








North Carolina  
**humanities**

**NORTH CAROLINA  
READS**

Program  
Guide  
2025

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# WELCOME

# I

Thank you for participating in **North Carolina Reads**, North Carolina Humanities' statewide book club in 2025!

North Carolina Reads is North Carolina Humanities' award-winning, virtual, statewide book club! North Carolina Reads annually features five books that explore the history and culture of North Carolina, and topics including race, gender, and society. The people, places, and events in the books offer an opportunity to reflect on how people can contribute to shaping their communities. North Carolina Humanities hopes these stories encourage conversation, camaraderie, and community among participants.

At the heart of North Carolina Reads is North Carolina Humanities' desire to connect communities through shared reading experiences. Reading is vitally important because it nourishes and helps develop our critical-thinking skills, strengthens our minds, expands vocabulary, elevates mental health, and creates opportunities to explore different perspectives.

As part of North Carolina Reads, North Carolina Humanities has distributed free books and reading resources to readers and book groups across North Carolina.

Beyond reading the books individually or communally, North Carolina Humanities strongly encourages groups to create plans and host reading programs, book discussions, or other North Carolina Reads-related events within their communities to further the impact of the content of each book and create opportunities to gather, discuss, listen, and learn.

In the pages of this guide, you will find a variety of ideas and suggestions to energize your plan for a North Carolina Reads book discussion for your own community. For text-dependent questions, please use our companion Reading Schedule and Discussion Questions Guide.

Happy reading!

# 2025 PROGRAM

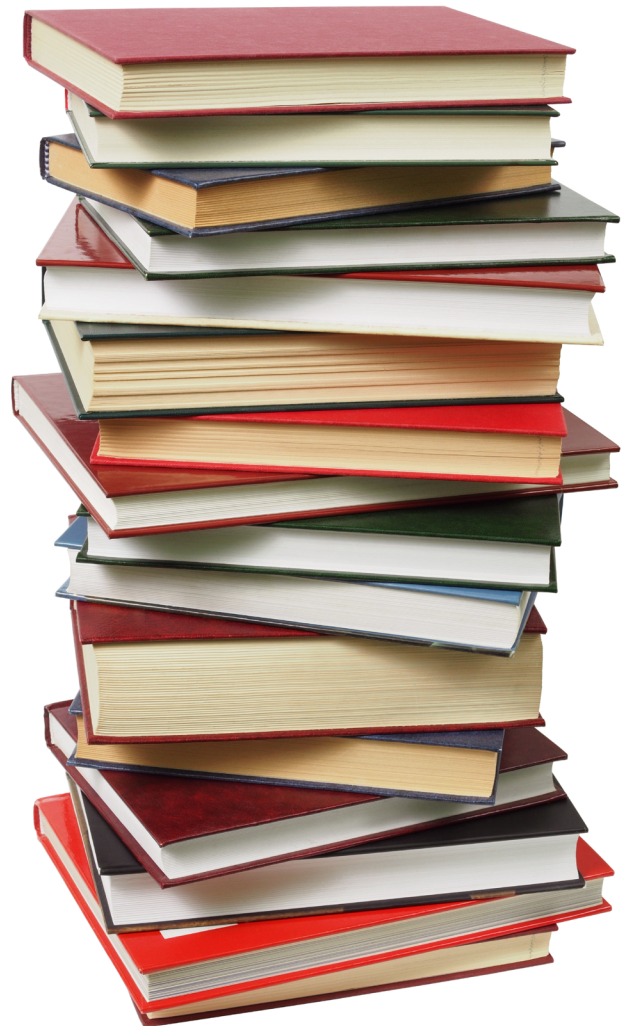
Throughout 2025, North Carolina Humanities is supporting groups across the state to read and create programs inspired by the North Carolina Reads book series.

Using the books and other resources provided by North Carolina Humanities (NC Humanities), your group will:

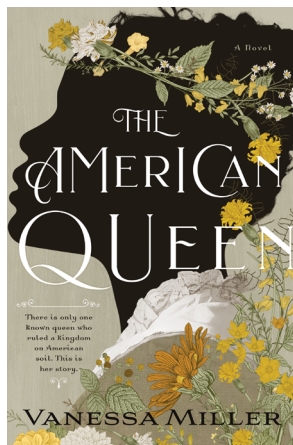
- Distribute the books received from NC Humanities to participants in your community.
- Implement group readings of one or more of the selected titles in their entirety. Each group will determine and plan whether participants will read individually or communally.
- Implement one book discussion or one community book event. Please note, reading events can be held in virtual or in-person formats as best suits each reader community's needs.

Each community's programs may vary depending on selected book(s) and book event formats preferred by each group.

NC Humanities encourages everyone to share their North Carolina Reads story! Please engage with us on social media @NCHumanities and complete the feedback and final survey, found at [nchumanities.org](https://www.nchumanities.org).



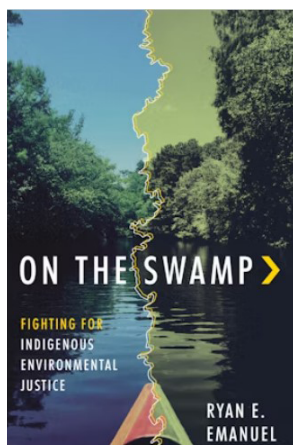
## 2025 North Carolina Reads Books



**FEBRUARY 2025**

### ***THE AMERICAN QUEEN*** **BY VANESSA MILLER**

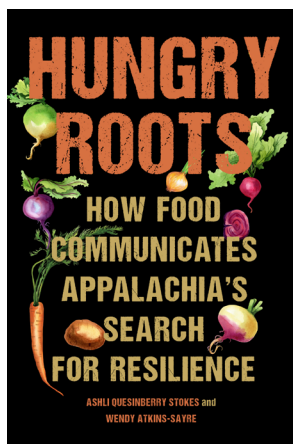
**Fiction.** Meet the queen of Happy Land. Transformative and breathtakingly honest, *The American Queen* is based on actual events that occurred between 1865-1889 and shares the unsung history of a Black woman who built a kingdom in Appalachia as a refuge for the courageous people who dared to dream of a different way of life. When the honorable Reverend William finally listens to Louella's pleas and leads the formerly enslaved people out of their plantation, Louella begins to feel hope. Soon, William and Louella become the appointed king and queen of their self-proclaimed Kingdom of the Happy Land. And though they are still surrounded by opposition, they continue to share a message of joy and goodness — and fight for the freedom and dignity of all.



**MARCH 2025**

### ***ON THE SWAMP: FIGHTING FOR INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE*** **BY RYAN E. EMANUEL**

**Nonfiction.** Environmental scientist Ryan E. Emanuel, a member of the Lumbee tribe, shares stories from North Carolina about Indigenous survival and resilience in the face of radical environmental changes. Addressing issues from the loss of wetlands to the arrival of gas pipelines, these stories connect the dots between historic patterns of Indigenous oppression and present-day efforts to promote environmental justice and Indigenous rights on the swamp. Emanuel's scientific insight and deeply personal connections to his home blend together in a book that is both a heartfelt and an analytical call to acknowledge and protect sacred places.



**APRIL 2025**

### ***HUNGRY ROOTS: HOW FOOD COMMUNICATES APPALACHIA'S SEARCH FOR RESILIENCE*** **BY ASHLI QUESINBERRY STOKES and WENDY ATKINS-SAYRE**

**Nonfiction.** Depictions of Appalachian food culture and practices often romanticize people in the region as good, simple, and, often, White. These stereotypes are harmful to the actual people they are meant to describe as well as to those they exclude. In *Hungry Roots: How Food Communicates Appalachia's Search for Resilience*, Ashli Quesinberry Stokes and Wendy Atkins-Sayre tell a more complicated story. The authors embark on a cultural

tour through food and drinking establishments to investigate regional resilience in and through the plurality of traditions and communities that form the foodways of Southern Appalachia.

MAY 2025

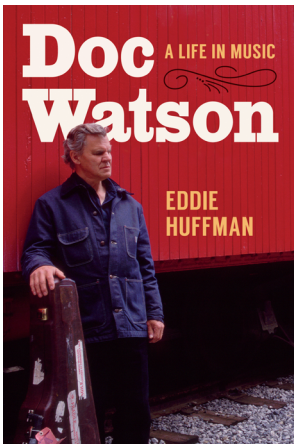
**THE GIRLS WE SENT AWAY**  
**BY MEAGAN CHURCH**



**Fiction.** It's the 1960s and Lorraine Delford has it all — an upstanding family, a perfect boyfriend, and a white picket fence home in North Carolina. Yet every time she looks through her father's telescope, she dreams of the stars. But when this darling girl-next-door gets pregnant, she's forced to learn firsthand the realities that keep women grounded. To hide their daughter's secret shame, the Delfords send Lorraine to a maternity home for wayward girls. But this is no safe haven — it's a house with dark secrets and suffocating rules. And as Lorraine begins to piece together a new vision for her life, she must decide if she has the power to fight for the future she wants or if she must submit to the rules of a society she once admired.

JUNE 2025

**DOC WATSON: A LIFE IN MUSIC**  
**BY EDDIE HUFFMAN**



**Nonfiction.** A musician's musician, Doc grew up on a subsistence farm in the North Carolina mountains during the Depression, soaking up traditional music and learning to play guitar even though he was blind. Rising to fame in the 1960s as part of the burgeoning folk revival scene, Doc became the face of traditional music for many listeners, racking up multiple Grammys and releasing dozens of albums over the course of his long career. Eddie Huffman tells the story of Doc's life and legacy, drawing on extensive interviews and hundreds of hours of archival research. Full of fascinating stories — from Doc's first banjo made from his grandmother's cat to the founding of MerleFest — this promises to be the definitive biography of the man and how he came to be synonymous with roots music in America and shows how his influence is still felt in music today.

*\*Book descriptions from publishers*

# PLANNING AN EVENT

## III

Consider planning group book discussions to explore themes, share perspectives, and present new views.

### Timing

Plan 60-90 minutes for each book discussion, just long enough to get into it, but short enough to hold everyone's attention. Discussions on virtual platforms may run shorter in length than in-person discussions.

### Sample Outline

#### **Introductions:** 5-10 minutes

The facilitator should introduce themselves by name and ask all participants to do the same. Keep introductions short to save the greater amount of time for book discussions.

#### **Discussion:** 45-60 minutes

Plan to have 10-15 questions ready to encourage discussions. Carefully consider your first question as it will set the tone for the discussion. Sample questions can be found on the following pages.

#### **Break:** 5-10 minutes

Typically used during an in-person discussion, allow participants 5-10 minutes to stretch, access bathrooms, or recharge with some refreshments.

#### **Conclusion:** 5-10 minutes

Thank participants for engaging with each other, sharing viewpoints, and considering new perspectives.

# FACILITATING

Tips to help prepare for leading discussions.

## Set Guidelines

At the start of all discussions it is important to set guidelines. Here are some important ones:

1. All perspectives are valued, and the view of everyone in the room is important.
2. Share personal experiences rather than general statements about groups of people.
3. It is okay to respectfully disagree.

## Navigating Challenges

Consider the following:

- Help control interruptions by asking the participant to “hold that thought so we can hear it again once X is finished speaking.”
- Ensure that each participant wishing to speak is heard. Use these types of phrases: “That’s an interesting point. Did anyone else feel the same or differently? Let’s hear from another reader.”
- Help reduce comments “wandering off topic” by reminding participants to focus on specific book content and ideas, not other people/issues. Offer calming remarks to defuse and get back on track by saying, “Let’s get back to the end of chapter X. What were your thoughts at this point?” or inject: “I wonder about page # and what’s really going on there?”
- Help hesitant participants by asking their likes/dislikes about each book being discussed. Even if they did not finish reading a book, they could still respond to this question.
- Every few minutes, scan the room for verbal and nonverbal cues: Do people appear to be comfortable in this setting? Are there shy people who look like they want to talk but just need to be asked?
- Avoid pressing your personal thoughts/opinions even when asked. The facilitator’s role is to facilitate conversations surrounding and exploring each book. Always guide discussions toward and back to participants.





## Asking Questions

Always ask open-ended questions that can be answered in a variety of ways. These question types often begin with: who, how, what, when, where. Select specific moments or quotes from the book to ground the discussion, but avoid questions that require a lot of background information.

Tie your first question to a major theme or idea you'll explore in the rest of the discussion, or start with a question based in the text. Pick an interesting quote or scene, read it together, then introduce other questions.

Ask a mix of interpretative and evaluative questions.

**Interpretative:** questions about the meaning of the text

- Why did this character do X?
- What did this character mean when they said Y?

**Evaluative:** questions that explore values and implications

- Is this character responsible for their actions?

*Sample questions can be found on the following page.*

## Finding a Facilitator

Great discussions start with facilitators. If feasible, consider having a professional facilitator for each book discussion.

Each facilitator should have great listening skills and readily make others feel comfortable to contribute to and talk about ideas. Facilitators should understand your goals for the discussion and commit to using the guidelines in this program guide.

When not using an in-house facilitator, it is recommended to recruit a local humanities or literary expert to facilitate each discussion. You could try to recruit English department faculty at nearby colleges or universities, or reach out to local librarians.

Since it takes a considerable amount of time and work to read, plan, and lead each discussion, it is recommended that facilitators be paid. How much to pay facilitators is up to each group. A standard range for facilitation is typically \$100 to \$150 per discussion session. Make sure to track expenses using the form on page 13.

## Sample Questions

These questions are the focal point of North Carolina Reads. You can shape your book discussion or book event around a few of these questions. The questions below do not have a “correct” answer but instead are large, overarching questions at the heart of the important issues raised in these books. Please find text-dependent questions for each book in our separate Reading Schedule and Discussion Questions Guide.

- How are people transformed through their relationships with others?
- How do people make decisions about their economic livelihood?
- Why is music an integral part of the human experience?
- How does society express gender expectations, and how are they met or challenged?
- How have gender and women’s roles changed over time and how might they relate to political and social events?
- What are the responsibilities of an individual regarding issues of social justice?
- How can literature serve as a vehicle for social change?
- How can musicians serve as cultural ambassadors?
- How do culture and music intersect?
- How does food reflect history, geography, and social structure?
- How can understanding foodways help bridge cultural gaps and promote understanding?
- How are environmental issues related to societal inequalities?
- How can individuals and communities advocate for environmental justice?
- What defines a community? How do historical events shape a community’s identity?





# PROGRAM CREDITS

Find a full list of general communication guidelines, tips, and more at [NCHumanities.org](https://www.nchumanities.org).

## Description

**When describing North Carolina Reads, please use the standard description:**

North Carolina Humanities' North Carolina Reads statewide book club explores the history and culture of North Carolina, and topics including race, gender, and society. North Carolina Humanities is a statewide nonprofit and affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions, opinions, or recommendations expressed do not necessarily represent those of North Carolina Humanities or the National Endowment for the Humanities.

## Crediting

North Carolina Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities must be acknowledged as sponsors.

Please use the following credit lines, the North Carolina Humanities logo, and the National Endowment for the Humanities logo on anything produced. Logos may be no smaller than 5 points and may be accessed from the [press kit](#) on our website.

### PRINT / SIGNAGE / WEBSITES

*"This [program/book event/discussion] is supported by North Carolina Humanities, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, [nchumanities.org](https://www.nchumanities.org)."*

### PROGRAMS / PUBLIC GATHERINGS

*"This [program/book event/discussion] is part of North Carolina Humanities' statewide book club, North Carolina Reads. North Carolina Reads was created by North Carolina Humanities and is funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Learn more at [nchumanities.org](https://www.nchumanities.org)."*

### BOOK TITLES

Book titles should always be italicized when talking about the actual book (unless in a press release which follows AP style). Book descriptions can be found on page 3.

# RESOURCES

One-click access to additional information

## Authors (In alphabetical order)

- Meagan Church: [www.meaganchurch.com](http://www.meaganchurch.com)
- Ryan E. Emanuel: [www.ryanemanuel.com](http://www.ryanemanuel.com)
- Eddie Huffman: [www.huffmaneddie.com](http://www.huffmaneddie.com)
- Vanessa Miller: [www.vanessamiller.com](http://www.vanessamiller.com)
- Ashli Quesinberry Stokes and Wendy Atkins-Sayre: [www.uscpres.com/Hungry-Roots](http://www.uscpres.com/Hungry-Roots)

## About North Carolina Humanities

North Carolina Humanities is a statewide nonprofit and affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Through public humanities programs and grantmaking, NC Humanities connects North Carolinians with cultural experiences that spur dialogue, deepen human connections, and inspire community. Learn more at [nchumanities.org](http://nchumanities.org).

## About National Endowment for the Humanities

Created in 1965 as an independent federal agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities is one of the largest funders of humanities programs in the United States. Additional information about the National Endowment for the Humanities and its grant programs is available at [neh.gov](http://neh.gov).

## About the NC Center for the Book

The North Carolina Center for the Book is a collection of North Carolina Humanities' literature and reading programs. Using a variety of formats and initiatives, North Carolina Center for the Book literary programs celebrate and promote the vital importance of books, reading, libraries, and North Carolina's literary heritage. The North Carolina Center for the Book, [nchumanities.org](http://nchumanities.org), is the state affiliate of the National Center for the Book in the Library of Congress and is supported in part by the State Library of North Carolina, [statelibrary.ncdcr.gov](http://statelibrary.ncdcr.gov).



# COST SHARE REPORT

Thank you for the time and effort you took to help host a North Carolina Reads book program!

North Carolina Humanities ensures free access to public humanities programs. We would not be able to do this without the generous contributions and documentation of cost share from our local program partners like you. Below, please see how to track these cost-share contributions.

In your final North Carolina Reads survey, you will be asked to show the expenses for this project as contributed by your group. Expenses can be contributed in two ways: cash and in-kind. Please capture the total for each expense type.

Expense Type	Cash	In-Kind
Value of Volunteer or Administrative Time	\$	\$
Value of Venue Space	\$	\$
Printing, Publicity, and Advertising	\$	\$
Refreshments	\$	\$
Facilitator Honorarium (book discussion event)	\$	\$
Other	\$	\$
Cash and In-Kind Totals	\$	\$
<b>Total Amount Contributed</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>

\_\_\_\_\_  
Host Coordinator or Authorized Personnel Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

On this form, “**Cash**” means a contribution by your group by paying for publicity, printing, refreshments, facilitator honorarium, paid staff time etc. Cash contributions are the “out-of-pocket” expenses. “**In-Kind**” means a contribution by your group in a form other than money or for a service that is donated. This can include, but is not limited to, the value of the space or venue provided; materials and equipment provided; and volunteer time spent distributing books, planning an event, and implementing an event. If you have questions, please call our office at (704) 687-1520.

North Carolina Humanities is a statewide nonprofit and affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Any views, findings, conclusions, opinions, or recommendations expressed in these books, by our partners, and by participants do not necessarily represent those of North Carolina Humanities or the National Endowment for the Humanities. This guide may be used with permission from North Carolina Humanities.

Please note that selected books are intended for readers 18 years of age and over, and may not be suitable for some audiences.

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