

PRESENTED BY THE DESCHUTES PUBLIC LIBRARY FOUNDATION



A Novel Idea ... READ TOGETHER

The Dog Stars Reader's Guide

Welcome to the eleventh anniversary of "A Novel Idea... Read Together." Every April, we gather to find a common place to discuss ideas, explore cultures, create art, find similarities, and question our differences in a safe and neutral environment. Together, we explore one book through discussions, 25 free programs and two author presentations. "A Novel Idea" programs and presentations are free for all residents in Deschutes County.

We are pleased to present this year's debut novel *The Dog Stars* by adventure writer Peter Heller. *The Dog Stars* is a post-apocalyptic story set in the Rocky Mountains. The novel casts an unusual mood as it alternates between mournful reflection, poetic nature writing and chillingly intense action. It is a tender, sometimes violent, read about grief and the resilience of the human spirit.

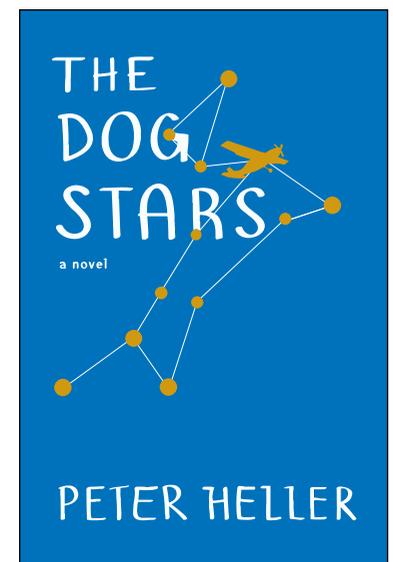
We invite you to enjoy the series of free events that run from April 12–May 3. Author Peter Heller presents at the Tower Theatre on Friday, May 2, at 7:00 p.m. and at Sisters High School on Saturday,

May 3, at 1:00 p.m. Free programs highlighting the novel are offered at libraries in Downtown Bend, East Bend, La Pine, Redmond, Sisters and Sunriver.

Through the continued and steady support of our sponsors, we have been able to keep "A Novel Idea" programs and author events free of charge and fully accessible for the residents of Deschutes County. We are very grateful for the continued support of Bend Research; E.H. & M.E. Bowerman Advised Fund of OCF; Francis, Hansen & Martin LLP; Oregon Humanities; and The Roundhouse Foundation. We'd also like to thank the five Friends of the Library organizations who help fund critical library programs such as "A Novel Idea" year after year.

The Deschutes Public Library and the Library Foundation also wish to thank you, the thousands of Deschutes County readers, for creating and participating in Oregon's largest and most successful community read program. Enjoy the read!

Chantal Strobel
Project Director



AUTHOR PETER HELLER
FRIDAY, MAY 2 • 7:00 p.m.

Tickets are free, but required. Tickets available April 12, 2014 at the Tower Theatre box office from 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m., online at www.towertheatre.org or by calling (541) 317-0700.

Tower Theatre
835 NW Wall Street, Bend

SATURDAY, MAY 3 • 1:00 p.m.

No tickets are required.

Sisters High School
1700 McKinney Butte Rd, Sisters

A book signing follows the presentations.



An exclusive interview with Peter Heller

Chantal Strobel: Your novel is set in a grim place during a grim time. What provoked you to write about this subject?

I have a good friend who is one of the world's leading paleobotanists. He studies seventy million year old plant fossils. You might say he has the Long View. One of his areas of expertise is the "K-T Boundary," the geologic layer that represents the line between when there were lots of dinosaurs and when they all went extinct. About 65 million years ago. Kirk is an aficionado of extinction. We go to breakfast now and then and one of the topics that always comes up is how we're now in the middle of the Sixth Great Mass Extinction, this one caused by us. This often leads to imaginings of what the apocalypse will look like when it comes, which it surely must. The eco-sphere as we know it is unraveling so fast. The odd thing is, these are not depressing discussions. To us, they are exciting, riveting. I think that when I came at last to writing a novel this is the subject that was most on my mind. And in my heart. I am, if I am moved by anything, profoundly moved by nature. Have been since I was the smallest child. And moved by her struggles right now. These themes had to be central to this book.

I actually saw the starkness as an opportunity. A world so empty of people allowed Hig to connect to nature, to himself, and to Jasper, in ways that he might not have before. Before. What will you do when you are utterly alone? It was a relief and a blessing to listen to one man's thoughts in such a world. For me, Hig's stream of consciousness was a song out of a day filled with wind and it offered a special music. And it was fun to see how the patterns and rhythms of these thoughts changed as he made human connection and fell in love.

Do you relate more to Bangley or Hig? Why?

I have to say that Hig often thinks and feels about things as I do. He loves what I love, and shies away from the things I shy from. But he can cook and garden, so there are things about Hig that are foreign to me! I love Bangley, I can't help myself. Maybe because he is the most unapologetic SOB I have ever met.

There is a strong poetic thread throughout your novel. Describe your relationship with poetry and why you felt it was important to include it in *The Dog Stars*.

I began with poetry and have written poetry my whole life. Began when I was six, with a passion. Coming up, I was in thrall to Eliot, Stevens, Yeats, Neruda. Ted Hughes and WS Merwin. I love haiku, and the poems of the Chinese Dynasty poets, especially the Tang. They were very connected to nature and could evoke whole worlds of beauty and loss with just a few brush strokes. Poetry, the music of language, is what compels me. And nature. I have spent a lot of time, both alone and with others, in remote wild country, and in the mountains and creeks close to home. It is where I listen to the purest music and where I am always the happiest. It is my ambition as a writer to communicate this connection with nature and with each other in a way that acknowledges that music.

How was writing a novel different for you than writing nonfiction work?

It was like coming home. My spirit just sang. One thing I knew was that I never wanted to know what was going to happen next, what the ending would be. With all the nonfiction books, of course I always knew. There is this incredible sense of adventure when you kayak a river that has never been done. Or that was maybe run but never well

described. You come around a tight bend in a walled canyon and you have no idea what you'll see around the corner. It might be a waterfall. I wanted that experience again in writing. I wanted to be surprised, shocked, thrilled, awed. Maybe terrified. I called my old friend Carlton Cuse, who was the showrunner and producer of the TV show *Lost*. We've been best friends since we were fifteen. I said, "Carlton, do you know any novelists that just start with a first line and have no idea where it will lead?" He didn't hesitate. "Oh, yeah, lots. I've worked with a bunch. Stephen King, for one; Elmore Leonard." I was jazzed. It kind of gave me permission. I sat down and wrote a first line and it was Hig talking and he spoke *The Dog Stars*. Of everything I've ever done, that was the most thrilling.

As an adventure writer and journalist, you have traveled throughout the world. Is there an experience you have found most inspiring?

I accompanied Sea Shepherd on their anti-whaling campaign to the Antarctic ice edge. I showed up with my duffel on the New Victoria Pier in Melbourne, and there, tied to the dock beside the prosperous cafes was an all-black pirate ship. It flew a Jolly Roger, and on the superstructure were rows of skulls and crossbones with the names of ships Sea Shepherd had rammed or sunk. Then, south of Tasmania, the welders came on deck and welded a big blade to the bow called the Can Opener, for gutting the hulls of Japanese whaling ships. It kind of dawned on me that this was not a lark, that everyone on the ship was willing to die to save a whale, to publicize the very real crisis of the oceans. The journey was hair-raising in every respect, we almost got sunk twice in engagements, once in a force 8 gale in 40 foot seas. But the esprit de corps on the ship was inspiring. There were haiku and dance contests, a running Texas hold 'em game in the mess. It was very powerful: that 44 people on a planet covered mostly in water, were willing to die to give voice to the species that could not speak for themselves.

When you look up at the stars, what guides you?

God. Who is the music of the whole immense firmament. I feel very, very grateful to be a witness and a listener.

Post-Apocalyptic fiction

Stacey L. Donohue, PhD
Chair, Humanities Department
Central Oregon Community College

Set in Colorado nine years after a lethal flu pandemic has killed most of the world's population, *The Dog Stars*, by Peter Heller, is part of the post-apocalyptic fiction genre, a subgenre of science fiction. Although the first full-length work in the genre is considered to be Mary Shelley's 1826 novel *The Last Man*, post-apocalyptic fiction became increasingly popular after World War II and the accompanying fear of nuclear annihilation. Both terrifying and illustrative, post-apocalyptic fiction continues to leave its mark on our literary landscape.

In most post-apocalyptic stories, the depiction of the catastrophe is less the focus than the story of the survivors of that catastrophe. The settings of post-apocalyptic novels are either immediately after the pivotal event, where the survivors are simply fighting to exist, or years later, where the pre-catastrophe world is forgotten or mythologized. It's not the event that captures our imagination as much as the characters' search for meaning and humanity in an environment that seems without either. The actual catastrophes usually reflect whatever impending disaster is happening at the time the writer is writing: plague, environmental concerns, fear of aliens, nuclear war, the Rapture, technology, human error or war. Over the last 20 years, the actual nature of the catastrophes have become more muddled, less interesting to writers as they explore their characters' motivations.

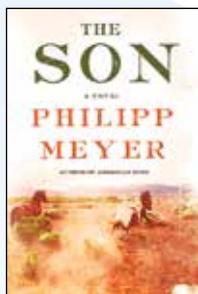
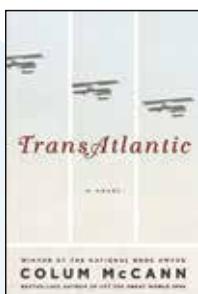
Why are post-apocalyptic stories so popular, particularly today? One theory is that people are simply afraid of the unknown, and post-apocalyptic films and novels allows us to, safely, imagine how other humans might survive the unknown, to experience, from the comfort of our sofas, what might happen if and when the world as we know it collapses. There is also a basic mistrust of those in power, whether human or divine, and such stories confirm that mistrust. The recent epidemic (so to speak) of zombie films, television shows, comic books and novels might reflect our fear of death: not only must we all die, but when we do, we might become the living dead.

What perhaps is most interesting about post-apocalyptic fiction is that we can follow the survivors, who are now heroes and heroines no matter how average they were in the pre-apocalyptic world, as they figure out how to evolve and survive. We can imagine ourselves in such situations: are we going to be the person who is killed because of our own fears, or stupidity? Or, are we going to be the hero, who manages to stay calm, and save the other survivors? While the end of the world may not be pretty, it does provide the characters, and vicariously us, hope for a fresh beginning.

Heller's protagonist, Hig, narrates his journey from a place of survival, with its accompanying emotional suppression, to his renewed desire for human connection. *The Dog Stars* may be a post-apocalyptic novel, yet it is equally a novel of friendship, with people, with our pet companions and of love for humanity restored.



TransAtlantic by Colum McCann

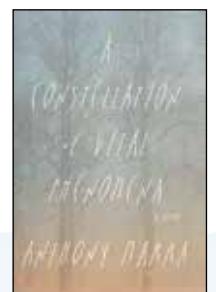
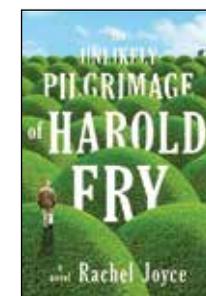


The Son by Phillip Myer

What else was read?

For the past 11 years, a group of dedicated community members and library staff gather between May and August to select the next "A Novel Idea" read. The selection committee seeks well-written books that pose timely and provocative themes to engage the community to read and discuss the book together. The committee reads up to 30 books and spends hours in discussion over the value and quality of the read for our communities. The beauty of "A Novel Idea" is that we hear from an equal number of readers who love the book as we do from those that do not care for it. This dynamic synergy is what we hope to achieve when making our final decision. Through "A Novel Idea," participants reflect on each other's opinions and find a common ground amongst our differences. We hope you enjoy this journey. We wanted to share with you the four novels that were this year's top contenders to *The Dog Stars*. All four of these books are definitely worth a read!

The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry
by Rachel Joyce



A Constellation of Vital Phenomenon
by Anthony Marra



Discussion questions

ONE The prose style of *The Dog Stars* is clipped, terse, often fragmented. Why would Heller choose this way of writing this particular story? In what ways is it fitting?

TWO At the beginning of chapter three, the narrator wonders why he's telling this story. What might be his motivations? Who does he imagine his audience will be?

THREE Hig says that Bangley "had been waiting for the End all his life.... He didn't do anything that wasn't aimed at surviving" [p. 71]. He also clearly enjoys killing people. In what ways is Hig different from Bangley? How did "the End" affect him? How does he feel about killing?

FOUR Jasper's death is a turning point for Hig. How and why does it affect him so powerfully?

FIVE When Cima's father asks Hig why he came to their canyon—why he flew beyond the point of no return—Hig can't find an answer. What might have prompted Hig to take that risk? What was he looking for?

SIX Why is Hig's relationship with Cima so important in the novel? What makes it particularly touching, given what each of them has suffered?



Photo courtesy of Fir0002/Flagstaffotos. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Cessna_182P.jpg

SEVEN *The Dog Stars* is a serious book about a devastating subject, but what are some of its more lighthearted moments? Why is it important that the book have this mixture of tenderness and violence, anxiety and peace?

EIGHT What has caused the end of human civilization in the novel? Why have the scattered survivors become so savage? Does the post-apocalyptic world Heller presents seem accurate and likely, given the state of the world today?

NINE How and why does Hig's relationship with Bangley change over the course of the novel?

TEN When they decide to take a ewe and a ram with them on the plane, Hig says, "Like the Ark. Here we go" [p. 273]. He says it jokingly, but does the novel offer a sense of hope that life on the planet might continue, post-apocalypse? What other biblical references occur in the novel?

ELEVEN The novel's ending is ambiguous. Cima, Hig, Bangley and Pops have formed a kind of family, the spruce and aspen are coming back, eagles and hawks are flourishing, but the trout and elk are gone, water is disappearing, and mysterious jets are flying overhead. What might happen next, or in the next ten years, for these characters and the world they live in?

TWELVE Why does Heller conclude *The Dog Stars* with Hig's favorite poem "When Will I Be Home?" by Li Shang-Yin? Why is this a fitting way to end the story? In what ways is the novel about the longing for home?

THIRTEEN What does the novel imply about human nature, after the constraints of civilization have been removed? What does it suggest about the possible consequences of the way we are living now?

FOURTEEN What similarities does *The Dog Stars* share with other recent dystopian novels like *The Hunger Games* and *The Road*? In what important ways does it differ from them?

The Influenza Pandemic of 1918

Kelly Cannon-Miller, Executive Director
Des Chutes Historical Museum

The Bend Bulletin headline of October 17, 1918, announced the worst: *Bend Is Under Close-Up Order*. The dreaded influenza virus, first seen in Europe the previous spring, had arrived. On the heels of the devastation of World War I, the virus circumnavigated the globe in mere months. All public gatherings were closed until further notice. No school, church services, lodge meetings or public meetings of any kind. All forms of public amusement were closed. No exceptions. Red Cross flyers and news reports reinforced steps to keep healthy and urged vigilance against the virus. Deadliest among healthy 20 to 40 year olds, if death occurred it did so within days of onset.

Medical facilities in still-young Bend were not prepared for, nor large enough to handle, a pandemic. Civic leaders, local doctors and nurses, guided by Bend's chapter of the American Red Cross, coordinated the use of the brand new gymnasium at the Amateur Athletic Club building as an emergency hospital. To fight the flu, the community would have to do it together. Leaders

relied on donations of linens and basic supplies from Bend's families. All able-bodied citizens were called upon to volunteer in any capacity they could. By November 7, 40 beds were available at the emergency hospital and they filled them immediately.

November saw the worst. The morning of November 12 brought news of four deaths the preceding night. *The Bend Bulletin* dutifully reported deaths and burial services, including 18-year-old school teacher Katherine Grace Vandever and Judge W.W. Orcut. In a span of six weeks, hundreds were taken ill and 36 people were dead.

After eight weeks, the bans lifted. New cases were less virulent and patients quarantined at home. On December 5 the emergency hospital closed and on December 12 school resumed. The newspapers brought word that Oregon was not alone. Around the world, the war claimed 15 million lives in four years; influenza claimed an estimated 40 to 50 million in just one. The disease affected 25% of all Americans, killing 675,000, leaving no city or town unaffected. The influenza outbreak of 1918 stands as the deadliest pandemic in recorded human history.



Bend's newly constructed Amateur Athletic Club, which was used to house people suffering from Spanish Flu over the course of a month in late 1918. Photo courtesy of the Deschutes County Historical Society.



Hig the Poet

Liz Goodrich

It's not an accident that Peter Heller opens and closes *The Dog Stars* with poems about love, longing, loss and finding home, all realities in narrator Hig's world. Prior to the pandemic that wipes out the majority of the world's human population Hig was a poet. With a poet as a narrator Heller is free to explore his own poetic tendencies. Described as "a post-apocalyptic adventure novel with the soul of a haiku," *The Dog Stars* is a lyrical work that blends the richness of poetry with riveting storytelling. Consider how the opening poem by William Stafford and the closing poem by Li Shang-Yin are connected and help us understand Hig.

The Farm on the Great Plains

William Stafford

A telephone line goes cold;
birds tread it wherever it goes.
A farm back of a great plain
tugs an end of the line.

I call that farm every year,
ringing it, listening, still;
no one is home at the farm,
the line gives only a hum.

Some year I will ring the line
on a night at last the right one,
and with an eye tapered for braille
from the phone on the wall.

I will see the tenant who waits—
the last one left at the place;
through the dark my braille eye
will lovingly touch his face.

"Hello, is Mother at home?"
No one is home today.
"But Father—he should be there."
No one—no one is here.

"But you—are you the one...?"
Then the line will be gone
because both ends will be home:
no space, no birds, no farm.

When Will I Be Home?

Li Shang-Yin

When will I be home? I don't know.
In the mountains, in the rainy night,
The Autumn lake is flooded.
Someday we will be back together again.
We will sit in the candlelight by the West window.
And I will tell you how I remembered you
Tonight on the stormy mountain.



Program schedule

The Dog Stars Inspired Art Exhibit

March 5–June 2
Downtown Bend Library
Hosted by the Friends of the Bend Libraries Art Committee

March 29–May 1
Sunriver Library
Hosted by the Friends of the Sunriver Library Art Committee

April 1–30
Sisters Library
Hosted by the Friends of the Sisters Library Art Committee

Synergy: Art and Literature

Public Reception
Saturday, April 12, 6:00–8:00 p.m.
Redmond Library

Exhibit: Enjoy art based on literature.
March 22–April 25
Redmond Library
Hosted by the Redmond Library Art Committee

Paws to Read

Readers from age 5–17 can have fun reading aloud to a therapy dog. Fifteen minutes sessions. Online registration required or call (541) 312-1054.

Thursdays, April 3–May 22
3:30–5:30 p.m.
Redmond Library

The Dog Stars Quilt Exhibit Reveal & Open House

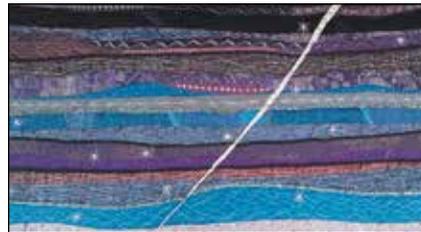
Each quilt, uniquely different in color, style, setting and shape, celebrates *The Dog Stars* and the quilters who have woven together their love of reading and quilting. Contact Marilyn, (541) 728-0527, marilyn@quiltworks.com.

Reveal

Friday, April 4, 5–7:00 p.m.
(First Friday Gallery Walk)
Saturday, April 5, 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.
QuiltWorks, 926 NE Greenwood Ave, Bend

Open House

Friday, April 18, 1:00 p.m.
Sunday, April 20, 1:00 p.m.
Wednesday, April 30, 1:00 p.m.
QuiltWorks, 926 NE Greenwood Ave, Bend



From Page to Poem: Workshop with John Martin

Use *The Dog Stars* to inspire your own poetry. Workshop members discover their own words for the thoughts and issues that the book raises. Note that this is a “come-as-you-are” workshop. No prior poetry writing skills are needed. Participants, who wish to, are encouraged to read their poems at the Second Sunday reading. Registration is required. Contact Liz at (541) 312-1032, lizg@deschuteslibrary.org.

In partnership with The Nature of Words

Saturday, April 5
10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. (part one)
Downtown Bend Library

Saturday, April 12
10:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m. (part two)
Downtown Bend Library

Book Discussion Groups

Monday, April 7, 6:30 p.m.
Sunriver Books & Music
1990 Sunriver Village Building 25C,
Sunriver

Thursday, April 10, 12:00 p.m.
Downtown Bend Library

Thursday, April 10, 12:00 p.m.
Redmond Library

Tuesday, April 15, 12:00 p.m.
East Bend Library

Thursday, April 17, 12:00 p.m.
La Pine Library

Monday, April 21, 5:30 p.m.
Paulina Springs Books
252 W Hood Ave, Sisters

Wednesday, April 23, 6:30 p.m.
Sisters Library

Monday, April 28, 6:00 p.m.
Paulina Springs Books
422 SW 6th St, Redmond

A Novel Idea Kickoff

Join Stacey Donohue, Professor of English at COCC and current Humanities chair, and library staff for a first look at *The Dog Stars*.

Saturday, April 12, 3:00 p.m.
Downtown Bend Library

Second Sunday

“From Page to Poem” participants share their work inspired by *The Dog Stars*.

Sunday, April 13, 2:00 p.m.
Downtown Bend Library

Low & Clear Documentary Screening

An exploration of life in the disappearing wilderness of the West, award-winning *Low & Clear* unfolds with moments of humor and pathos, success and failure.

Monday, April 14, 6:00 p.m. and
Tuesday, April 15, 6:00 p.m.
Tin Pan Theater
869 NW Tin Pan Alley, Bend

Redmond Library
Monday, April 28, 6:00 p.m.



A NOVEL IDEA ... READ TOGETHER

SELECTION COMMITTEE

Kevin Barclay · Ruth Burleigh · Tina Walker Davis ·
Stacey Donohue · Liz Goodrich · Kim Jackson · Catherine Jasper ·
Nathan Pedersen · Chantal Strobel

STAFF

Chantal Strobel, Project Director · Liz Goodrich, Lead Project
Coordinator · Tina Walker Davis, Project Coordinator · Ann Hettinger,
Graphic Design · Suzy Olsen, Foundation Coordinator

Mennonites in the Pacific Northwest

Mennonites came to America in the 17th century to flee persecution in Europe. Jerry Barkman, whose Mennonite grandparents came to the U.S. in the 1870s from South Russia, traces the beliefs of the Mennonites as well as their movement throughout the world, then to the U.S. and to the Pacific Northwest.

Monday, April 14, 6:00 p.m.
Downtown Bend Library

Tuesday, April 15, 12:00 p.m.
Sisters Library

Going Out is Optional, Getting Back is Mandatory

Karl Baldessari, director of the Aviation Program at COCC, takes a closer look at flight as a tool for survival. He'll share details of his own 25 years of Coast Guard aviation experience conducting search and rescue missions.



Tuesday, April 15, 6:00 p.m.
Redmond Library

Thursday, April 24, 6:00 p.m.
East Bend Library



MAIN EVENTS

Author Peter Heller

The author of *The Dog Stars* wraps up this year's "A Novel...Read Together" with two presentations. A book signing follows each author presentation.

FRIDAY, MAY 2, 7:00 P.M.

Tower Theatre
835 NW Wall Street, Bend
Tickets are free, but required.*

SATURDAY, MAY 3 • 1:00 P.M.

Sisters High School
1700 McKinney Butte Road, Sisters
No tickets are required.

*TICKETS AVAILABLE APRIL 12, 2014 AT THE TOWER THEATRE BOX OFFICE FROM 10:00 A.M.–12:00 P.M., ONLINE AT WWW.TOWERTHEATRE.ORG OR BY CALLING (541) 317-0700.

Spanish Flu in Central Oregon

Join Kelly Cannon-Miller of the Des Chutes Historical Museum at the library to learn about the influenza epidemic of 1918 and how it affected Central Oregon.

Wednesday, April 16, 6:00 p.m.
Downtown Bend Library

Wednesday, April 23, 12:00 p.m.
Sisters Library



Local Dog Stars

Just like Jasper in *The Dog Stars*, local dogs with their handlers by their sides attempt to relieve depression, give comfort, give hope, give love and reduce the stress of others. Meet therapy animals, their volunteer handlers and hear the stories of local dog stars.

Thursday, April 17, 6:00 p.m.
East Bend Library

Farm to Table

Join Sarahlee Lawrence from Rainshadow Organics for a discussion about growing food in Central Oregon and sample dishes prepared by chefs using products from her farm. Class size is limited and registration is required. Contact Liz at (541) 312-1032, lizg@deschuteslibrary.org.

Saturday, April 19, 1:00 p.m.
Downtown Bend Library

Tuesday, April 22, 6:00 p.m.
Redmond Library

Fly Fishing in Central Oregon

Join Vail Borne, fishing guide and owner of River Borne Outfitters, for a look at why people fish and where the best spots are near us.

Saturday, April 19, 1:00 p.m.
Sunriver Library

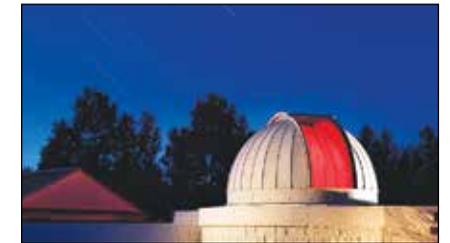


The Night Sky by Eye

Join us at the Sunriver Observatory or the Downtown Bend Library for a guide through the constellations and some of the mythology behind them. We'll head outside in the second part of both programs to look deep into the cosmos with our naked eyes and with telescopes. April nights can be very cold; please remember to bring warm clothes for outdoor viewing.

Friday, April 25, 8–10:00 p.m.
Sunriver Observatory
57245 River Road, Sunriver

Wednesday, April 30, 7–9:00 p.m.
Downtown Bend Library



Framing Nature

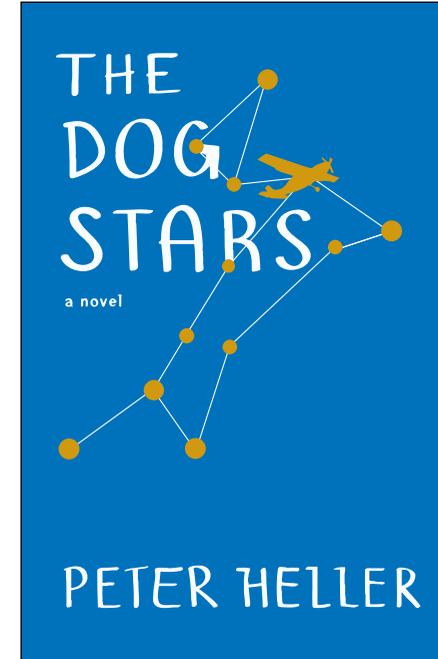
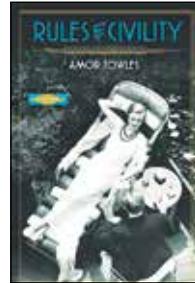
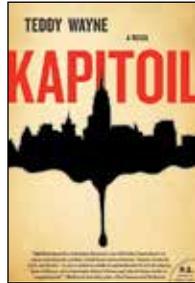
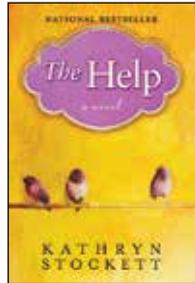
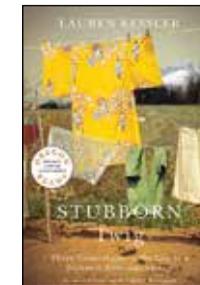
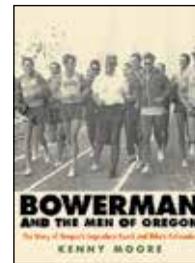
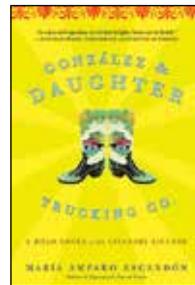
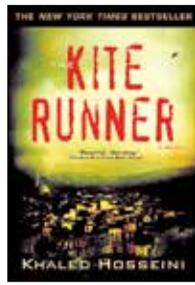
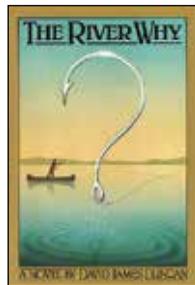
Join Steve Mark, historian at Crater Lake National Park, when he shares the history of the National Park System. He'll highlight the convergence of ideas that produced Crater Lake National Park and other spectacular areas administered by the federal government.

Saturday, April 26, 2:00 p.m.
Downtown Bend Library

Sunday, April 27, 2:00 p.m.
La Pine Library



Eleven years—eleven memorable books



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