

North Carolina
humanities

**NORTH CAROLINA
READS**

Reading
Schedule &
Discussion
Questions
2026



NORTH CAROLINA READS |

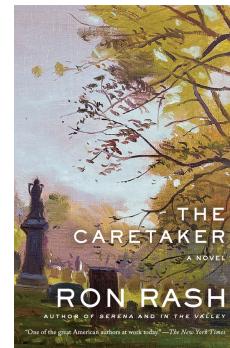
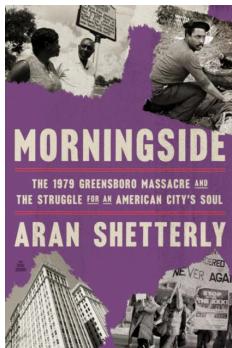
READING SCHEDULE & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

North Carolina Humanities' 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.

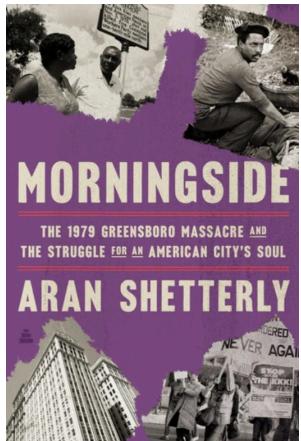
At the heart of North Carolina Reads is North Carolina Humanities' desire to connect communities through shared reading experiences. Reading is vitally important because it nourishes and helps develop our critical-thinking skills, strengthens our minds, expands vocabulary, elevates mental health, and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

Everyone is welcome to join the North Carolina Reads book club! As part of North Carolina Reads, North Carolina Humanities hosts monthly, virtual book club events where participants hear from guest speakers, including authors and topic experts, and have opportunities to ask questions about featured books.

A reading schedule is included here, as well as sample discussion questions for self-inquiry and exploration with other readers. For ideas on planning a book club discussion, please use our companion North Carolina Reads Program Guide.



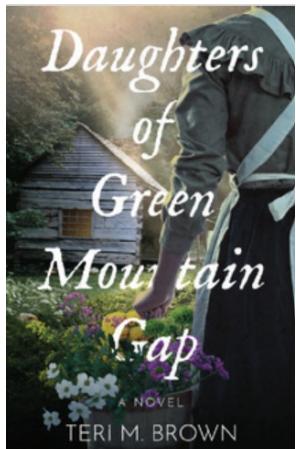
2026 North Carolina Reads Books



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.



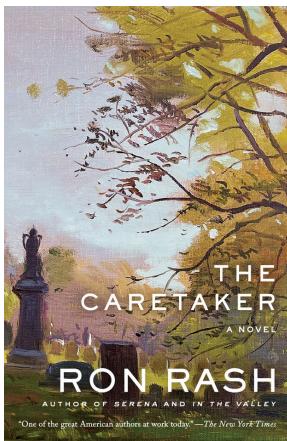
MARCH 2026

***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**

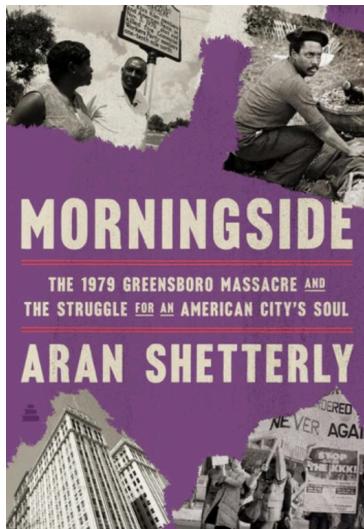
Fiction. It's 1951 in Blowing Rock, North Carolina. Blackburn Gant, his life irrevocably altered by a childhood case of polio, seems condemned to spend his life among the dead as the sole caretaker of a hilltop cemetery. It suits his withdrawn personality, and the inexplicable occurrences that happen 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

FEBRUARY 2026



Morningside: The 1979 Greensboro Massacre and the Struggle for An American City's Soul

BY ARAN SHETTERLY

READING SCHEDULE

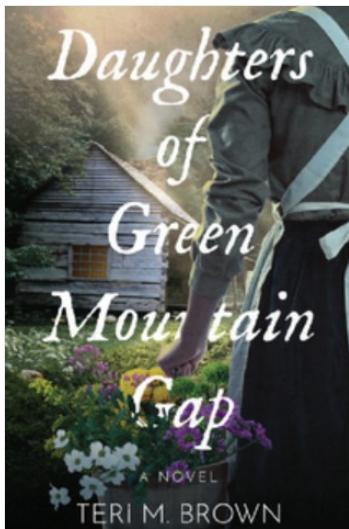
February 1-7	Chapters 1-8
February 8-14	Chapters 9-20
February 15-21	Chapters 21-31
February 22-28	Chapters 32-Epilogue

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What was the political and social climate in Greensboro, NC and the larger South in the 1970s?
- How does the book explore the intersection of race and social class? What did Nelson Johnson and Communist Workers Party in Greensboro hope to achieve?
- Why did the 1960s and 1970s see a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan?
- How were local and federal authorities able to monitor the activities of and gain access to both the Communist Workers Party and the Ku Klux Klan? What were the results?

- What are your impressions of the events of November 3, 1979?
- In the aftermath of the Greensboro Massacre, a state murder trial, a federal criminal civil rights trial, and a federal civil trial occurred. What were the outcomes of the trials?
- Reflect on Nelson Johnson's journey from activist to community religious leader. How did Nelson's pursuit of a theological degree influence his perspectives and engagement with the community?
- What was the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project? What resulted from the commission's work?

MARCH 2026



Daughters of Green Mountain Gap BY TERI M. BROWN

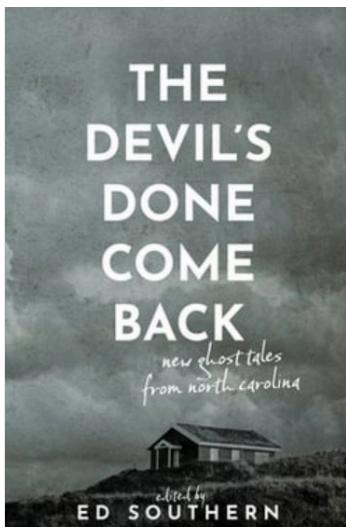
READING SCHEDULE

March 1-7Prologue-Chapter 10
March 8-14Chapters 11-23
March 15-21Chapters 24-36
March 22-31Chapter 37-Epilogue

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do the relationships between the three main female characters evolve throughout the story? What is your impression of Dr. McKeithen and the impact he has on Maggie, Carrie Ann, and Josie Mae?
- How are the themes of family and motherhood explored throughout the novel?
- How is the conflict between folk healing and modern medicine explored? How is the conflict resolved?
- Maggie and Josie Mae spend significant time learning from the Cherokee community. What are the results of this cultural exchange?
- How does the novel portray the experiences of grief, healing, and forgiveness?
- Describe the similarities and differences of today's communities with the communities found in the Appalachian Mountains in the 1890s.

APRIL 2026



The Devil's Done Come Back: New Ghost Tales from North Carolina

EDITED BY ED SOUTHERN

READING SCHEDULE

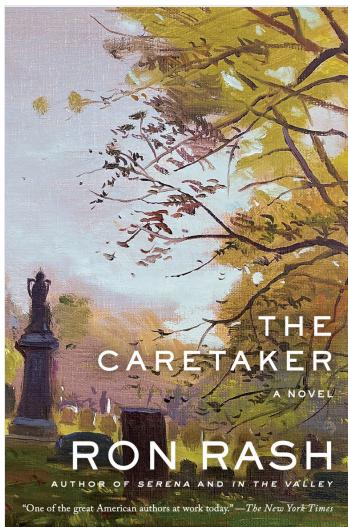
April 1-8	Live Oak-The Maco Light
April 9-16	Gravity Hill-My Lydia
April 17-23	The Kirk Road Bridge-The Lost Guide
April 24-30	The Brown Mountain Lights-Dogwood

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What different forms do “ghosts” take in the various tales?
- What is the purpose of ghost stories? How do ghost stories and folklore reflect cultural values?
- What is the role of ghost stories in understanding history and society?
- The anthology captures stories from across North Carolina. How do place and geography shape and define the stories? How do the historical locations of the stories explore the themes of memory and understanding the past?

- How do humans interpret supernatural experiences?
- Why are certain stories told and retold over generations? How does the act of storytelling influence the meaning of the stories?
- How do the stories illustrate the tension between the “old” North Carolina and the “new” North Carolina?

MAY 2026



The Caretaker

BY RON RASH

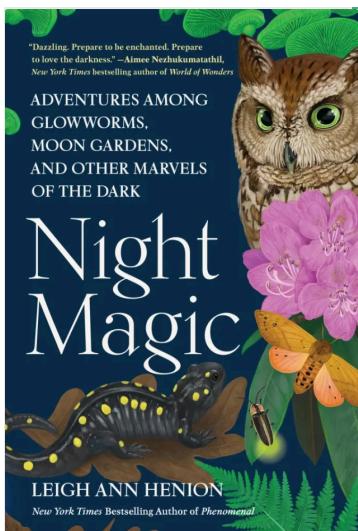
READING SCHEDULE

May 1-8Chapters 1-8
May 9-16Chapters 9-18
May 17-24Chapters 19-25
May 25-31Chapters 26-Coda

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The novel's setting is during the Korean War. How does the historical context of the conflict impact rural communities and shape the characters' experiences and decisions?
- Social status and reputation are important themes of the novel. Where do various characters fit in this social hierarchy? In what ways do the varied characters use their status to exert influence?
- Discuss the different parenting approaches in the novel, comparing and contrasting the Clarke, Hampton, and Gant families. Both the Clarke and Hampton families express the idea of being "owed." What do you think they expect from their children?
- Jacob most likely experiences what we would now diagnose as PTSD after returning from the war. How does the novel portray this experience and its impact on his life?
- Discuss the love between Jacob and Naomi. How does their relationship test the boundaries of family loyalty and expectations? How does Gant show his loyalty to Jacob and Naomi?
- The novel is set in Western North Carolina and uses vivid imagery of the natural world. How does depictions of the natural world contribute to the story and its themes?
- Major themes of the novel are secrecy and deceit. What is revealed over the course of the novel and what were your reactions?

JUNE 2026



Night Magic: Adventures Among Glowworms, Moon Gardens, and Other Marvels of the Dark

BY LEIGH ANN HENION

READING SCHEDULE

June 1-7	Preface-Chapter 3
June 8-14	Chapters 4-5
June 15-21	Chapters 6-7
June 22-30	Chapters 8-9

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is light pollution and what are the effects of artificial light?
- How does the author's perspectives about the dark change throughout her journey? Does learning about the nocturnal flora and fauna make you feel more curious or apprehensive about the dark?
- How does the book explore the duality of night as both a source of vibrant life and fear?
- The author travels extensively through Appalachia to see different marvels of the night, but also finds these marvels in her own backyard. What are some "night marvel" experiences that you have encountered or hope to encounter?
- What do you think the impact is of events like Grandfather Glows and Mothapalooza? How do events like these create community?
- How does the book relate to your own experiences with the natural world at night?
- What is the importance of moon gardens in relation to other nocturnal wonders presented in the book?
- The author concludes the book by attending a fire-making class. How does this experience bring the story full circle and relate to humanity's relationship with light?



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2026 NORTH CAROLINA READS READING SCHEDULE & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

NOTES

NORTH CAROLINA READS

Reading Schedule & Discussion Questions

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

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.

Through public humanities programs and grantmaking, North Carolina Humanities connects North Carolinians with cultural experiences that spur dialogue, deepen human connections, and inspire community. North Carolina Humanities is a statewide nonprofit and affiliate of 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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