

# Soapstone: Celebrating Women Writers

## Study Groups

---

**Reading Barbara Kingsolver's** *The Bean Trees* and *Prodigal Summer*, led by Lex Runciman  
Four Saturday Mornings, 10 to 1  
February 22 & 29, March 7 & 14  
ArtSpace Room, TaborSpace, 55th & SE Stark

In *The Bean Trees*, one of the first things Marietta Greer does is rename herself. Five years out of high school, she drives away from her rural Kentucky hometown in a VW bug lacking all windows except the windshield. She plans to get as far west as the car will take her, which turns out to be Tucson, Arizona, home of Jesus is Lord Used Tires. In *Prodigal Summer*, forest ranger Deanna spends her days learning about and protecting her Zebulon County home: "We're on National Forest land, inside a game protection area," she says early on. That's her home. She's divorced, a scientist, and she's interested in coyotes: "Keeping tabs on the predators tells you what you need to know about the herbivores, like deer, and the vegetation, the detritivores, the insect populations, small predators like shrews and voles. All of it."

"All of it" – that's Kingsolver in three words. Fiction of the sort that Barbara Kingsolver writes is meant to be immersive. So not only will we live in the company of her characters, we'll also inhabit their worlds, meeting the people they meet, observing their reactions and their choices, as quite quickly it becomes impossible not to ache with them and root for them. In dark times – and in winter that will be literally true – these books will act as boon alternatives. And in embracing central issues of individuality and community, these books will give us plenty to discuss.

In the tradition of Soapstone's study groups, time will be given over to the comments, observations, and questions of those around the table. You are asked to be an attentive reader, eager to voice your own responses, interested to hear and consider the responses of others, curious to see where these texts and our cumulative questions, observations, and understandings might lead.

Texts: *The Bean Trees* (1988) and *Prodigal Summer* (2000), both by Barbara Kingsolver.

**Lex Runciman** has published anthologies, college textbooks, and six collections of poems, one of which won the Oregon Book Award. His most recent book, *Salt Moons: Poems 1981-2016*, was published by Salmon Poetry in 2017. Now retired, he taught at Oregon State University for eleven years and at Linfield College for twenty-five, where he won the Olds-Hellie Award for Creative Achievement and was twice named Edith Green Distinguished Professor.

---

**Reading Margaret Atwood's** *The Testaments*, led by Tricia Snell  
Two Saturday Mornings, 10 to 1  
January 11 & 18  
ArtSpace Room, TaborSpace, 55th & SE Stark

The red gloves are lying on the bed. I pick them up, pull them onto my hands, finger by finger. Everything except the wings around my face is red: the color blood, which defines us. . . . The white wings are prescribed issue; they are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen. — Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 1985

Donning a red cloak and white bonnet, thanks to Margaret Atwood's wild-yet-tethered-to-reality imagination, nowadays roars an instant protest: We resist the patriarchy! We demand our reproductive rights! We stand against the oppression of all women! Women have used this red protest all over the world, including Poland, Croatia, Argentina, and the U.K., but especially in the USA, protesting bills, protesting Trump, protesting Pence. A line of handmaids stood outside the courtroom of Brett Kavanaugh's hearing.

*The Handmaid's Tale* exploded into our consciousness in 1985—whether you wanted it to or not, and it's ok to hate it AND attend this study group!—then blossomed into film, TV, fanfiction, and a worldwide political movement. Now, almost 35 years later, Atwood presents us with a sequel: *The Testaments*.

Did our narrator reach the outside world safely and build a new life for herself? Or was she discovered in her attic hiding place, arrested, sent to the Colonies or to Jezebel's, or even executed? (Atwood, from ending of *Handmaid's*).

We'll find out! This study group will examine *The Testaments* from many angles. First of all, does Atwood pull this sequel off? If so, how did she do it? If not, why not? How has her writing style changed or stayed the same? Do any of her more recent poems foretell *Testaments*? What/how/why does her storytelling move us (whether we "like" it or not)? What is the nature of speculative fiction? How does the fate of Gilead—and the lives of Offred, Aunt Lydia, and others—reflect on our own lives? Will *Testaments* offer us guidance on what's in store for us in our own politically fraught world? Is that an expectation that is even reasonable?

I promise, *The Testaments* has some humour in it too! Atwood still has that deliciously direct, cut-to-the-core, and often-dark-but-frequently-very-funny style. I look forward to revelling with you in the dark funny of Atwood's dystopia!

I'm a Canadian who grew up in Atwood territory, literally in terms of geography, and literarily in terms of what I read as a young person. Atwood's worldview resonates with me, with strong reverberations coming from the familial, tainted-love, power-structure dynamics of the Canada-U.S.A. relationship.

My hope is that excavating *The Testaments* together—will act as a launching pad for greater enjoyment of Atwood's whole, vast body of work. Delight is the main goal. Along the way, I hope each of us as citizens of the Earth will gain insight into the sources of our own world views and voices.

All things come to she who waits. Time wounds all heels. Patience is a virtue. Vengeance is mine. – Margaret Atwood, *The Testaments*, 2019

Texts will include *The Testaments* (2019) and poems (to be sent out to participants prior to the seminar), with references to *The Handmaid's Tale* as needed (I do advise reading *Handmaid's* again prior to *Testaments*, for the fullest experience, but you could also find a good online cheat-

sheet to refresh you on Handmaid's story and characters.) I'll also bring some video of Atwood to the seminar to enrich our discussions.

**Tricia Snell** is a Canadian-American writer and flutist. Recently her story "Out to the Horses" was longlisted for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC's) 2019 Short Story Prize; the same story is forthcoming in Room Magazine, a Canadian quarterly literary journal that has been featuring the work of women and genderqueer writers and artists since 1975. Her writing has also been published in Every Day Fiction, Art Papers, Oregon Humanities, The Oregonian, and The Grove Review, and has been read by actor Barbara Rappaport on the National Public Radio (NPR) show, The Sound of Writing, a PEN Syndicated Fiction project. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing/Fiction (George Mason University) and an ARCT flute performance degree (Toronto Royal Conservatory of Music). Tricia's past roles include Executive Director for two arts nonprofits (Caldera and the Alliance of Artists' Communities). She lives in Nova Scotia, Canada and makes extended trips to Oregon, USA. [www.triciasnell.com](http://www.triciasnell.com)

---

### **Reading Judy Grahn, led by Judith Barrington**

Four Saturday mornings, 10 to 1

October 5, 12, 19, and 26.

Multnomah Friends Meeting House, 4312 SE Stark

“The Women’s Movement of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s generated an extraordinary outpouring of poetry that captured an age of expectancy, of defiant purpose, and exuberant exploration.” Perhaps when you read this description of Poems from the Women’s Movement you might expect a collection of poets whose names are unknown to you. Maybe you’d be surprised to open it up and find Sylvia Plath, Muriel Rukeyser, Adrienne Rich, and Anne Sexton all listed on the first page. Look further and you’ll discover more well-known poets: Audre Lorde, Lucille Clifton, Susan Griffin, and Sharon Olds. But nestled among an illustrious group of 58 are some who were equally or even more essential to the culture of second-wave feminism, but who, thirty years later, remain less well known; among them is Judy Grahn.

In the seventies, feminists were drawn to her work, both for its craft and for a view of the world that was working-class and female, sometimes hilariously funny, and sometimes heartbreaking. In addition to poetry, she wrote nonfiction about Sappho and Gertrude Stein, and a book I loved on LGB (as it was then) history: *Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds*. Over the years I got to know her as our paths crossed at conferences and the homes of mutual friends. I’m excited to invite you to take a fresh, or renewed look at some of Grahn’s extraordinary poetry.

Texts: *The Work of a Common Woman* by Judy Grahn, and *Poems from the Women’s Movement*, edited by Honor Moore.

**Judith Barrington** is the author of five books of poetry, the most recent, *Long Love: New and Selected Poems*. Her *Lifesaving: A Memoir* was the winner of the Lambda Book Award and was a finalist for the PEN/Martha Albrand Award for the Art of the Memoir. She is also the author of the best-selling *Writing the Memoir: From Truth to Art*. She has been a faculty member of the University of Alaska, Anchorage’s low-residency MFA Program. [www.judithbarrington.com](http://www.judithbarrington.com)

---

## **The Magical, Mythical, Transformative Work of Angela Carter and Joy Williams,**

led by Gina Ochsner

Four Saturday mornings, 10 to 1

September 7, 14, 21, and 28

Multnomah Friends Meeting House, 4312 SE Stark

Intoxicating. Lyrical and subversive. Defiantly un-buttoned. Angela Carter and Joy Williams' work has been accused of this and so much more as their rule-bending stories exquisitely re-write traditional roles ascribed to women, men and other beasts. Carter and Williams borrow old tales and myths such as Beauty and the Beast, Red Riding Hood and changeling stories. Then they knock out the prescriptive assumptions about how stories can be told and more to the point, how stories featuring women can be told.

What happens when innovators like Carter and Williams rip the seams out of those old flaxen garments and re-spin them? Pure gold! What drew me to these writers was their insistence upon re-imagining old scripts that seemed to hem in and chafe female characters who rarely, if ever, have a voice, let alone free will. In this four-week study, we'll look at the borrowed narrative templates these writers used and track the narrative devices that sparked the various story and character metamorphosis. We'll think about how Carter and Williams challenge and re-work traditional stereotypes as well as the meaning and relevancy of storytelling as an agent of change.

Texts: We'll look at Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, a tour de force of baroque language, byzantine detail, and strong, active female protagonists. Our second text is Joy Williams' *The Changeling*, a work of astonishing power and lyricism.

**Gina Ochsner** is the author of the short story collection *The Necessary Grace to Fall*, which was selected for the Flannery O'Connor Award and the collection *People I Wanted to Be*. Both collections received the Oregon Book Award. *The Russian Dreambook of Color and Flight* was published in 2010. Her latest novel entitled *The Hidden Letters of Velta B*, was released in July 2016. To find out more about Gina, please visit [www.ginaochsner.com](http://www.ginaochsner.com).

---

## **Reading Denise Levertov, led by Mimi Maduro**

Four Saturday mornings, 10 to 1

Spring, 2019

ArtSpace Room, TaborSpace, 55th & SE Stark

As a poet of both imagination and conscience, Denise Levertov continually examined and re-examined purpose, witness, and presence in the here and now. Hers is a poetry of engagement where the precision of words matters. We will immerse ourselves in Levertov's work across time and—over six decades beginning in England, the land of her birth in 1923 until her death in Seattle in 1997. We will explore her poetry through the lens of her celebration of mystery and political activism. Through Levertov's essays we will learn about her inspirations and perspectives on craft. We will listen to each other read poems of hers that move and resonate within us.

Discovering Denise Levertov's poetry and vision as an English Literature major in college was a pivotal moment of awakening in my life. This spark spawned a lifelong enchantment reading,

studying and collecting Levertov's poetry, essays, and letters. It's a body of vibrant work I return to again and again.

The text will be *The Collected Poems of Denise Levertov*. Published by New Directions. 2013. Edited by Paul A. Lacey and Anne Dewey. Some additional essays, letters and articles will be provided as PDFs.

**Mimi Maduro** is a member of the 29th Street Writers in Portland, and the Calliope Poets in the Columbia Gorge. She teaches classes in facilitation and in management fundamentals at Columbia Gorge Community College. These days she is focused on organizing and editing a manuscript of her poems spanning the past twenty-five years.

---

### **Reading Margaret Atwood, led by Trisha Snell**

Four Saturday mornings, 10 to 1

Fall, 2019

ArtSpace Room, TaborSpace, 55th & SE Stark

*tell me  
everything  
just as it was  
from the beginning. — Atwood, 1967*

*The parts of writers' lives that are interesting are usually the part before they become a well-known writer. — Atwood, 2017*

*Now I am a grownup  
and literate  
and I sit in my chair  
as quietly as a fuse ... — Atwood, 1968*

At the women's marches of January 2017, several signs pled "Make Margaret Atwood fiction again!" Indeed! Well, this study group will attempt to do that—and more—by focusing on her deliciously direct, cut-to-the-core, yes-often-dark-but-frequently-very-funny early poems and short fiction, before she was thought of as the oracle of dystopia. We'll also read and discuss a few recent poems and stories to see what connections we might uncover.

Our quest will be to revel in, or at least turn a few cartwheels inside, this earlier voice, and perhaps see how it compares to her current voice. We'll also explore the world-view that blossomed into her marvelously varied and vivid body of work (by my count, she's written 71 books of all kinds, as well as umpteen talks and articles and reviews).

I'm a Canadian who grew up in Atwood territory, literally in terms of geography, and literarily (yes it's a word!) in terms of what I read as a young person (besides Atwood and a handful of other Canadians such as Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence, that early reading included a lot of British gothic and European social novels, with some James, Hemingway and Fitzgerald thrown in). Atwood's worldview resonates with me in Old World-New World ways, with strong reverberations coming from the familial, tainted-love, power-structure dynamics of the Canada-U.S.A. relationship.

My hope is that excavating the origins of Atwood's voice—or her many voices—will act as a launching pad for greater enjoyment of Atwood's whole, vast body of work. Delight is the main goal. Along the way, I hope each of us as citizens of the Earth will gain insight into the sources of our own world views and voices.

*One day you will reach a bend in your life.  
Time will curve like a wind  
and after that the young  
will no longer be afraid of you  
the way they ought to be ... — Atwood, 2007*

Texts will include *Eating Fire*, *Selected Poetry 1965-1995*; selections from *The Door* (poems, 2007); and either *Surfacing* (a short novel, 1972) or *Dancing Girls* (short story collection, 1977). Confirmation of this will be sent out in good time prior to the first study group meeting. I'll also show some early videos of Atwood reading her work.

Tricia Snell is a Canadian-American writer and flutist. She writes stories, poems, essays, reviews, and songs and is the author of the book *Artist Communities* (Allworth Press). Her writing has been published in *Art Papers*, *Oregon Humanities*, *The Oregonian*, and *The Grove Review*, and has been read by actor Barbara Rappaport on the National Public Radio show, *The Sound of Writing*. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing (Fiction) from George Mason University in Fairfax, VA, USA and an ARCT flute performance degree from the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, ON, Canada. Tricia's past roles include Executive Director of two arts nonprofits (Caldera and the Alliance of Artists' Communities) and Writer/Project Manager for environmental organizations. She splits her time between Nova Scotia, Canada and Oregon, USA. [www.triciasnell.com](http://www.triciasnell.com)

---

---

**Reading Grace Paley's Fiction, Nonfiction and Poetry, led by Natalie Serber**

Four Saturday mornings, 10:30 to 1:30

Fall 2018

Friends Meeting House, 4312 SE Stark

Reading Grace Paley's Fiction, Nonfiction and Poetry, led by Natalie Serber

*"When you write, you illuminate what's hidden, and that is a political act."*

~Grace Paley

The right book finds us when we need it. That was absolutely true for me as a young mother and beginning writer. A friend put a Grace Paley collection in my hands and there was something so accessible, so charming, insightful, funny and deceptively uncomplicated about Paley's voice that I felt known. Writer, mother, activist, always unapologetic, Paley said, "The outside world will trivialize you for almost anything if it wants to. You may as well be who you are." Her book was an invitation for me to come to the page with my own voice.

Paley published only three slim collections of her wry and gossipy short stories. She also wrote essays and poems. In this discussion group we will be reading a good mix of her work. Women's lives, the joys and pressures of children, husbands, sex and work, aging parents, social justice,

basically life in its messy glory is her subject. Whether you are new to Paley or have been reading her your entire life, I look forward to taking a deep dive with you!

Texts:

Paley, Grace. *Just as I Thought*, Farrar Strauss Giroux. NY 1998

Paley, Grace. *The Collected Stories*, Farrar Strauss Giroux. NY. 1994

**Natalie Serber** is the author of *Community Chest*, (Two Sylvias Press), and *Shout Her Lovely Name*, (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) a New York Times Notable Book of 2012, a summer reading selection from *O*, the Oprah Magazine, and an Oregonian Top 10 Book of the Pacific Northwest. Her fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Zyzzzyva*, *The Greensboro Review*, *The Bellingham Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Inkwell*, and *Hunger Mountain*. Essays and reviews have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Oprah Magazine*, *The Huffington Post*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Oregonian*, *The Rumpus*, *Salon*, and *Fourth Genre*. She lives in Portland, Oregon.

---

### **Reading Virginia Woolf's Nonfiction, led by Judith Barrington**

Four Saturday mornings, 10 to 1

Fall 2018

Friends Meeting House, 4312 SE Stark

You may know Virginia Woolf from one or all of her novels: perhaps you read *To the Lighthouse* in college or discovered *Orlando* by chance and with great delight. But do you know the enormous amount Woolf wrote apart from the ten novels? She revealed herself as an early feminist in work such as *Three Guineas* and the well-known *A Room of One's Own*, and wrote numerous essays and short stories, many book reviews, and a constant diary that cannot be dismissed from a summary of her literary output. In this study group, we will jump into just a few of these offerings, and perhaps match up some of the writing with the letters Woolf wrote to her Bloomsbury contemporaries as well as to a wide array of writers and thinkers beyond her circle.

I grew up in Sussex and rode my pony on the Downs where Woolf often walked, thinking about her current project, while living at Monks' House in Rodmell. She died three years before I was born and I knew nothing about her until later, when her work became important to me both as a feminist and as a writer, my sense of connection perhaps enhanced by having roamed that same patch of downland, often described in the diaries.

Whether you are a longtime Virginia Woolf fan, or are coming new to her work, you will find plenty to read, and always, thanks to the internet and the library, supplementary texts such as biographies and commentaries that have been written through the years since this astonishing body of work was published in the early twentieth century. Together, we will dip into it and discuss a selection of the short works.

If you want to get a sense of the author and her life before the study group begins (not at all required), I think the best biography is *Virginia Woolf* by Hermione Lee.

**Judith Barrington** was born in Brighton, England, and came to Oregon in 1976. Her *Lifesaving: A Memoir* was the winner of the Lambda Book Award and was a finalist for the PEN/Martha Albrand Award for the Art of the Memoir. She is also the author of the best-selling *Writing the Memoir: From Truth to Art* and four collections of poetry. Her fifth poetry book, *Long Love*:

New and Selected Poems, will be released by Salmon Poetry in June, 2018. She has been a faculty member of the University of Alaska, Anchorage's low-residency MFA Program and gives workshops and readings around the U.S. and in Britain. [www.judithbarrington.com](http://www.judithbarrington.com)

---

**Reading Adrienne Rich, led by Sara Guest**

Four Saturday mornings, 10 to 1

Winter 2018

TaborSpace

Adrienne Rich wrote, "Our future depends on the sanity of each of us, and we have a profound stake in the project of describing our reality as candidly and fully as we can."

She did that brilliantly as a poet, essayist, activist and thinker. From her origins as a formalist whose first poetry collection *A Change of World* was chosen for the Yale Younger Poets Award by W.H. Auden, she spent her life discovering and mastering a voice that was challenging, timely and courageous to become "one of the most widely read and influential poets of the second half of the 20th century".

We will consider Rich's most personal and political work including poems from *Diving Into the Wreck*, *The Dream of a Common Language* and *An Atlas of a Difficult World* among others, and essays from *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* and *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*. We will explore her achievement as an artist in the context of the times in which she lived, the movements she was shaped by and in turn helped to shape.

I chose Adrienne Rich for this study group because her work has accompanied me and challenged me as I've sought to deepen my understanding of social justice, personal history and poetics. And because of the example she offers us of a woman who continued to develop as an artist and activist from the publication of her first book at the age of 22 until her death at the age of 83.

All readers are welcome, from those who have read her work for decades to those for whom it will be the first time. If you don't own these books and can't find them used, copies of what we'll discuss will be provided.

**Sara Guest** is a poet, essayist, facilitator, literary lecturer and careful reader. She has worked as a literature editor for *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and a producer for Harpo Studios and in various capacities as an editor or program, project or creative manager. She leads reading seminars with Literary Arts and the Portland Underground Graduate School and writing workshops with Write Around Portland.

---

**Reading Linda Pastan, led by Andrea Hollander**

Four Saturday mornings, 10 to 1, winter 2018

TaborSpace

In the early 1970s when I began to teach myself to write poems, I discovered the work of Linda Pastan. I was drawn to her poems, in part, because of her subject matter, which, though it may have been labeled "domestic" at the time, I found much richer than such a label suggested. Yes,



her subjects seemed to dwell upon the everydayness of ordinary lives, but beneath such triggering subjects were deeper, even disturbing, ones. A contemporary of Sylvia Plath at Radcliffe (Pastan won the Mademoiselle Poetry Prize the year Plath was runner up), Pastan's work continues. Now 85, she has published 17 volumes of poetry, most recently *Insomnia* (Norton, 2015), which she says has to do with "a struggle with consciousness itself as well as a struggle with the looming dark, just outside the window."

I am especially interested in the nature of the creativity over time, as exemplified by the work of Linda Pastan. How does a writer's work develop? In what ways does a writer's subject matter evolve, or does it? What changes? What stays the same? Each session will focus on a few poems, most of which can be found in *Carnival Evening: New and Selected Poems 1968 - 1998* (Norton, 1998) and in *Insomnia* (Norton, 2015), which will be our texts. Participants will be expected to read the poems ahead of time and to engage in our discussion about them. The atmosphere will be relaxed and welcoming. Due to our lengthy sessions, participants are encouraged to bring lunch. The study group welcomes both readers and writers, those who already know Pastan's work, those who would like to know it better, and those for whom the study group will be an introduction.

**Andrea Hollander** moved to Portland in 2011, after many years in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas, where she ran a bed & breakfast for 15 years and served as the Writer-in Residence at Lyon College for 22. Her 4th full-length poetry collection, *Landscape with Female Figure: New & Selected Poems, 1982 -2012*, was a finalist for the Oregon Book Award; her 1st, *House Without a Dreamer*, won the Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize. Among her many other honors are two Pushcart Prizes (in poetry and literary nonfiction) and two poetry fellowships from the National Endowment of the Arts. In September 2018, Hollander's 5th poetry collection, *Blue Mistaken for Sky*, will be published by Autumn House Press.

---

### **Entering the House of Munro, led by Natalie Serber**

Six Tuesday evenings, 7 to 9, fall 2017

TaborSpace

Alice Munro has famously said, "A story is not like a road to follow ... it's more like a house. You go inside and stay there for a while, wandering back and forth and settling where you like and discovering how the room and corridors relate to each other, how the world outside is altered by being viewed from these windows. And you, the visitor, the reader, are altered as well by being in this enclosed space, whether it is ample and easy or full of crooked turns, or sparsely or opulently furnished. You can go back again and again, and the house, the story, always contains more than you saw the last time. It also has a sturdy sense of itself of being built out of its own necessity, not just to shelter or beguile you."

Those of us familiar with the stories of Alice Munro and those of us entering her house for the first time will be beguiled and sheltered by her spaciousness and concision. Whether in rural or urban settings, whether about departures or homecomings, birth or death, Munro's stories provide us readers with plenty of surprise discoveries and inevitable truths. I was introduced to her work while in graduate school and was both inspired and daunted by her ability to write stories that capture a sweeping life and the decisive moments when a life is changed by a chance meeting, or an opportunity passed by. In this study session, we will read from "Selected Stories," and discuss the work in terms of both form and content, craft and theme. What a treat to embark upon a deep

study of Munro's evolving revelations on self, women, family, and landscape.

**Natalie Serber** is the author of a memoir, *Community Chest*, and the story collection, *Shout Her Lovely Name*, a New York Times Notable Book of 2012, a summer reading selection from *O, the Oprah Magazine*, and an Oregonian Top 10 Book of the Pacific Northwest. Her fiction has appeared in *The Bellingham Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Inkwell*, and *Hunger Mountain*. Essays and reviews have appeared in *The New York Times*, *O, The Oprah Magazine*, *The Huffington Post*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Oregonian*, *The Rumpus*, *Salon*, and *Fourth Genre*. Natalie has received the John Steinbeck Award, Tobias Wolff Award, and H.E. Francis Award, and has been short listed in *Best American Short Stories*. She teaches fiction and the personal essay at Marylhurst University, the Attic Institute and at various conferences including Squaw Valley Community of Writers. Natalie received her MFA from Warren Wilson College. She lives in Portland, Oregon. <http://www.natalieserber.com>

---

---

### **Reading C.D. Wright, led by Wendy Willis**

Four sessions, 10 to 12, fall 2017

ArtSpace Room, TaborSpace

When C.D. Wright died unexpectedly in 2016, she had published over a dozen books, most of which were called poetry collections, though several of them also walked close to the line of experimental novella and lyric essay. Her book, *One With Others* (2011), won the National Book Critics Circle Award and was nominated for a National Book Award. Two books, *ShallCross* (2016) and *The Poet, The Lion, Talking Pictures, El Farolito, A Wedding in St. Roch, The Big Box Store, The Warp in the Mirror, Spring, Midnights, Fire & All* (2016), were published posthumously.

C.D. Wright was born in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas, and her work returns to her Arkansas home again and again, though she spent most of her adult life in the North, including teaching for much of her career at Brown University in Rhode Island.

C.D. Wright was singular in her voice and her muscularity of language. As Ben Lerner put it after her death: “[S]he was part of a line of mavericks and contrarians who struggled to keep the language particular in times of ever-encroaching standardization. I think of the messy genius of James Agee and Mary Austin as two possible antecedents for her genre-bending, lyrically charged, often outraged and outrageous American English.” She used that fierceness to look at friendship and love and place and race and death. I guess she used it to look at everything.

We will read two books—*Deepstep Come Shining*, about which Michael Ondaatje said: “For me, C.D. Wright's poetry is river gold. 'Love whatever flows.' Her language is on the page half pulled out of earth and rivers still holding onto the truth of the elements. I love her voice and pitch and the long snaky arms of her language that is willing to hold everything human and angry and beautiful.”; and *One With Others* (2010) (“If white people can ride down the highways/with guns in their trucks/I can walk down the highway unarmed”).

**Wendy Willis** is a poet and essayist living in Portland. Her first book of poems, *Blood Sisters of the Republic*, was published in 2012, and she has had poems and essays published in *Utne Reader*, *Poetry Northwest*, *New England Review*, *Oregon Humanities*, *ZYZZYVA*, and numerous other places. Wendy is also the Executive Director of the Deliberative Democracy

Consortium and the Founder and Director of Oregon's Kitchen Table at Portland State University. Wendy graduated magna cum laude from Georgetown Law Center and holds an M.F.A. in poetry from the Rainier Writing Workshop at Pacific Lutheran University and a B.A. from Willamette University. Wendy's next book, *A Long Late Pledge*, will be released in September 2017.

---

### **Reading Elizabeth Bishop, led by Barbara Drake**

Four sessions, 10 to 1, Spring 2017

Friends Meeting House

Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979) was one of the major American poets of the twentieth century. A recipient of many awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1956 and the National Book Award in 1970, she was friends with famous poets of her time such as Robert Lowell and Marianne Moore, published work in *The New Yorker* and other prominent magazines, and from time to time held prestigious teaching positions. And yet in some ways she was an outsider and a mystery. She traveled extensively and for many years lived in Brazil with her lover, architect and political activist Lota de Macedo Soares. Bishop's poetry often deals with loss and the difficulty of finding one's place in the world. This is not surprising since her father died when she was only 8 months old. A few years later her mother suffered a nervous breakdown, was confined to a mental hospital, disappearing from Elizabeth's life forever. Shuffled between relatives in Nova Scotia and Massachusetts, she was in some ways rootless.

The need to situate one's self in a lonely world is often reflected in her poems. Throughout her adult life Bishop struggled with her own demons of depression and alcohol, but judging by her work she must have been a delightful person with a warm sense of humor. Her poetry is often playful. Poems such as "The Man-Moth," about a mysterious and lonely imaginary character based on a newspaper typo, or "One Art," a catalog of life's losses, from door keys to people and places, adopt a fanciful, even humorous, tone. And simply studying the way in which Bishop uses observant and detailed description, as in her poem "The Fish" and many others, is itself a whole course in the art of poetry. Reading her poems, admiring her craft, delighting in her images and ideas, one feels an impulse to share the experience with others, perhaps turning to the nearest human being—friend, lover, or stranger in a coffee shop—and saying, you've got to read this, it's so good. How does she do that? This will be the central topic of our study group. We will gather for the sheer joy of reading, talking about, learning from, and coming to understand the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop in the company of others.

Our text will be *The Complete Poems 1927-1979*, Elizabeth Bishop, supplemented with selected material about the writer, including essays and film.

Barbara Drake's books and chapbooks of poetry include *Driving One Hundred*, *Love at the Egyptian Theatre*, *What We Say to Strangers*, *Life in a Gothic Novel*, *Bees in Wet Weather*, and *Small Favors*. She is also the author of two memoirs, *Peace at Heart: an Oregon Country Life*, and *Morning Light: Wildflowers, Night Skies, and Other Ordinary Joys of Oregon Country Life*. Her book *Writing Poetry*, a widely used college textbook, has been in print since 1983. Her writing appears in numerous literary magazines and anthologies. She developed the creative writing program at Linfield College where she taught until retiring as Professor Emerita in 2007.

---

### **Reading Joy Williams, led by Sallie Tisdale**

Four sessions, Spring 2017, 10 to 1  
Friends Meeting House

Joy Williams has written four novels, five short story collections, and two books of nonfiction. Williams is one of the rare writers whose voice is commanding in several genres. Her stated desire is to make literature “dangerous” again, with the power to “awaken and change us,” to describe the “the mysterious, undeserved beauty of the world.” This beauty, Williams believes, lives behind the “heat, the recklessness and ruthlessness, the grotesqueries and cruelties” of American experience. American writers, she believes, “must reflect the sprawl and smallness of America.”

She has been nominated for a National Book Award, Pulitzer Prize, and National Book Critics Circle Award for Criticism. In 2016, she received the PEN/Malamud Award for Excellence in the Short Story.

At 72, Williams has never owned a computer, does not have a television, and writes on one of her seven Smith-Corona typewriters. She has had only two jobs in her life: a brief stint as a waitress when she was at the Iowa Writers Workshop, and researching shark attacks for the Navy for a time. Only one of her books sold well—a tourist’s guide to the Florida Keys that is supremely scornful of tourism. Williams is on the road almost all the time, driving in an old Bronco with her two dogs on an endless pilgrimage from Arizona to Maine to Wyoming, seeking the deep solitude and isolation she requires for writing.

She believes that each form has its own tale to tell; that short stories should “touch people on a deeper level, a deeper, stranger level” than they often do. Her characters are filled with longing; their mistakes are often big ones. “Many of my figures seek something that cannot be found.”

This group will examine two of Williams’ books, the recent retrospective collection of her short stories called *The Visiting Privilege* and a bracing book of essays about environmental topics called *Ill Nature*.

**Sallie Tisdale** is the author of eight books of nonfiction, including the recent collection of essays, *Violation*. She has taught essay and memoir in a variety of settings. <http://sallietisdale.com>

---

### **Reading Jane Austen, led by Annie Lighthart**

Four sessions, 10 to 1, Fall 2016  
TaborSpace

“Perhaps we shouldn’t find Jane Austen’s novels as fascinating as we do: people from another era sit quietly and talk. They politely drink tea. Characters take uneventful walks to neighboring towns. Yet the tensions, passions, and histories in that world of small gestures make the novels of Austen complex, astute, and, in a word, irresistible. This study group will look at four of Austen’s enduring novels: *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*.

“We’ll consider the questions Austen’s work raises, especially her recurring and timely inquiry into whether the heart and mind stand a chance in a world dominated by status and money.

Participants are asked to read one novel per session and join in a relaxed and friendly discussion. Since Austen's characters valued good conversation over tea or a meal, we will too: please feel free to bring your lunch or pick up a cup of tea at the TaborSpace café.

Whether you are new to Austen's work or a long-time fan, a reader looking to immerse herself in another world or a writer hoping to gain new insights from a past master, this study group welcomes you."

**Annie Lighthart** is a writer, teacher, and the author of the poetry collection *Iron String*. Her work has been read by Garrison Keillor on *The Writer's Almanac* and chosen by Naomi Shihab Nye to be placed in Ireland's Galway University Hospitals as part of their *Poems for Patience* project. She has taught at Boston College, with Portland's Mountain Writers, and with community groups of all ages.

---

---

### **Reading Leslie Marmon Silko, led by Janice Gould**

The weekend of November 4-6, 2016

Friends Meeting House

We'll focus on Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony*, supplemented by her book of essays, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*. Contemporary Native American written literature is often beholden to tribal oral traditions. Silko's masterpiece, *Ceremony*, is a case in point. Drawing on stories and concepts from both Pueblo and Navajo sources, and using the modernist device of the novel, Silko crafts a complex tale about the power and endurance of ceremony. We will explore this novel's themes and structure. Is *Ceremony* a novel about identity? Is it an anti-war novel? Is it an ecological argument, a plea for the environment? Is *Ceremony* still a relevant piece of fiction? Silko's first book of essays, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* provides us with some details about Silko's life and helps us understand some of her thoughts as a writer, and as a mixed-blood woman of Native American (Laguna Pueblo) descent.

**Janice Gould** is a poet and writer of Native American (Koyoonk'auwi) descent: "Silko was one of the first Native American authors I read, after reading N. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *House Made of Dawn*. Silko's short stories were familiar and approachable, contemporaneous. With humor and pathos, she draws a picture of Native American village life—of extended families, day-to-day work and activities, the importance of the natural world, and the presence of the oral tradition—stories and gossip, songs and prayers. While I grew up in California and not in New Mexico, I could still appreciate Silko's sense of connection to place, and especially to the arid, rural landscape of her homeland. Silko's novel *Ceremony* spoke to me powerfully; I read it while my mother was dying of cancer. It seemed to express the feelings of anomie, loss, and disorientation I felt during that time as I cared for my mother, and yet the message of love and connection permeated the novel too, and gave me solace. For this, and for other reasons, I have always loved this work."

---

---

### **Sappho and her Sisters: Greek and Roman Women Poets, led by Paul Merchant**

Three Saturdays in June, 2016 from 9:30 to 2:30

TaborSpace

The Greek poet Sappho and the Roman poet Sulpicia are the only women poets of the classical period whose work survives in any appreciable quantity. (A small handful of others are known to us in even more fragmentary form.) Sappho and Sulpicia are interesting to compare, since they are both writers of startling inventiveness and vivid personality. They are also, for modern readers and writers, valuable reminders of a lost world of women's writing that now has to be reimagined, and in their different ways can be an inspiration for courage and honesty in our own writing lives.

*From Paul Merchant's proposal:* My original degree at Cambridge was in Classics, and my main interest was in poetry, so I've been a devotee of Sappho's poetry for more than fifty years. I've also translated a good deal of Catullus, and have always wondered whether his friend Clodia, whom he called Lesbia, was a poet. More recently I've been translating Horace, who must surely have known the only Roman woman poet whose work survives, Sulpicia. I enjoy the thought of comparing two women poets, Sappho and Sulpicia, who are both so daring and outspoken.

---

---

### **Reading the Poetry of Maxine Kumin, led by Andrea Hollander and Judith Barrington**

Four Saturdays in January of 2016, from 10 to 1

TaborSpace

Maxine Kumin (1925 - 2014) is one of the great poets of our time. Winner of the Pulitzer and Ruth Lilly Poetry Prizes among many others, and Poet Laureate of the United States, she produced a large body of work which was very important to Andrea Hollander and Judith Barrington, both of whom also knew her personally.

*From Judith and Andrea's proposal:* "Each session will focus on a few poems, all of which can be found in *Where I Live: New and Selected Poems*. You will be expected to read the poems ahead of time and participate in discussion about them. It will be a relaxed atmosphere, with participants encouraged to bring their lunch, to make it easier to fit in on a Saturday. The study group welcomes both readers and writers, those who already know Kumin's work well, those who would like to become better acquainted with it, and those for whom the study group will be an introduction to her work."

---

---

### **Reading the Poetry of Sylvia Plath, led by Kate Gray**

Four sessions: October, 2015 to February, 2016, from 6:30 to 8

Friends Meeting House

This study group began on Plath's birthday and ended on the date of her death. The group read and discussed the 25 poems from *Ariel* that Plath wrote in the last four months of her life, the same four-month span of the study group.

*From Kate Gray's proposal:* "Since I was 16 years old, I've explored the work of Sylvia Plath. When *Letters Home* was published, my mother dropped a copy on my desk and told me to read the letter written when Plath attended my aunt's debutante party at my grandparents' home. Plath and my aunt were dorm-mates at Smith College. For me, Plath is personal. In the past 15 years I have attended conferences on Plath, written drafts of a novel about her, put on the white gloves and touched drafts of "Daddy" and the calendar she used the last year of her life and more. I've met her roommate at Haven House and the last person to see her alive. I'm currently in the thick

of writing the novel with her as one of the point-of-view characters. My contention is that the media image of Plath is way too narrow and sensationalized, and I hope that through the study of her, we can experience her joy and brilliance, her growing pains as a young woman, and her drive.

## Events

### **Women Writers in Discussion: a Quarterly Series**

Organizer and moderator: Elisa Saphier  
Another Read Through Bookstore, Portland

Soapstone has funded the first two in this series.

Saturday April 16, from 1:30-3, a discussion with Ellen Urbani, Rene Denfeld, and Karen Karbo about "flawed" women characters, and finding strength in both adversity and imperfection.

Saturday June 25, from 1:30-3, a discussion with Liz Prato, Margaret Malone, and Monica Drake focusing on "unlikeable" female characters and publishers', reviewers', and readers' reactions to them.

---

### **Queen of the Night An Evening with Shirley Jackson**

Organized by Karen Munro  
October 28, 2015, 6 to 8  
Glyph Café and Art Space, Portland

This free public reading celebrated the work of Shirley Jackson, who wrote the classic short story "The Lottery" as well as several novels and many short stories from the 1940s through the 1960s. Jackson was known both for her uncanny and chilling fiction, as well as her humorous family memoirs. The event celebrated her at a moment when she is receiving renewed interest and reputation, with a new posthumous collection out in 2015 and a new biography in 2016.

Readers Leni Zumas, Lara Messersmith-Glavin, and Jemiah Jefferson read three of Jackson's short stories for a full house audience. Zumas read "The Beautiful Stranger," Messersmith-Glavin read "The Witch," and Jefferson read "The Lottery." Colleen Burner, co-publisher of Shirley literary magazine (<http://www.shirleymag.com/>) provided raffle prizes including chapbooks of some of the magazine's stories. Design work for promotional materials was by Amanda Morgan. The evening finished with a mock "stoning," with audience members tossing balled tissue paper "stones" at raffle prize winners on the stage.

*From Karen Munro's evaluation:* "We promoted the evening primarily via a Facebook Event, to which 160 Facebook users were invited. (Public events allow invitees to invite their own friends.) We also sent an event description and the Facebook URL to Portland's literary calendars, including Swamp Lit and The Rumpus's "Notable Portland" feature. We shared free listings with the free weekly websites, although this wasn't as effective as we had hoped.

We posted regularly to the Facebook Event page in order to keep it showing up in people's feeds,

and generally noticed an increase in "likes" and "going" responses after each post. We would recommend that future events also use Facebook, and try to target "influencer" people in the Portland literary community who can help spread the word."

*Before we started this program formally we provided funding for two events:*

**A Memorial Reading for Adrienne Rich**, organized by Katharine Salzmann, was held at the Unitarian Church in May of 2012. Beautiful banners of some of Rich's poems graced the room along with flowers. Several hundred came for the program in which people who knew Rich were invited to read a poem of hers and talk about her. An open-mic followed for audience members to read their favorite Rich poem.

**A Birthday Party on What Would Have Been Grace Paley's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday**, organized by Judith Arcana was held at the Clinton Street Theatre December 11, 2012. A documentary film of Grace's life was shown, invited presenters read from her prose, poetry and nonfiction, and a birthday cake was enjoyed by a packed audience.

It was these events, in part, that propelled us along the path we are now on, supporting independent events and study groups that celebrate women writers. All events are offered free of charge. A small fee is charged for the study groups. Since the grant program was announced and proposals solicited, we have funded the following.

### **International Women's Day Celebrations**

Starting in 2015, Soapstone has sponsored a reading by women of both their own work and the work of feminist poets from the past. The Soapstone Board appoints an organizer and she is given a budget and asked to design and organize the event.

### **International Women's Day 2018 / Celebrating Women's Voices**

***An Afternoon of Antidotes to Despair* : Leanne Grabel and Selam Getu**

Saturday, March 10, 3 p.m.  
Pacific Crest Community School  
112 NE 28<sup>th</sup>

This International Women's Day afternoon event sponsored by **Soapstone**, will feature the powerful performance poetry of **Selam Getu**, a 16-year-old Jefferson High School student, and veteran performance poet **Leanne Grabel**.

Challenged to create new work throughout the month of January, the two poets will experiment with interweaving their words, as well as presenting solo poetic commentary on these trying times in America. Known for her poetry-based theatrical performances over the years (*The Lighter Side of Chronic Depression*, *Anger: The Musical*, *The Little Poet*, *Badgirls*, etc.), Grabel mixes humor, grief, outrage, adoration and keyboard beats to enhance her presentations that stare bravely and nakedly at life, death, chronic outrage, new grandbabies and escape from this dark reality. Getu states that her hope is "to one day publish books for all of the everyday black girls



like me who oftentimes don't see themselves reflected in the pages they read." There will be snacks!

---

**International Women's Day 2017 / "Our Foremothers' Voices"**

Organized, devised and directed by Kathleen Worley

March 4, 2017, 2 to 4

First Unitarian Church

*Readers:* Judith Arcana, Diane Olson Dieter, Michelle Fujii, Robin Amy Gordon, Michele M. Mariana, Emma Oliver, Jamie M. Rea, Ithaca Tell, Kathleen Worley

*Writers:* Susan B. Anthony, Gloria Anzaldua, Lucille Clifton, Maria Irene Fornes, Judy Grahn, Susan Griffin, Tillie Olsen, Grace Paley, Pat Parker, Adrienne Rich, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others.

---

**International Women's Day 2016**

Organized and introduced by Brittney Corrigan McElroy

March 6, 2016, 3 to 5

Concordia University in the George R. White Library

Brittney handpicked a diverse group of six poets to read: Leanne Gabel, Kate Gray, Brandi Katherine Herrera, Kaia Sand, Annie Lighthart, Wendy Willis, each of whom read a poem by a "foremother" and their own work. Light refreshments. Co-sponsored by Concordia University.

---

**International Women's Day 2015 / "Of Course I'm a Feminist!"**

Organized and introduced by Ellen Goldberg

March 8, 2015, 6 to 8

TaborSpace

A standing room only crowd, approximately 120 women and men, came to hear 18 women each read a poem of her own. The readers were chosen by Ellen after a call for anonymous submissions. Ellen gave a wonderful introduction which included excerpts from many important poems from the past forty years with a slide show of photos of feminist poets, present and past. Cookies in the shape of the Women's Liberation symbol were served during the intermission (and books from the readers were sold). The event ended with a surprise singing of Bread and Roses (lyrics supplied to the audience in the program) led by Izetta Smith. Readers were: Judith Arcana, Elise Kuechle, Brittney Corrigan, Carlyn Syvanen, Penelope Schott, Pam Crow, Francis Payne Adler, Marilyn Stablein, Ila Suzanne Gray, Linda Ferguson, Gail Barker, Tricia Knoll, Carter McKenzie, Andrea Hollander, Emily Carr, Shawn Aveningo, and Sharon Wood Wortman. Judith Barrington read at Ellen's request.

*From the program:* "Feminist poetry readings have a long history in Portland going back to the mid-seventies at the YWCA. They were mobbed and thrumming with energy—we were all hungry for the new poetry about our lives, our "wild impatience," our secrets. Poetry nurtured and inspired us, prodded and affirmed us. It was a central part of the Second Wave. Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Judy Grahn and the brave new voices who stood in front of us and read—all their work was crucial to each of us personally, and in significant ways, it was the heart of the

movement. Ellen Goldberg has been writing and reading her poems and supporting women writers since those heady days. She has organized this reading to launch Soapstone's new program of grants celebrating women writers."