

Seven Books for a Better World

Literature can be the window that transports us to new realities, allowing us to wrestle with a new truth or alternative view of the world. Books have the power to change our minds, and with that our world.

Having distributed over 26 million books across 16 countries and created titles in 35 languages, Room to Read has witnessed the transformative power of books. We created this book list to build bridges between one another and drive progress to a better world.



Educated

By Tara Westover

Born to survivalists in the mountains of Idaho, Tara Westover was seventeen the first time she set foot in a classroom. Her family was so isolated from mainstream society that there was no one to ensure the children received an education and no one to intervene when one of Tara's older brothers became violent. When one of her brothers got himself into college, Tara decided to try a new kind of life. Her quest for knowledge transformed her, taking her across continents to Harvard and Cambridge University. Only then would she wonder if she'd traveled too far and if there was still a way home.

Exit West

By Mohsin Hamid

In a country teetering on the brink of civil war, two young people meet — sensual, fiercely independent Nadia and gentle, restrained Saeed. They embark on a furtive love affair and are soon cloistered in a premature intimacy by the unrest roiling their city. When it explodes, turning familiar streets into a patchwork of checkpoints and bomb blasts, they begin to hear whispers about doors — doors that can whisk people far away for a price. As the violence escalates, Nadia and Saeed decide that they no longer have a choice. Leaving their homeland and their old lives behind, they find a door and step through. *Exit West* follows these remarkable characters as they emerge into an alien and uncertain future, struggling to hold on to each other, their past, and the very sense of who they are.

Humans of New York

by Brandon Stanton

You don't have to look exclusively towards public figures and fictional protagonists for inspiration. You can also be inspired by strangers, those throngs of people you pass by on the street and never have the opportunity to speak to. Author Brandon Stanton made a habit of listening to strangers' stories, from New York City to around the world.

The Book Thief

By Markus Zusak

Liesel is a foster girl living outside of Munich. Her life is forever changed when she picks up a single object, partially hidden in the snow. That single act, marks her first act of book thievery. So begins a love affair with books and words, as Liesel, with the help of her foster father, learns to read. Soon she is stealing books from Nazi book-burnings, the mayor's wife's library, wherever there are books to be found. When Liesel's foster family hides a Jewish man in their basement, Liesel's world is forever changed.

The Empathy Exams

By Leslie Jamison

Jamison's series of essays is exactly what it purports to be: an examination of empathy. The first essay catalogs Jamison's experience as a practice medical patient, (as in, she pretended to be a patient for medical students). What emerges is a deep rumination on how we cultivate empathy in our lives and how — most importantly — we can be empathetic towards ourselves.

The Library Book

By Susan Orlean

In *The Library Book*, Orlean chronicles the Los Angeles Public Library fire and its aftermath to showcase the larger, crucial role that libraries play in our lives. This story also delves into the evolution of libraries across the country and around the world, from their humble beginnings as a metropolitan charitable initiative to their current status as a cornerstone of national identity.

Sea Prayer

By Khaled Hosseini

A short, powerful, illustrated book written by beloved novelist Khaled Hosseini in response to the current refugee crisis, *Sea Prayer* is composed in the form of a letter, from a father to his son, on the eve of their journey. Watching over his sleeping son, the father reflects on the dangerous sea-crossing that lies before them. It is also a vivid portrait of their life in Homs, Syria before the war, and of the city's swift transformation from a home into a deadly war zone.

Like these picks?

Share what you're reading on social media with #RtRBookClub