

Reading Matters

Great Books Council of San Francisco

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www.greatbooks-sf.com

Mentors for Discussion Leaders Available

NEW PROGRAM UNDER WAY

We now have a cadre of Mentors to help leaders hone their discussion leading skills. These people have had success as leaders and are now trained to help other leaders develop their own leading styles.

What is this?

Although we all try to adhere to the Shared Inquiry method of discussion whereby we share reactions and ideas obtained from a given reading, the leader has to see that the



discussion stays on the reading, is not dominated by a few folks and that respect for others is maintained. Leaders are not bound by a certain "style" of leading and are free to develop their own particular style.

What will happen?

Mentors will help leaders to do this. Some leaders want help with developing provocative questions, others with group control and others with drawing people out. The job of the mentor is to provide the kind of help requested. It is not to evaluate.

Why do we need it?

The program came as a result of our training many new leaders, few of whom felt competent to lead right away. This program will offer the support needed to get them started.

How Does it Work?

If you request a mentor he or she may come to your group and observe your group in action; he or she may work with you at your home or theirs to develop better questions, or they may simply talk with you over the phone. It is up to the leader to ascertain what help is wanted.

For more information, contact Barbara McConnell or a mentor in your area. The mentors to date are:

Brent Browning (south bay) 408-353-6340
Wallis Leslie (peninsula) 650-941-6206
Sheri Kindsvater (Sacramento) 916-852-0615
Claudia O'Callahan (San Francisco) 919-852-0615
Kay White (north bay) 415-382-1927
Carol Hochberg (east bay) 510-666-8496
Susana Conde (east bay) 510-658-3835
Rick White (north bay) 415-382-1927
Rudy Johnson (east bay) 925-846-6084
Kathleen Conneely (east bay) 510-530-2344
Karen Schneider (north bay) 415-454-6969
Mary Stuart (north bay) 707-575-1984
Jim Hall (San Francisco & north bay) 415-387-2125

Call Barbara McConnell for more information 925-705-7217

or email: barbaramcc29@msn.com

Asilomar Great Books Weekend April 8-10, 2011

"Plans for the San Francisco Great Books 2011 Asilomar weekend are well under way. Asilomar's idyllic setting and the company of fellow great bookies provide the perfect environment for discussing great literature. I'm especially excited about the excellent readings chosen this time by the selection committees." --Rob Calvert, Coordinator

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* was the first novel to split the atom. If the novel, before *Mrs. Dalloway*, aspired to immensities of scope and scale, to heroic journeys across vast landscapes, with *Mrs. Dalloway* Virginia Woolf insisted that it could also locate the enormous within the everyday; that a life of errands and party-giving was every bit anywhere; and that should any human act in any novel seem unimportant, it has merely been inadequately observed. The novel as an art form has not been the same since. *Mrs. Dalloway* also contains some of the most beautiful, complex, incisive and idiosyncratic sentences

ever written in English, and that alone would be reason enough to read it. It is one of the most moving, revolutionary artworks of the twentieth century.

On Virginia Woolf, Jorge Luis Borges commented "Hers is indisputably among the most sensitive of the minds and imaginations felicitously experimenting with the English novel."

Plato's Phaedrus was presumably composed around 370 BC, when Plato was about 60 years old, around the same time as *Republic* and *Symposium*; with those two texts, it is often considered one of Plato's literary and philosophic high points.

Love, rhetoric, the existence and nature of the soul, and looking deeply within your own soul are discussed and argued. "Empty rhetoric" (just clever arguments and tricks used to sway the masses) is opposed to "true rhetoric," the art of influencing the soul through words. This may be the perfect description, and damnation, of modern politics and the legal system. No wonder Socrates was condemned to later take poison -- he actually BELIEVED in Justice, Truth, and the Good. As a Philosopher he could not compromise on such things for he knew the profound damage that it would do to his soul and to his "wings."

George Bernard Shaw uses his play *Caesar and Cleopatra* to illustrate some of his views of the ancient and modern world. Was Cleopatra drawn to Julius Caesar for love or just politics when Rome was occupying her land as the British were occupying Egypt during Shaw's time? He admires the man of action, Caesar, in his struggle

with Pompey and when he has Caesar exercise clemency several times in the play. Another theme recognized by various reviews is Shaw's belief that people have not been morally improved by civilization and technology. There is humor in this play and it is a fun read. Besides the numerous stage productions there have been several film and television versions of the play.

(The reviews above are from various sources.)

The poetry will include **Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Auden's "As I Walked Out One Evening,"** and **Dylan Thomas's "Fern Hill,"** plus some more modern selections. We are looking forward to engaging reading followed by illuminating discussions.

This year we're planning an optional, informal screening of *The Hours* after lunch on Saturday, to get people in the mood for that evening's discussion of *Mrs. Dalloway*. (...but no outside references, people!) This year's party is moving to Saturday afternoon, starting at 4:00. Donna Reynolds has agreed to delight us with cocktail lounge music, suitable for the "cocktail party" hour. The novel discussion will be from 7:30-9:30 pm.

If you'd like further information and a registration form, it can be downloaded from our web site:

www.greatbooks-sf.com

We hope that you'll consider joining us at Asilomar in 2011. Please don't hesitate to contact Rob Calvert if you have any questions or need help in any way. Call 510-524-6617 or email rob@rob-calvert.com.

Great Books Council of San Francisco

Serving Northern California

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Workshop for Great Books Discussions

Saturday, April 30, 2011

Want to lead a book discussion?
Want to brush up your leading style?
Want to be a stronger reader and participant?

Once a year, we offer this workshop with our most experienced leaders to practice shared inquiry and trade tips on what makes a good discussion. Have fun in small discussion groups. Meet motivated readers. Get helpful feedback.

Join us from 9:30-4:30 in Rossmoor, Walnut Creek. Advance materials and directions will be sent to you. Sign up early! There is a \$25 charge to cover expenses, a break even fee. Bring your own lunch.

For further information or to register for the event, please check back on our website closer to the date, or contact coordinator Kay White: 10 Oak Forest Road, Novato, CA 94949, kaycleveland@aol.com, 415-382-1927.

Gold Country Nonfiction Mini-Retreat

Saturday, May 14, 2011

Join us at Mercy Center in Auburn, California for **Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil** by John Berendt. Buy the Paperback **ISBN-10: 0679751521**. On the New York Times best seller list for 216 weeks, **Midnight . . .** focuses on real-life events, eccentric personalities portrayed with wicked wit. We'll discuss the book in the morning (we start at 9:30 am), enjoy lunch at Mercy Center, then watch the movie, directed by Clint Eastwood, starring John Cusack, Kevin Spacey, Jack Thompson, Irma P. Hall, Jude Law, and Alison Eastwood, concluding by 4:30 pm.

For more information contact Donna Reynolds, Registrar, 1133 Ravine View Drive, Roseville, CA 95661 (916) 797-8561 or go to www.greatbooks-sf.com.

New Groups News:

Ten of us in the **El Cerrito Great Books** group met December 6 for a pot luck Christmas dinner and discussion of Roger Fry's *An Essay in Aesthetics*. This group is growing steadily and our next discussion will be of *An Outpost of Progress* by Joseph Conrad on Monday, Jan. 24, 2011 from

6:30 PM to 8:30 PM. **Laura Bushman** for more information at laurabushman@yahoo.com

The **Richmond Branch Library Great Books** group in San Francisco has grown to its upper limit so Group Leader Cliff Louie has decided to not accept any new participants. As a result we will be starting a **new discussion group** at the **SF Main Library** on Thursday, February 3, 5:30 to 7:30 pm. We will discuss the *Declaration of Independence*. clifford.louie@sbcglobal.net or call **Jim Hall** at **415-387-2125** to register.

The **Berkeley Poetry Group** has entered its second, successful year, with ten steady participants. Our discussions are lively, sometimes contentious, and always stimulating. The selection of poetries is wide, ranging over time and styles. We let each poem take its time, and some poems are held over for the following month. This is a leaderless group: **Carol Hochberg, (510) 666-8496** hosts the group in her Berkeley living room and acts as "floor manager" to keep the discussions on track.

Monterey Peninsula College started a Great Books Program in 2009. Besides the academic program there is a Great Books discussion group that meets regularly. Contact Dave Joplin at djoplin@mpc.edu for more information on the discussions. Last year at **Asilomar** a number of the students in the program joined us and added greatly to our discussions. Some students will be joining us again this year for **Asilomar Great Books Weekend 2011**.



Join "The Great Conversation"
at

The MPC Great Books Program
and earn a Great Books Scholar Certificate online
www.mpc.edu/greatbooks
or dclemens@mpc.edu



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Our Events in 2011

San Francisco Mini Retreat
Saturday, February 12,
Mechanics Institute Library,
San Francisco.

A discussion of Giuseppe di
Lampedusa's *The Leopard*
followed by viewing
Visconti's film starring Burt
Lancaster. **THIS EVENT IS
SOLD OUT!**

Asilomar Great Books Weekend

April 8-10, Asilomar State
Conference Center, Pacific
Grove.

Poems by Keats, Auden,
Thomas,
Armantrout, Plath, and
Cavafy.

Mrs. Dalloway by Virginia
Woolf.

Phaedrus by Plato.

Caesar & Cleopatra by
George Bernard Shaw.

Contact Rob Calvert
510-524-6617

Leader Training Workshop Saturday, April 30.

Contact Kay White
415-382-1927

Gold Country Mini Retreat May 14, 2011

Mercy Center Auburn.

A discussion of John
Berendt's *Midnight in the
Garden of Good And Evil* will
be followed by a viewing of
the screen adaptation.

Contact Donna Reynolds
916-797-8561

Annual Meeting and Picnic

Sunday, June 12, Noon
Potluck Lunch. No charge,
with a picnic BBQ, and book
discussion in Tilden Regional
Park, Berkeley.

Contact Jim Hall 415-387-2125

Long Novel Weekend

August 20-21, Walker Creek
Ranch, Marin County near
Petaluma.

Look Homeward, Angel by
Thomas Wolfe.

Contact Marge Johnson
925-846-6084

Wine Country Mini Retreat

Saturday, October 1,
Calistoga, An ideal one day
introduction to Great Books
discussions.

Contact Jim Hall 415-387-2125

Poetry Weekend

November 5-6, Westminster
Retreat, Alamo. Discover the
pleasure of reading and
discovering the meanings of
great modern and classic
poems.

Contact Brent Browning
408-353-6340