KCLL Summer Lit Picks: Staff Suggestions for Your Recreational Reads

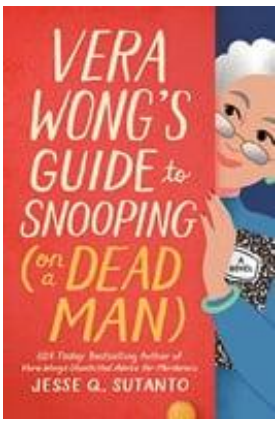
By: Barbara Engstrom

The sun is out and the days are longer, which means that as residents of one of the most well-read regions in the country, we are all required to spend at least some time in a hammock with a cool drink and a good book. In this month's King County Law Library column, get a leg up on what to read for your Book Bingo card with a peek into what the law library and foundation staff are currently reading.

Vera Wong's Guide to Snooping by Jesse Q. Sutanto (and Vera Wong's Unsolicited Advice for Murders)

This book was chosen by Tamara Hayes, Technical Services Librarian. Tamara is responsible for every aspect of the collection, including acquisitions, circulation, collection development, cataloging, and processing. Tamara also manages the subscriber program, conference room reservations, and invoicing. She is the glue that holds the library together.

My summer reading suggestion is Vera Wong's Guide to Snooping by Jesse Q. Sutanto.



This is book two of a series, the first being Vera Wong's Unsolicited Advice for Murders. Vera runs a tea shop in San Francisco and, since she "solved" a murder that occurred in her shop in book one, business has been booming. Now a bona fide crime solver, she's on to the next case. Vera tends to "adopt" people who need a mother figure and insert herself into their lives, whether they want her there or not, and it's futile to fight her. Oftentimes, she ingratiates herself to them with the Chinese dishes that she prepares, which no one can seem to say no to.

In this new book, Vera collects a few new people to add to her growing tribe. At the police station, Vera runs into Millie, a young woman debating whether to report her friend Xander missing. Vera immediately takes Millie back to the tea shop and into her fold. Millie seems to be worried about more than her missing friend, and now Vera has a mystery to solve. The story takes Vera behind the scenes of being an "influencer" and makes her one as well.

Book two had me laughing out loud multiple times. Vera Wong is just too funny with her observations and sayings. Even though the book covers a dark topic, it's a fairly light read. If you're interested in book two, you might as well read the first book in the series too.

A Flicker in the Dark by Stacy Willingham

This is Outreach Services Attorney Sarah deQuay's pick. Sarah produces KCLL's self-help form packets. Sarah has that rare talent for being able to do deep dives into complex legal subject matter and then present her conclusions in a way that's easily accessible by pro se litigants. Sarah is unfailingly kind and empathetic with patrons and just generally a ray of sunshine in the law library.

I just finished A Flicker in the Dark by Stacy Willingham with my book club, and it totally delivered on the creepy, twisty thriller stories I've always enjoyed reading. The story follows Chloe, whose father was convicted of a string of murders when she was a tween. Now, twenty years later, Chloe is a psychologist trying to live a normal life when a copycat killer emerges in the community. I'm a longtime mystery and thriller fan, so I can usually guess the twists early, but this one kept me on my toes. I also especially loved that it's set in Louisiana, where I'm from. Since I've been to a lot of the places mentioned in the book, it made the plot feel more immersive for sure — even if I had a few subtle cringes at the audiobook totally butchering some Cajun-French pronunciations!

Also, I highly recommend starting a book club with friends or family! It's such a fun way to read more, spend time together, and dive into stories you might not pick up otherwise. In our group, we even try to cook food that matches the setting or theme of the book, which adds a whole other layer of fun.

Blackout and All Clear by Connie Willis

If you've been to KCLL within the last 40 years, then you know Rick Stroup, our Assistant Director and recommender of this next pick. Rick is a legend at KCLL — no matter how esoteric or novel the question coming across the reference desk is, more likely than not, Rick has run into it before and knows just the resource to point the patron to. Rick would be forgiven for being resistant to change after almost 40 years on the job, yet surprisingly, he's always the one to quickly embrace new technology, programs, and initiatives. We also love him for his infectious laugh and mad baking skilz.

Winner of eleven Hugo Awards and seven Nebula Awards — the most by any author — Connie Willis is a legend in the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and historical fiction. Her historical research is impeccable, her ability to blend hard-core science with touching human-interest elements is masterful, but ultimately, she just knows how to spin a great yarn within the context of historical truth.

Blackout and All Clear are companion novels set principally in London during the Blitz in World War II. Typical of Willis' works, the author also takes the reader farther afield to build a more dimensional narrative. You will be transported to the evacuation of the beaches at Dunkirk, to a country manor home used to temporarily house children evacuated from London, to a tube station where a famous Shakespearean actor entertains his fellow Londoners during the raids, and to ambulance stations scattered around the English countryside, where brave women of the Auxiliary Territorial Service risk life and limb to bring aid to bombing victims and downed RAF pilots.

Enter the science fiction element — in particular, time travel. Moving among all these venues are a series of fictional historians, who have each traveled back in time to study particular World War II events. Of course, their paths collide, crisscross, become entangled, and eventually lead them all in directions hitherto unplanned for. Willis is particularly adept in the subtle and tricky art of weaving complex, parallel plot narratives. The center around which all these characters and situations revolve is the genuinely heroic effort Londoners staged to preserve St. Paul's Cathedral during the eight months of horrific fire storms caused by Nazi bombing raids.

Blackout and All Clear are available in both print and via Audible. I recommend both reading and listening to them. The Audible version includes a foreword delivered by Willis herself, where she describes being on the rooftop of St. Paul's Cathedral and recognizing with no small amount of humility that the cathedral itself was the only structure for numerous blocks not completely destroyed by the fire storms. This recognition was, in part, her inspiration for writing the novels.

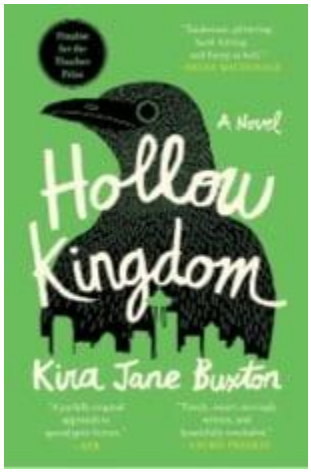
The Every by Dave Eggers (and The Circle)

Our next pick comes from Kristie Thompson, Executive Director of the KCLL Foundation. Kristie somehow finds time to keep the foundation running like a Swiss watch on top of multiple other volunteer activities, raising two very active teenagers, and fostering an even more active toddler. I'm constantly in awe of her organizational and time management skills. On top of all that, she maintains a great sense of humor, is a lot of fun to be around, and she reads more books than anyone I know!

I recently finished The Every, Dave Eggers' sequel to his 2013 tech dystopia novel The Circle. In The Every, protagonist Delaney Wells takes a job with the global tech giant The Every in the hope of destroying it from within, only to have every over-the-top idea she proposes — expecting that each will finally be the breaking point — find wild success. While there are many humorous and insightful elements in the book, it also provides a great deal of fodder for serious conversations regarding the tradeoffs we are willing to make

for “convenience,” the limits of privacy in a tech-focused culture, and whether or not individuals have agency to resist the increasing intrusions of technology. If you enjoy a good satire and are concerned about the growing power of big tech companies, this may be the summer read for you.

Hollow Kingdom by Kira Jane Buxton (and Feral Creatures)



Our next picks come from Catherine Davenport, our Outreach Services Librarian. Catherine joined KCLL in February and has been very busy running our Family Law Drafting Lab, designing and teaching workshops for our pro se patrons, and resuscitating our hitherto moribund newsletter. In her short time at KCLL, Catherine has become a connoisseur of the lunch fare near the courthouse. Be sure to check out the delightful “Cate’s Bites” column in our newsletter!

Ever wonder what the crows around Seattle are thinking? Did you know the UW crows have beef with the Bothell crows? In this post-apocalypse novel, S.T., a crow, and Dennis, a bloodhound, team up for wily adventures along the Alaskan Way Viaduct, trying to save their human Big Jim from the zombie apocalypse. The novel is told from S.T.’s point of view as a domesticated crow who has a penchant for Cheetos and TV. Hollow Kingdom and its sequel, Feral Creatures, by Kira Jane Buxton will have you laughing and crying, sometimes at the same time.

Flights by Olga Tokarczuk (translated from Polish by Jennifer Croft)

The final pick is a book that I, Barbara Engstrom, Chief Cook and Bottle Washer, recently read and really enjoyed.

I found myself compulsively reading Flights because of the singularity of the author’s voice and beauty of the writing. While Flights is classified as a novel, there is no linear plotline. Rather it’s a series of vignettes of many, many different characters and stories centered on some aspect of movement and what it means to be from (or leave) a place and how travel or transience affects those undertaking it. Early in the book, a man becomes increasingly frantic after his wife and son disappear during a family trip to the Croatian island of Vis. Much later in the novel, the characters are reintroduced back home in Poland with the wife and son returned, and life seemingly back to normal. But when the explanation for their disappearance is unsatisfactory to the husband, another flight ensues. In another vignette, a daughter in the 18th century fights to get the remains of her father (a slave turned courtier who was stuffed and displayed in a royal museum) returned to her. This thread mirrors the story of Doctor Blau, a 21st-century pioneer in plastinating the human body for anatomical

study who also abuses unwitting young women lured into modeling for him for photographic preservation of their different physical forms. Flights weaves philosophical meditations on leaving (and staying) that are thought-provoking but with a wry sense of humor and absurdity. I particularly enjoyed the “travel psychology” vignettes. As I do with many of my favorite books, I find myself thinking about the characters and themes of Flights quite often.

Come Visit Us at KCLL

While we don’t have a fiction collection at KCLL, we do have a law book collection that we’ve lovingly curated and maintained. To find out more about our collection in print and eBook format, visit us at www.kcll.org.