The Correspondent: A Novel* by Virginia Evans (Crown, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2025)

This debut novel, written in an epistolary format, is about a woman rediscovering herself in the winter of her life. Now in her later years, Sybil van Antwerp reflects on a life shaped by ambition, loss, and complicated relationships. This retired lawyer revisits her past through correspondence as a way to confront grief, regret, and long-held truths. As she writes, Sybil finds moments of grace and self-forgiveness, all while sharing a memorable cast of characters. Reviewed in Kirkus.



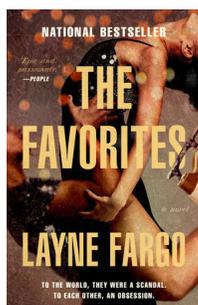
Culpability* by Bruce Holsinger (Spiegel & Grau, 2025)

The Cassidy-Shaw family is on their way to a high school sports tournament when they have a fatal collision in their self-driving mini-van. No one in their car was hurt, but the elderly couple they hit was killed. As the police investigate the crash, the family retreats to a rented lakehouse in an effort to heal from the emotional trauma only to find their family bonds fracturing under the weight of individual secrets and the complex moral question of whether the driver or the AI is really to blame. Reviewed in Publishers Weekly.



***The Dream Hotel: A Novel* by Laila Lalami (Pantheon, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2025)**

Upon landing at LAX, Sara Hussein is pulled aside by security guards and sent to a "retention center" – for a crime they predict she will commit. As her time in the facility repeatedly is extended for small infractions, Sara questions why she has been detained and whether she'll ever be released. Touching on themes of technology, privacy, surveillance, and more, the novel is a chilling, dystopian view of our future. Starred review from Kirkus.

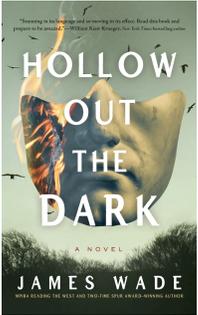


***The Favorites: A Novel* by Layne Fargo (Random House, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2025)**

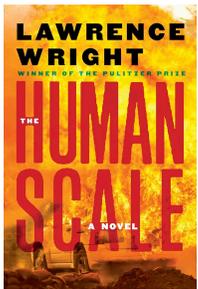
Katarina Shaw is driven from a young age for Olympic glory when she meets Heath Rocha, a lonely boy stuck in foster care. The pair have a deep connection that leads to friendship, love, and a dynamic pairing on the ice. But when winning at all costs motivates one and their relationship is all that matters to the other, the pair is torn apart at the worst of times. As the 10-year anniversary of their final skate approaches, an unauthorized documentary of Shaw and Rocha reignites the public's fascination and thirst for the real story, but the truth may be even more shocking than the headlines. Reviewed in Kirkus Reviews and Library Journal.



Harlem Rhapsody by Victoria Christopher Murray (Berkley, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2025) Jessie Redmon Fauset was the very first Black woman to be named as the literary editor of *The Crisis*, a preeminent Negro magazine. From this vantage point, she was at the forefront of discovering and shaping many of the up-and-coming writers during the Harlem Renaissance at the beginning of the 20th century. You will recognize the names of many of these writers: Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen are just two of them. Another familiar name, W. E. B. Du Bois gave Jessie the editor position and was also her lover. Her name has been forgotten, but now her story is being told in this eye-opening historical novel. Reviewed in Kirkus.

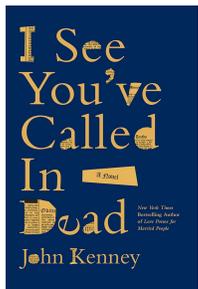


Hollow Out the Dark by James Wade (Blackstone Publishing, 2024) Jesse Cole is a decorated veteran trying to live a quiet life and take care of his brother's family. Amon Atkins is a Texas Ranger battling within himself to forge his career and maintain his principles. Both men find themselves immersed in the illicit whiskey trade of Prohibition in East Texas, struggling to weigh their morals against the morass of violence and the rising body count of the region. How far can they bend before they break? Themes of love, grief, trauma, violence, and the hope of redemption shape this intense Southern Gothic crime thriller. Reviewed in New York Journal of Books.



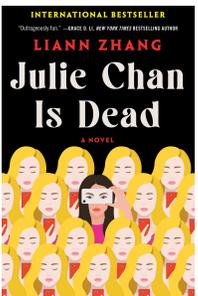
The Human Scale: A Novel by Lawrence Wright (Knopf, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2025)*

Tony Malik, an Arab American FBI agent is given an assignment in the Israeli city of Hebron to discover what the Jewish Chief of Police wanted to tell the FBI, but the Chief is brutally murdered before he can accomplish this. Malik then teams up with the Israeli police officer, Yossi Ben-Gal, to help solve this crime. This time-relevant novel has the reader experience the cultural differences of the two men and their relationship, of friends and family, as well as the constant, violent conflicts that spiral toward the October 7th Hamas attack on the Israelis. The unlikely occurrence of peace is a haunting realization. Reviewed in Library Journal.



I See You've Called In Dead by John Kenney (Zibby, 2025)*

Bud Stanley, a middle-aged, divorced obituary writer, finds himself in quite the predicament when he drunkenly publishes his own obituary. What follows is the suspension of his job and a new assignment of attending wakes and funerals to gain an understanding of his own life. *I See You've Called in Dead* is a dark comedy that follows Bud as he learns about grief, reinvention, and learning how to truly live by confronting death head-on. Starred review in Booklist.



Julie Chan Is Dead: A Novel by Liann Zhang (Atria Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2025)

When struggling grocery store cashier Julie Chan discovers the body of her estranged twin sister, Chloe, she impulsively steals her identity hoping to escape her dreary existence. Chloe is a hugely successful social media influencer with millions of followers, brand partnerships, and a beautiful apartment. Julie soon finds herself, however, in a sinister cult-like circle of social media elites where the price of perfection might be her own life. Starred review in Publishers Weekly.



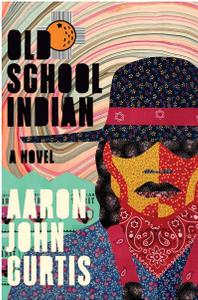
Make Your Way Home: Stories by Carrie R. Moore (Tin House Books, an imprint of Zando Publishing, 2025)

This debut collection of eleven short stories features life, love, and loss in the American South. Told from various African American perspectives and rooted in history, each story offers insight into how the past shapes their present realities. Spanning from Florida, North Carolina, and Texas each character explores the idea of home and whether true belonging is a place, people, or a feeling. Reviewed in Kirkus.

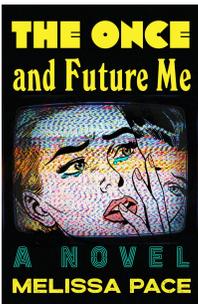


The Names: A Novel by Florence Knapp (Pamela Dorman Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2025)

In Knapp's debut novel the same unforgettable family members are depicted in three different storylines. Three different names, three different stories, three different endings. The author clearly believes an individual's name can influence a person's life. These names affect each of the characters' ability to love, deal with the father's abuse and violence, as well as to accept and forgive when needed. The three alternate versions create an emotional and powerful story. Reviewed in Kirkus.

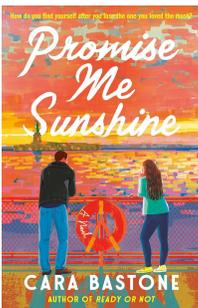


Old School Indian by Aaron John Curtis (Hillman Grad, an imprint of Zando Publishing, 2025) Abe Jacobs is dying, and he feels that his world is crashing down. So, he returns to the healing of his ancestors through the ministrations of his great uncle, Budge, on the Ahkwesahsne reservation. Abe tries to cling to the hope of a cure, though he is very skeptical. Not only does he need to cure his bodily disease, but also that of his soul. Meeting his extended family and coming back to where his life began, he works to find himself. A wonderful story of the contemporary indigenous experience. Reviewed in Kirkus.



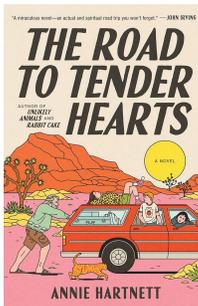
The Once and Future Me: A Novel by Melissa Pace (Henry Holt & Co., an imprint of Macmillan, 2025)

Who am I? Am I Dorothy Frasier, a schizophrenic 1950s housewife who requires institutionalized (and extreme) psychiatric care? Or am I Bix, an amnesiac 21st-century soldier from an unimaginable future on a mission to save humanity? I don't know, and as my fractured mind slings me between these realities, I must unravel the riddle of my own mind and figure out which reality is, in fact, real. Either way, these are dangerous waters to navigate. A mind-bending blend of psychological thriller and science fiction, *The Once and Future Me* treads the line between reality and psychosis, predator and prey. Careful, you might get whiplash. Reviewed in Booklist.



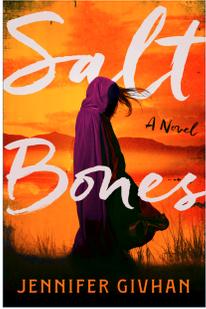
Promise Me Sunshine: A Novel by Cara Bastone (Dial Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2025)*

Lenny is drowning in grief after her best friend Lou dies of cancer, jumping from job to job, avoiding her parents, and she's abandoned the apartment she shared with Lou. When she stumbles into a job as a nanny to the precocious Anisley, Lenny meets Anisley's awkward, grumpy uncle Miles. Turns out, Miles has experienced loss of his own and struggles to connect with his sister, Anisley's mom Reese. Miles offers to help Lenny complete her "live again" list, left for her by Lou, if Lenny will help him connect with his niece and sister. Complex characters drive this story filled with the perfect amount of emotion, humor, and romance. Starred reviews in Kirkus Reviews, Booklist, and Library Journal.

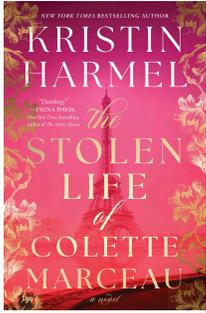


The Road to Tender Hearts: A Novel by Annie Hartnett (Atria Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2025)

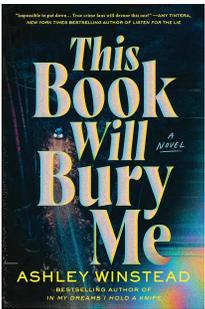
PJ Halliday is looking for a second chance at love and decides to take a cross-country road trip to propose to his recently widowed high school sweetheart. Along for the ride are his estranged young adult daughter, two orphaned children, and a stray cat with an uncanny ability to predict death. Serious themes of love, loss and grief are masterfully explored through the lens of a screwball comedy in this heartwarming novel. Starred review in Booklist.



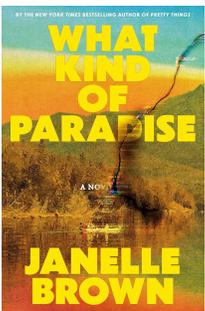
Salt Bones: A Novel by Jennifer Givhan (Mulholland Books, an imprint of Hachette, 2025)
This visceral retelling of the Persephone and Demeter myth set along on the Mexicali border, follows Malamar (Mal) Veracruz who has spent her life in this place shaped by her sister's disappearance and mother's contempt, making her the caretaker of her younger brother and eventually her own two children. When another girl disappears, Mal and her daughters embark on a dangerous, supernatural journey that exposes secret truths about local legends, her family, and even herself. Blending elements of Latinx and Indigenous culture, mystery, and horror, *Salt Bones* explores resilience, motherhood, and environmental collapse. Starred reviews in *Library Journal* and *Publishers Weekly*.



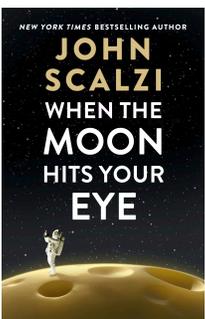
The Stolen Life of Colette Marceau: A Novel by Kristin Harmel (Gallery Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2025) From pre World War II Paris to present day Boston, this historical novel spans over 70 years. Colette Marceau, a descendant of Robin Hood, embraces her heritage and spends her life stealing jewels from the cruel and unkind to give to those in need. Although her life of thievery allows her to help those less fortunate, she is haunted by the unanswered questions surrounding her sister's disappearance in Nazi Paris. When a missing bracelet reappears years later in New York, Colette and friends search for the answers that previously eluded her. Reviewed by *Booklist* and *Library Journal*.



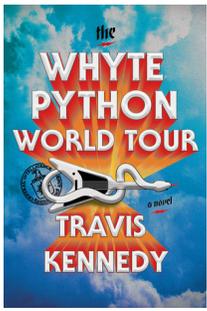
This Book Will Bury Me by Ashley Winstead (Sourcebooks Landmark, an imprint of Sourcebooks, 2025)
After her father's sudden death, college student Jane Sharp's life is thrown into turmoil. Searching for an escape from her grief, Jane discovers the world of online true crime communities. Trading her grief for an obsession with true crime, Jane forms friendships with fellow amateur sleuths and finds a renewed sense of purpose. When three college students are murdered in what becomes known as the "Delphine Massacres" (based on the 2022 University of Idaho murders), Jane and her new friends race to uncover the truth before anyone else. As they dig deeper, the line between reality and obsession blurs, revealing a case far more complex—and dangerous—than they ever expected. Reviewed by *Publishers Weekly*.



What Kind of Paradise: A Novel by Janelle Brown (Random House, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2025)
What do you do when you realize your loved one has become dangerous, indoctrinated, and extreme? Jane's story looks back at being raised in Montana off the grid in the 1990s. At first, her father's paranoia manifests in home-schooling and a self-published 'zine, but as Jane begins to consider college and a life outside her cabin, her father involves her in a crime that will change her life forever. An engaging thriller about the dangers of isolation. Reviewed by *Publishers Weekly*.

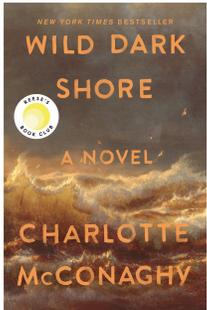


When the Moon Hits Your Eye by John Scalzi (Tor Books, an imprint of Macmillan, 2025)
The moon has turned into an orb of cheese. It is discovered first on earth as the pieces of the moon that are here turn to cheese as well! Follow the humans that try and discover the how and the why. Meet the astronauts, scientists, billionaires, and others that confront this new reality. What a fun read on a strange happening to the nightly visitor in the sky: our moon. Reviewed in *Booklist*.



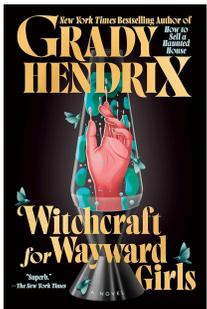
The Whyte Python World Tour: A Novel by Travis Kennedy (Doubleday, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2025)*

Did the CIA recruit the drummer of a hair metal band to foment revolution in Eastern Europe in 1986? Does it matter if it's not true? Told from the perspective of Rikki Thunder, who is launched from sleeping in a condemned paint store to stardom with one of the hottest bands in Los Angeles, this bizarre, quirky read is crass, silly, and just possible enough to buy as a premise that you'll keep reading through their adventures near and far. Reviewed by Kirkus.



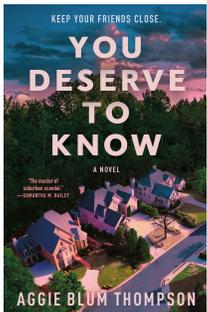
Wild Dark Shore: A Novel by Charlotte McConaghy (Flatiron Books, an imprint of Macmillan, 2025)*

Dominic Salt and his three children—Fen, Raff, and Orly—live alone on Shearwater Island, a remote outpost near Antarctica that is home to the world's largest seed vault. Rising sea levels have forced all other inhabitants and researchers to evacuate, leaving the family isolated. After a powerful storm washes a mysterious woman named Rowan ashore, the Salt family begins to question how she arrived—and why. As secrets and past traumas surface, the family races against time to decide which seeds—and lives—are worth saving. Reviewed by Publishers Weekly.



Witchcraft for Wayward Girls by Grady Hendrix (Berkley, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2025)*

In 1970s Florida, fifteen-year-old Fern is sent to the Wellwood Home for “wayward girls” to hide her pregnancy and give birth in secret. Frustrated by the controlling adults who claim they know what's best, Fern and the other girls take back their power by using a book of witchcraft given to them by the bookmobile librarian. While there are supernatural elements, the real horror here is in how the girls are treated. Starred review in Booklist.



You Deserve to Know by Aggie Blum Thompson (Forge, an imprint of Macmillan, 2025)

Gwen, Aimee, and Lisa are inseparable best friends and mothers living on a quiet, affluent street in East Bethesda, Maryland. Their seemingly perfect lives unravel when Gwen's husband is found murdered. As police investigate, cracks form in their friendship, revealing secret affairs, lies, and long-simmering tensions. When the truth emerges, it is more shocking than anyone could have imagined. Reviewed by Publishers Weekly.