

**PLACE: Theme for 2021-2022**  
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Have you ever lived in a place that dominated the story of your life? That is certainly the case for Alexandra Bergson in Cather's *O Pioneers* (discussed September 2021) and Miss Jane Hubbell Kinneson in Mosher's *On Kingdom Mountain* (discussed October 2021). Although both of these novels are set in a specific time period, the quality of the main characters' relationship with place, with home, seems almost timeless. The land on which they live is an inseparable part of their identity. This is not the case with *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, the memoir we read in December. Nafisi's book explores the author's experiences while living in Iran during a particular time period, from 1978-1997. This author does not allow herself to be defined by place as she leaves the repression in Iran for the intellectual freedom of the USA.

In the Spring of 2022, we will continue to discuss literature in which the setting has a central importance. I use the word "setting" here in reference to our Spring/Summer books because the literary setting includes both place and historical period. Understanding the role of setting is of critical importance in our April and May literacy selections.

On **Thursday, April 28 at 10:30**, we will meet Dr. Suzanne Brown on Zoom to discuss *The Four Winds* by Kristin Hannah. This best selling novel, written during the current pandemic, depicts Elsa Martinella's struggle against poverty, drought and whirling dust storms on a failing Texas farm. This place shows our main character and her neighbors no mercy. After years of sticking to her land, Elsa and her little family move west. In the fields of California during the Great Depression, Elsa finds herself again in a place that offers little security and never ending backbreaking labor. This is a work of historical fiction and as such both place and time determine Elsa's story and develop her character.

Hurricane Katrina was a category 5 hurricane that hit Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi to devastating effect in August 2005. Many people, especially poor people of color, were killed, traumatized and/or displaced. On **Thursday, May 26 at 10:30**, Mr. Will Speers will discuss

***Salvage the Bones***, the story of an improvised family living in a fictional Mississippi Gulf town in the days before and after this historic storm.

Jesym Ward won the National Book Award for this novel. It is a demanding read about difficult lives in a tough place. I look forward to Speers' insights into the lives of one family struggling to survive.

Lucy Barton lives in New York City but her sense of self is a construct of the small town in which she was raised, Amgash, Illinois. Hospitalized for weeks after recovering from minor surgery, Lucy is visited, at the request of her husband, by her estranged mother whom she has not seen in decades. Her mother was always distant and unaffectionate to Lucy as a child, yet for five days, she sits by her daughter's bedside without sleeping. To pass the time, Lucy and her mother share stories and gossip of ordinary events that occurred during Lucy's difficult childhood.

On the surface, Elizabeth Strout's ***My Name is Lucy Barton*** reads like a simple story of a woman who escaped a painful past to become a respected writer. But, on closer reading, you will find that every pause, every "oh!" has something to tell you about the power of the place that Lucy comes from.

On **Wednesday (not Thursday), July 13 at 10:30**, I will discuss this beautifully written novel with you at the Moultonborough Public Library.