










North Carolina
humanities

**NORTH CAROLINA
READS**

Program
Guide
2026

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WELCOME

I

Thank you for participating in North Carolina Humanities' 2026 **North Carolina Reads**, statewide book club!

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. 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 distributes book support and reading resources to readers across North Carolina.

Beyond reading the books individually or communally, North Carolina Humanities requires groups receiving book resource support to host reading programs, book discussions, or other North Carolina Reads-related events within their communities to further the impact of the books 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!

2026 PROGRAM

Throughout 2026, 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 NC Humanities, your group will:

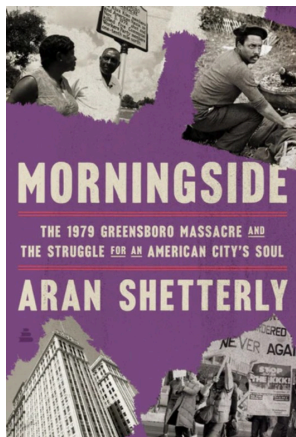
- Distribute the books received with support from NC Humanities to participants in your community.
- Implement group readings of one or more of the selected titles in their entirety. Each group will determine and plan whether participants will read individually or communally.
- Implement at least one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



2026 North Carolina Reads Books



FEBRUARY 2026

***MORNINGSIDE: THE 1979 GREENSBORO MASSACRE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR AN AMERICAN CITY'S SOUL* BY ARAN SHETTERLY**

Nonfiction. On November 3, 1979, as activist Nelson Johnson assembled people for a march adjacent to Morningside Homes in Greensboro, North Carolina, gunshots rang out. A caravan of Klansmen and Neo-Nazis sped from the scene, leaving behind five dead. Known as the “Greensboro Massacre,” the event and its aftermath encapsulate the racial conflict, economic anxiety, clash of ideologies, and toxic mix of corruption and conspiracy that roiled American democracy then—and threaten it today. In 88 seconds, one Southern city shattered over irreconcilable visions of America’s past and future. When the shooters are acquitted in the courts, Reverend Johnson, his wife Joyce, and their allies, at odds with the police and the Greensboro establishment, sought alternative forms of justice. As the Johnsons rebuilt their lives after 1979, they found inspiration in Nelson Mandela’s post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Martin Luther King Jr’s concept of Beloved Community and insist that only by facing history’s hardest truths can healing come to the city they refuse to give up on. This intimate, deeply researched, and heart-stopping account draws upon survivor interviews, court documents, and the files from one of the largest investigations in FBI history. The persistent mysteries of the case touch deep cultural insecurities and contradictions about race and class. A quintessentially American story, *Morningside* explores the courage required to make change and the evolving pursuit of a more inclusive and equal future.



MARCH 2026

***DAUGHTERS OF GREEN MOUNTAIN GAP* BY TERI M. BROWN**

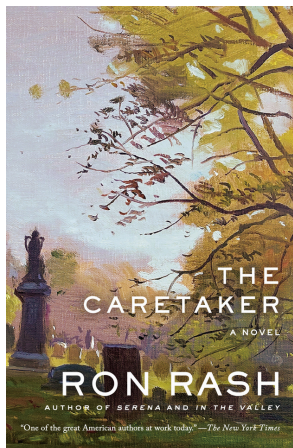
Fiction. An Appalachian granny woman. A daughter on a crusade. A granddaughter caught between the two. Maggie McCoury, a generational healer woman, relies on family traditions, folklore, and beliefs gleaned from a local Cherokee tribe. Her daughter, Carrie Ann, believes her university training holds the answers. As they clash over the use of roots, herbs, and a dash of mountain magic versus the medicine available in the town’s apothecary, Josie Mae doesn’t know whom to follow. But what happens when neither family traditions nor science can save the ones you love most? *Daughters of Green Mountain Gap* weaves a compelling tale of Maggie, Carrie Ann, and Josie Mae, three generations of remarkable North Carolina women living at the turn of the twentieth century, shedding light on racism, fear of change, loss of traditions, and the intricate dynamics within a family. Author Teri M. Brown skillfully navigates the complexities of their lives, revealing that some questions are not as easy to answer as one might think.



APRIL 2026

***THE DEVIL'S DONE COME BACK: NEW GHOST TALES FROM NORTH CAROLINA* EDITED BY ED SOUTHERN**

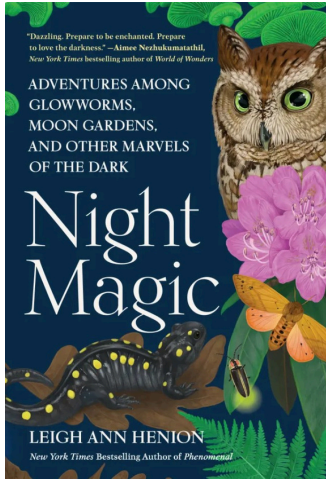
Fiction. North Carolina ain't what it once was: forests and fields have given way to suburbs and vacation homes, textile mills to high tech, tobacco farms to tourism. That doesn't mean, though, that the ghosts of the Old North State have gone away. In this anthology, readers might glimpse some of the ghostly apparitions, headless fiends, and creepy hollers they heard about around their childhood campfires. Now, fifteen of the state's finest contemporary prose writers and poets have reimagined these stories—bringing us fresh tales that are bound to scare the living daylights out of us all over again. Contributors include: Michele Tracy Berger on the ghosts of the Great Dismal Swamp, Wiley Cash (and his daughters) on the Maco Light, Annette Saunooke Clapsaddle on the Raven Mockers, Tyree Daye on family hauntings, Jeremy B. Jones on the phantasms of Chimney Rock, Ed Southern on the Jack Tales and the Devil's Tramping Ground, Ross White on the Little Red Man of Old Salem, and many more. *The Devil's Done Come Back* reclaims these old ghost tales as living stories, told and re-told to frighten and delight.



MAY 2026

***THE CARETAKER* BY RON RASH**

Fiction. It's 1951 in Blowing Rock, North Carolina. Blackburn Gant, his life irrevocably altered by a childhood case of polio, seems condemned to spend his life among the dead as the sole caretaker of a hilltop cemetery. It suits his withdrawn personality, and the inexplicable occurrences that happen from time to time rattle him less than interaction with the living. But when his best and only friend, the kind but impulsive Jacob Hampton, is conscripted to serve overseas, Blackburn is charged with caring for Jacob's wife, Naomi, as well. Sixteen-year-old Naomi Clarke is an outcast in Blowing Rock, an outsider, poor and uneducated, who works as a seasonal maid in the town's most elegant hotel. When Naomi eloped with Jacob a few months after her arrival, the marriage scandalized the community, most of all his wealthy parents who disinherited him. Shunned by the townsfolk for their differences and equally fearful that Jacob may never come home, Blackburn and Naomi grow closer and closer until a shattering development derails numerous lives. A tender examination of male friendship and rivalry as well as a riveting, page-turning novel of familial devotion, *The Caretaker* brilliantly depicts the human capacity for delusion and destruction all too often justified as acts of love.



JUNE 2026

NIGHT MAGIC: ADVENTURES AMONG GLOWWORMS, MOON GARDENS, AND OTHER MARVELS OF THE DARK
BY LEIGH ANN HENION

Nonfiction. *Night Magic* is a glorious celebration of the dark! New York Times bestselling nature writer Leigh Ann Henion makes the case for embracing night as a profoundly beautiful part of the world we inhabit—and she invites us to leave our well-lit homes and step outside. It turns out we don't have to go far to find marvels: We are surrounded by animals that rise with the moon, gigantic moths, and nocturnal blooms that reveal themselves, incrementally, as light fades. In her quest to know night with greater intimacy, Henion travels through forests alight with bioluminescent mushrooms and mountain valleys teeming with migratory salamanders. She ventures into the dark alongside naturalists, biologists, primitive-skills experts, and others who've dedicated their lives to cultivating relationships with darkness and the creatures who depend on it. In this age of increasing artificial light, *Night Magic* is an invitation to focus on the biodiversity that surrounds us. We do not need to stargaze into the distant cosmos or to dive into the depths of oceans to find awe in the dark—when we reclaim night, dazzling wonders can be found in our own backyards.

Book descriptions from publishers

PLANNING AN EVENT

III

Plan 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.

IV

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 “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 share their own 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 “correct” answers 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?




What are the responsibilities of an individual regarding issues of social justice?




How can literature serve as a vehicle for social change?




How have gender and women’s roles changed over time and how might they relate to political and social events?




How does society express gender expectations, and how are they met or challenged?




What roles did different cultural influences play in shaping Appalachian healing practices?




How does conflict influence a character’s decisions and actions?




How is folklore used to define and preserve cultural identity?




What defines a community? How do historical events shape a community’s identity?



How do ghost stories incorporate local history and geography?



What is our role in preserving natural darkness and protecting nocturnal environments to benefit both wildlife and humans?



How do human activities affect biodiversity and ecosystem stability?

PROGRAM CREDITS

Find a full list of general communication guidelines, tips, and more at 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. 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](http://nchumanities.org) 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."

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."

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)

- Teri M. Brown www.terimbrown.com
- Leigh Ann Henion www.leighannhenion.com
- Ron Rash www.ronrashwriter.com/home
- Aran Shetterly www.aranshetterly.com
- Ed Southern www.edsouthern.com

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.

About the 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.

About North Carolina 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 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.



COST SHARE REPORT

Thank you for the time and effort you spent organizing and hosting local NC Reads programs!

North Carolina Humanities ensures free access to public humanities programs in part through a Federal grant which requires matching local investment. We would not be able to do this without the generous in-kind and cash contributions from our local program partners like you. Below, please see how to track and document these cost share contributions. In your North Carolina Reads Final Report, 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 to submit on the Final Report, which is assigned via the online application system.

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

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 (704) 680-4281.

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

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 for the North Carolina Reads program with permission from North Carolina Humanities.

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