



Season 3, Episode 28: All the Buddy Reads + Genre Convincers

Mon, 2/22/21 • 42:19

Kaytee Cobb 00:10

Hey readers, welcome to the Currently Reading podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about books that we've read recently. And as you know, we don't shy away from having strong opinions. So get ready.

Mary Heim 00:22

We're light on the chit chat, heavy on the book talk, and our descriptions will always be spoiler free. We'll discuss our current reads a bookish deep dive, and then we'll press books into your hands.

Kaytee Cobb 00:33

I'm Kaytee Cobb. I'm a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico. And I love chatting about books with my bookish friends.

Mary Heim 00:40

And I'm Mary Heim, a working mom of one and I spent the morning making calendar reminders for all of the book release dates that I'm excited about for 2021. This is episode number 28 of season three. And we are so glad you're here.

Kaytee Cobb 00:54

We are so glad you are here. It has been a hot minute since I got to record with you, Mary. So I'm glad to have you back here to chat with me again. Yay.

Mary Heim 01:01

I'm so happy to talk about books with you today, Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 01:05

Definitely, I'm going to let everybody know before we get into the meat of episode that today for our deep dive we are going to be talking about the books that convinced us to try a genre and the ones that maybe convinced us to stay away from a genre. So I'm excited to get into that. I'm hoping for some spicy opinions there. But first, we're gonna get into our bookish moments of the week, like we always do. Mary, what was your bookish moment this week?

Mary Heim 01:29

My bookish moment this week actually just happened yesterday evening. So I met with a handful of bookish friends. We were brought together by bookstagram to discuss our buddy read of one of Selena Montgomery's romance thrillers. Now, if you are not familiar with Selena Montgomery, that is the pen

name of Georgia politician and lawyer, Stacey Abrams, who also of course happens to be a prolific romance thriller writer. I really, so this is something I wanted to do. I wanted to read some of her books, I wanted to support her as an author. And I wanted the accountability. Because this is a book that I may... in a genre I don't think I normally would have, you know, gravitated to naturally. So the best way for me to do that ever, like most readers, I think, is to get bookish friends with you to pick that book up to keep going to have that kind of carrot at the end of the stick of talking about it together at the end. So we got to get we together a couple books or a couple. We took a couple weeks to read the book. And then we all got together on Zoom last night to talk about it. And it was really, really fun. 10 out of 10 would recommend buddy reads and virtual book clubs, especially when you're looking to step out of your comfort zone. So that was my bookish moment this week. What about you, Katie?

Kaytee Cobb 02:47

I love that my bookish moment and also has a little bit to do with buddy reading. So last week at our closing to the show, I hinted at it. But this week, I'm going to make a little bit bigger deal out of it. We hired Megan Phouthavong Evans to do the shownotes for Currently Reading every week. And that is so exciting to me, because as you know, that has been a total labor of love for me for two and a half years. I love our show notes. I am passionate about them. But it is work that somebody else can do. So that frees me up for a number of hours every single week of the month. And that means that I can now start putting that time towards other things that I'm really excited about. This month, I'm dedicating that time toward new Patreon activities. I decided going forward to make sure I've got a buddy read set for our bookish friends. every single month where we'll gather to chat about it at the end of the month, and I'm excited about our next two for February. We're reading Intimations by Zadie Smith, which is my first one that I'm reading by her. And then in March for middle grade March we're reading Amari and the Night Brothers by B.B. Alston. And I'm so excited to read those two and then to choose more great authors going forward. So thank you to Megan for making that possible for us.

Mary Heim 03:55

Yay! What that feels like the podcast's bookish moment of the week like not just you, Katie, but all of us. Yay, Megan, yay for buddy reads just all sorts of good things.

Kaytee Cobb 04:06

Yes, everybody benefits because Megan is willing to take that work on for us. So I'm just very excited about it. But that means I've got more time to read and hopefully you have had time to read as well. Mary, why don't you tell us about some current reads?

Mary Heim 04:19

You bet I have. Okay, so my first book for us this week is Dangerous Alliance: An Austentacious Romance by Jennieke Cohen. So this is a YA historical romance mystery. And in typical Jane Austen style, we have a young heroine, she finds her family in dire straits and must find herself a husband or risk destitution. Right. We've seen this before. This is not unfamiliar if you are an Austin fan. So we certainly have some of Austin's Greatest Hits in this story, but I really loved that we have some a lot of compelling nuance that makes this very like Regency era story feel very current. So our heroine Victoria has a sister in an abusive marriage who she has to get out. Like she truly may not survive this marriage but she really is confined by the trappings of her time. And that's kind of the whole plot behind

Victoria needing to find a husband is that you know, her parents estate is at risk this very, you know, when we're looking at some of the many issues of a patriarchal society that right there is right up there. We have this really lovely supportive connected family of origin, which I thought made this story feel a lot more current than a traditional, maybe Austen novel. We have this, of course, love interest, who's a childhood best friend, but has been cast out by society. He's grappling with honor versus societal expectations, and of course, a super compelling mystery. Accidents are happening around the estate and around Victoria and her family. And it seems like more and more, that she's being targeted by this nefarious plot. And it's not just her dowry that's at stake. I will admit that this one, maybe linguistically, really kept true to those Regency era novels. And it struggled, I struggled to kind of have my attention captured by it at the beginning of my book tolerance, my ability to stay connected with something that doesn't grab me right away isn't super great, hasn't been for the last 12 months, maybe longer. But I'm really glad that I persevered with this one because I loved where it ended up strong female lead, I think it'd be a great YA option for you know, teens or young adults who are looking for who already love Jane Austen, or are looking to dip their toes but need a little bit, something more current to pull them in. We have some really great wink wink nudge nudge references back to OG Jane Austen, and I just loved it. So that is *Dangerous Alliance: An Austentacious Romance* by Jennieke Cohen.

Kaytee Cobb 06:58

I love that. That sounds very fun. And I definitely want to put it on my TBR.

Mary Heim 07:03

Good. What's what's up first for you Kaytee?

Kaytee Cobb 07:07

My first one this week is *Outlawed* by Anna North. This was I this is kind of a buzzy book right now. So I'm excited that I've already read it. So Ada is our main character. She's only 17 when we meet her, but a year into her marriage, she has not conceived yet. And in the kind of dystopian society that she lives in, we're living post a pandemic in the mid 1800s. And a lot of people have died. And the people that remain think that Jesus saved them, the baby Jesus saved them. So babies are kind of revered in this culture. So a woman that cannot conceive is accused of witchcraft, basically, because she's not blessed by the baby Jesus. So there's this whole, like, weird dystopian religion thing going on. And because of that, Ada has to flee to in order to save her life and the lives of her family, because her association with being a witch, may then carry over to her younger sisters, her mom, and really ruin the entire family's lives. This book is kind of like a diverse feminist, sometimes LGBT positive take on the western. We're like, in the wilds of the western United States, again, in this dystopian society, in a community where all these outlawed women have come together, because none of them have fulfilled their duty as a woman, they none of them have been able to, to produce this marker of womanhood. And it's really a question of how do you find identity and community when all of that has been taken away from you? My favorite reflection of a comment was from this group that I'm in where a commenter talks about the idea of outlaws being applicable to anyone, even in our current day and age, who has to live, quote, unquote, outside the law, when laws are unjust, and when they're bigoted. And I just love that I loved that entire reflection on it, I think that can pull a number of people in to being outlaws that wouldn't normally associate themselves with being outside the law. And I just that really made this book sink in for me, so I ended up really enjoying it. So again, that was *Outlawed* by Anna North.

Mary Heim 09:20

I have that one sitting on my bookshelf right now, Kaytee, and I think you may have just bumped it to like number one spot in my TBR. That sounds so great.

Kaytee Cobb 09:30

I love that. So I do. I mean, I think it's probably pretty clear from the way that I described it. But there's definitely some triggering things in this if there's anyone out there who is thinking about picking this up, but has any kind of issues with infertility or with infant loss. Like there are some tough themes in this book, if that area of life is a trigger for you. So please know that going in. I don't want any hearts broken reading this book. Cool. All right. So what is your second read this week, Mary?

Mary Heim 09:58

Next up for me, Kaytee is *Two Can Keep a Secret* by Karen McManus. So this should come as no surprise to anyone who's heard me talk books lately. But I think my comfort zone when nothing else is working for me is YA mystery. And this one hit all of checked all of the boxes for me. So we've got teenage twin protagonists whose mom escaped her small town after her twin sister went missing years and years ago. So now they find themselves going back to live with their grandma for a period of time in that same small town, of course, it's incredibly buzzy, everybody knows their name, they come back and they are instantly the talk of the town. And of course, only a few days in and history seems to start repeating itself, right, another teenage girl in the town goes missing. And all of the sudden the spotlight is thrown back on this missing twin sister they're missing on from years and years ago. And the story just takes off from there. I thought this one I mean, talk about a book that jumps right in and we'll hook you from page one if that's what you need right now. This is that book. I thought that the kind of mirroring across time the plot across time was done super duper well, the pacing was really excellent. I just could not put it down. If you like *One of Us is Lying*, which is McManus's I think another book of hers. I'm not sure if it's her debut or not, but or a *Good Girls' Guide to Murder* I highly, highly recommend adding this one to your list. That is *Two Can Keep a Secret* by Karen McManus

Kaytee Cobb 11:32

Okay, but this one isn't a sequel to any of her other books?

Mary Heim 11:35

It is not this is a standalone novel. So if you aren't sure if you want to dig into a series, this one wraps everything up pretty nicely at the end.

Kaytee Cobb 11:45

I like that I like her as a writer, *One of Us Is Lying* was like *Breakfast Club* murder mystery to me. And I love that I think that's so fun.

Mary Heim 11:52

Yes, I think I read both of those in very quick succession. And they are different enough that it doesn't feel like you're reading the same book over again, which is another another pet peeve that she avoided pretty well.

Kaytee Cobb 12:05

Good job, Karen.

Mary Heim 12:06

You're proud of Way to go, Karen.

Kaytee Cobb 12:08

All right. My second book this week is Florence Adler Swims Forever by Rachel Beanland. Okay, I was not prepared for this book. I feel like I had heard it set up a number of times. But you know, I wasn't prepared. Or maybe I wasn't listening. I'm not sure. Let me tell you about it. Florence is training to swim across the English Channel One summer, when quote unquote, "tragedy strikes", her sister Fannie is on bedrest while pregnant after having lost a baby shortly, shortly after his birth. And so the family decides to keep this tragedy, a secret from Fannie so as to not stress her out because they don't want her dealing with another like pregnancy complication. That's the whole setup. That's the whole setup for the book. And I totally did not know that going in that this book is basically a whole entire secrets and lies book. I thought it was like fun historical fiction. Nope, not that. So this is about secrets and lies, but it's also about this family and how grief affects them. It's about being Jewish on the East Coast in the years leading up to World War Two. It's about what parents are willing to do for their children and their grandchildren. It's slower, it's a bit more reflective, but I really enjoyed it. I was totally gobsmacked though, because I didn't read the setup before I went in. So unfortunately, this is my second book this week that has trigger warnings for you know, pregnancy complications and issues, deaths, grief, etc. So I apparently actually looking at my third book now, that's gonna be a running theme today. Oops. But it was really well done. And if you like a character driven novel about family about historical fiction, this could be a really good book for you. It's Florence Adler Swims Forever, by Rachel Beanland.

Mary Heim 13:53

I've seen that one. I've seen it around. But you're right, Kaytee. I also don't think I've spent enough time digging into what to expect. So grateful to hear that from you and kind of have a heads up on what I would be getting into if I chose to pick it up.

Kaytee Cobb 14:08

Yes, yeah.

Mary Heim 14:10

Okay. Well, my third book this week is you may have heard me talk about this one in my top 10 of the year with Mindy a couple of weeks ago, but I just had to give it one more plug. So this is HRH: So Many Thoughts on Royal Style by Elizabeth Holmes. So Elizabeth Holmes, if you're not familiar with her is the creator of a popular royal style Instagram series that she calls So Many Thoughts. And this book really kind of builds upon all that she has built within the Instagram world. And I liken it to you know if Instagram is kind of the zine version. Do you remember when zines were a thing?

Mary Heim 14:49

Of royal style deep dives. This is like the glossy September Vogue, right? So you've got Holmes really breaks down the thought and nuance behind royal fashion spanning all the way from the queen. We've got Diana's trajectory, all the way currently to the choices of Meghan and Kate. I, you know, I like the Royals, just like any other, you know, good Midwestern girl who did a semester abroad in London. But I never really realized what a significant amount of thought and storytelling goes into royal fashion until I started following Elizabeth Holmes, and I just find it so fascinating. This is a super fun, really quick read. It's totally the kind of gorgeous coffee table book that you can grab off your shelf and flip through while you need you know, kind of when you need that reminder of what it's like to wear more than just sweat pants, and slipper socks all the time, which is currently my life. But I I truly, truly loved it. And it has totally continued this constant theme in my reading life where I just want to consume royal content all the time. So if you find yourself sharing this boat with me, please pick this one up. That is HRH: So Many Thoughts on Royal Style by Elizabeth Holmes.

Kaytee Cobb 16:06

Love that. I'm glad that you brought it again too, because I am excited to hear about it directly from you.

Mary Heim 16:12

Yay, I'm so glad.

Kaytee Cobb 16:14

Okay, my third one this week. Is This Close to Okay by Leesa Cross-Smith. This is a book I'm just gonna put right out there at the beginning of that Meredith would totally hate. So that's why I didn't want to bring it into an episode where Meredith was talking to me about it. So if she's your book twin, just know that going in. Our main character is Tallie, who's a therapist, Mary, and kind of reeling after her divorce. Her life has been up ended, she doesn't really know what to do going forward. She's driving home one day from work and crosses a bridge and sees a man standing on the edge. She gets out, talks him down, invites him into her car, and then takes him home. And she doesn't tell him that he that she is a therapist. So they're both keeping secrets. There are very, very questionable decisions made in this book. Those decisions add tension the entire way through where there didn't need to be any. But that tension is what kept me turning the pages wondering what was going to happen. This novel is not very long, so I don't want to give a lot more setup than that. I buddy read it with a bookish friend Jessica Rumely, and got live reactions from another bookish friend Katie as she read it, and the whole time you're just sitting in tension waiting for the other shoe to drop. So there's a lot of Goodreads chatter about this book. Like "I had to DNF nothing was happening", etc. But I could not put it down and I couldn't stop thinking about it when I had to actually go and do life stuff. So it ended up getting four and a half stars for me, which is pretty surprising. I really enjoyed it. I still think about it. It's been a month and a half since I read it. It's This Close to Okay by Lisa Cross-Smith.

Mary Heim 17:51

Wow. All right, Kaytee, I have to say while that may be a "Meredith hates this book" for some reason, I or for other reasons, I think that this might be a "Mary would hate this book" because I cannot read books where therapists are behaving unethically without wanting to crawl out of my skin. So yeah, I but

I will be a safe space here for you to talk about this book in this episode without my judgment, but sounds like when maybe I will not be picking up.

Kaytee Cobb 18:17

Yeah, no, I don't I don't think that you would pick it up either. I think you would probably throw this book across the room or it would be so mad at Tallie the entire time. And and as a non therapist and and as a non Meredith, I also was very mad at Tallie. Like I was like, woman, what what are you doing? You are insane. Like, stop it. But because of that I couldn't stop thinking about it. So that's I mean, how do you rate a book like that? I ended up rating it highly, because it really like seeded itself into my brain as something that was constantly niggling at the back of my head. So yeah, I had to I had to rate it highly.

Mary Heim 18:54

That sounds worthy of your 4.5 stars, that's for sure.

Kaytee Cobb 18:58

Yeah. Good stuff. Yeah. All right. So those were our six current reads. And so now we're gonna get into our deep dive, which we're affectionately terming "genre convincers". We made this up. It's not a real word. No.

Mary Heim 19:11

It's fine. It is now

Kaytee Cobb 19:14

We made it up. But now it's a word. Yep. Great. And we can't wait to hear about all y'all's genre, genre convincers after this episode airs. But first, we're going to tell you a little bit about ours. So Mary, why don't you tell us about the first book that that came to mind when we thought about this deep dive?

Mary Heim 19:29

This, you could not have phrased that more perfectly. Kaytee. This is absolutely the first book that popped to mind that I was like I got it. The other ones I had to sit and reflect a little bit more. But this is the book that single handedly convinced me that I enjoy some romance novels. And that book is Red White and Royal Blue by Casey McQuiston. Now this is a book that the entirety of bookstagram has read. So many folks have picked up this book, so I'm not going to spend too much time rehashing the plot. But I do want to say that this book really had an impact on me. Right? It was, it looks like fun. It looks like fluff. It's a romance novel for sure. But I will continue to eat my words over and over again that I was not vehemently not a romance reader, because the quality and caliber of the amazing romance novels that have come out particularly in recent years, that feels like all that I am comfortable with claiming because I have not read backlist romance. But I can say for sure that I've read some really great recent releases that would fall into the romance category that I thought were just spectacular. And I think this is one of the best. So this is indeed the book that really, really sold me on romance. We have a really new, some nuanced, really fun LGBT characters. We have royalty, which there's my theme that I didn't expect was going to be showing up through this episode, which you know I love. The characters are supremely likeable. There's lots of consent and care and equitable representation. I'm I remember reading like the group text and language in this book and thinking like,

yes, this is my friend group chat. These are my friends. This is like these are millennial characters who I would know, you know. And so, this, I feel like, I had been under the impression that romance novels were just these kind of dusty bodice rippers that had lots of cringy kind of, you know, just problematic issues sitting on my library sale shelf. And this book taught me that that is absolutely not the case. And my reading life has been so much more fun since discovering that they are for me. So by and large, this was a very evident genre convincing for me and that is Red, White and Royal Blue by Casey McQuiston.

Kaytee Cobb 21:50

That is so funny to me, Mary, because my very first one that I thought of was the one that convinced me that historical romance is not just bodice ripper.

Mary Heim 22:01

Oh, okay, let's hear it.

Kaytee Cobb 22:03

So while I was recovering from surgery on my knee, which was in November of 2019, I read Bringing Down the Duke by Evie Dunmore, and this is like suffragettes in you know, bodices, of course, but they are fighting for women's rights. It's historical. It's sexy, it's feminist. I loved it. And it was the book that switched that for me, because I really feel like prior to that time, I had not read any historical romance. That wasn't actually I don't think I had read any historical romance. Because in my head, they all had Fabio on the cover. And they all had, you know, like that romance title, genre, title generator formula. Yeah, you can play with that. That was historical romance to me. And instead, I found out that they're actually like really fun and spunky and feminist, which was just such a thrilling delight for me. So that one is Bringing Down the Duke but I totally I want everybody to read it. I loved the second one too, from Evie Dunmore, I just thought she she's just a really fun author had no idea that historical and contemporary romance was completely my jam.

Mary Heim 23:10

Who knew? Love it?

Kaytee Cobb 23:11

Who knew

Mary Heim 23:12

We can always be growing. I love it.

Kaytee Cobb 23:15

What's the second one? Let's see if we can keep this theme going. I'm excited.

Mary Heim 23:18

We I actually think that we can now not necessarily with, you know, the content of this novel I'm about to talk about, but to borrow from the historical piece. And the book that convinced me that historical fiction was for me, was far and away Kindred by Octavia Butler. So Mindy and I both raved about this

one in our top 10 without planning. And I know that this one has been pressed before on the podcast. You and Meredith have talked about it Kaytee. So I also won't spend a ton of time on the plot. However, I think that my reading my reading life as an adult really took off during a time where the big thing in caps in historical fiction was World War Two stories. And I just generally did not connect with story after story after story in that time period. That's not to say that I haven't enjoyed some World War Two historical fiction novels. But it was all I was really seeing around the time that I was really hearing a lot about historical fiction. And I just thought, Hmm, I don't really want to keep reading these stories. That's not for me. So I kind of dismissed historical fiction as just not really my jam. I look back on that now and I can see how silly that is. But you know, I wasn't really looking critically at what else was available within the genre. So I was drawn to Kindred for a whole host of other reasons. But it really was after reading it, that I realized the very obvious truth is that, you know, there is so much diversity of topic and story within historical fiction, obviously, because history is not a monolith, right? It's not just World War Two. And I was really doing myself a big big disservice by just dismissing it off the bat, and this one was an excellent push for me to dig further into the genre. And stop with that over generalizing and make sure to that I was diversifying my historical fiction as well as just, you know, seeking out, you know, non World War Two stories. So, I think yet again, I think that's another one like this is a book everyone should read, I think that everyone could read. It's not necessarily one that I'm like pick it up, you'll enjoy it so much, but it's so captivating. It's so well done. It totally convinced me of historical fiction. That is Kindred by Octavia Butler.

Kaytee Cobb 25:33

Love that. And I'm gonna pull that sci-fi thread because Kindred it has a little bit of time travel in it. And I'm going to say my next genre that I had to be convinced of and now I'm always looking for it is sci-fi thriller. And this was Dark Matter by Blake Crouch. Right?

Mary Heim 25:49

Sogood, so good,

Kaytee Cobb 25:50

So good. I did not know that I needed this genre in my life. It is nerdiness mixed with terror. And I, I didn't know that that was a thing, until I read this specific book. And now I'm always kind of seeking that thrill. I am a very nerdy human. I love getting deep into the weeds of science and genetics and spacetime. Like, even if I don't understand it completely. I love that. And so I'm always like, and this was the book that convinced me that Oh, you can totally be a reader that is intellectual and nerdy. And be totally terrified out of your bones. I think that's great. I love it.

Mary Heim 26:30

Yes. It is such a such a good one. I cosign wholeheartedly with everything you just said, Kaytee.

Kaytee Cobb 26:38

Excellent. Okay, what's your third one? Mary?

Mary Heim 26:40

Okay, my third book is a spicy pick. That's a little spicy. I don't know. Do we have a name for this? Is this like, an anti-genre convincer maybe we need to get a little bit.

Kaytee Cobb 26:51

Genre de-convincer?

Mary Heim 26:52

her Yeah, a genre dissuader. That sounds almost too mild, maybe, but maybe that's the direction we want to go in. It's a little mild for what I'm about to say. I may be about to alienate many individuals, okay, and I will own it. And you do not have to agree with me. And that is 100%. Okay. And so the book that convinced me away from a genre, away from the genre of Gothic novels, is Rebecca by Daphne du Maurier. I know I'm not alone in this spicy opinion, at least in our podcast host crew. And I believe I've seen other chatter within our bookish friends as well, that I'm not the only one who holds this opinion. So we can be a small but mighty group. So okay, truly, like I understand that there is a lot of love for this book, it's deemed as a modern classic. I should love Gothic novels, like I feel like I should love them. They are peak spooky, which, you know, is right where I am happily reading from September through November. But I have tried and DNF did not finish Rebecca a number of times until I finally here's tying us back, led a group read along. That pushed me to stay the course I thought I want to read this book, I want to see what all the fuss is about. I'm going to have other people hold me accountable. And I hated it. I hated it. Which was a great way to lead a whole group of friends into talking about it together. But I disliked every single character. I did not want to root for any of them. I could not stand the pace, I found the only compelling thing to be the sense of place, but that was not enough to save it for me. I have now tried multiple times to read other books in this genre. And I should know better because I either DNF them or I hate them. They are not for me at all. And I should have learned long ago that if you do not like the OG book in a genre which I think Rebecca is either very close or one of the early you should know better than to keep trying and keep trying to read current iterations. Mary Heim, stop it don't do that. So that is that is my spicy take on Rebecca and Gothic novels, and Daphne du Maurier in general. Sorry, Daphne. That is where I am.

Kaytee Cobb 29:18

Oh, man. Okay, so I also put my spicy opinion here at number three. And I'm actually making up a genre just like how we made up genre convincers I'm calling it... you ready? character driven fiction filled with a-holes. That is the new genre I'm going to talk about today.

Mary Heim 29:37

I like it.

Kaytee Cobb 29:38

I, yeah, it's a thing. Yeah. So it's books like and I've talked about these books before Everything I Never Told You by Celeste Ng. I just talked about Memorial by Bryan Washington. All Grown Up by Jami Attenberg. These are character driven books, where you hate the characters. And so there's actually nothing in the story that is redeeming at all like you, there's not something to pull you forward like a great plot, and there's not someone to root for. And there's no one like making big progress in their

lives. And I just, I, and I keep getting torn in like I keep getting sucked in and I I don't know if it's a flaw in me as a reader that I have multiple ones for this genre. So obviously, they haven't convinced me yet. Either that or I'm not doing good enough research. But every time I pick up a book that I can put into the character driven fiction filled with a-holes genre, it always disappoints me, and it makes me so mad. So I really need to find a way to not ever pick those up again.

Mary Heim 30:37

I I think that can I get like a little Kaytee flag every time I pick up a book that's like that, because I also agree with you that that is not I need at least someone to root for. I don't always need a likable character. But if everybody in the book is an a-hole, I am not going to have a good time. So I think I we need to make some sort of flag. We'll figure out what the acronym for that sentence of this anti-genre is and we can flag it on all of these books.

Kaytee Cobb 31:03

It could be like a series of emojis maybe. Oh, yeah.

Mary Heim 31:06

Oh, I like that. Yeah, that sounds like fun.

Kaytee Cobb 31:09

I like that too. All right, what's your last category for a genre convincer Mary?

Mary Heim 31:13

Okay, my final one and I feel like this one I can absolutely, really credit the podcast for. But a big genre convincer for me in the category of middle grade was *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* by Kelly Barnhill. I picked this one up on audio a couple years ago, because it was getting all sorts of praise and esteem. And my, you know, my reading life was kind of taking back off in adulthood as I was done with grad school and kind of digging a little bit more in to what books were popular. And I think it had truly been since I was within this age group that I had picked up a middle grade novel. So it had been quite some time. This is a really whimsical, escapist fairy tale. We've got this kind misunderstood forest witch, who is she's got this kind of motley crew of characters, the swamp monster who's really wise, this quirky little dragon and a child who was abandoned to the witch in the forest, who has developed some magical powers. So that is our main cast of characters. This novel is spectacular on audio, it is totally perfect peak middle grade. And it really convinced me that a middle grade novel can be not just beautifully written, but excellently plotted, totally captivating, just as applicable to its base of young readers as it is to, you know, an adult who would pick it up and this one it just, perfectly hits all of the notes for me. And I really do think that one of the best things we do with the podcast is to open people up to genres that they maybe would have never dipped into Kaytee, you and Meredith do a spectacular job of that. And for me, that was really middle grade. And since then, I have picked up so many middle grade books that I have just loved, that I never ever, ever, ever would have kind of come across, had it not been, you know, until I had till Charlotte was old enough to pick up those books on her own. So I'm so glad to have middle grade as part of my reading life. And this one, I think if anybody else is kind of on the precipice, I would recommend this 110 times over and that is the *Girl Who Drank the Moon* by Kelly Barnhill.

Kaytee Cobb 33:25

Okay, my last one is probably my, my one that I'm most likely to get emotional about is what? So you probably could guess that it's social justice. And I went back as part of this deep dive to try and kind of trace my own social justice journey, and how I got to the point where I am today. So I looked back mostly on Goodreads. And I noticed my reading starting to change in 2016. In that I was trying to diversify the authors that I was reading. I read like you talked about already some really great historical fiction at that time, like Homegoing, and Underground Railroad, and then Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson, great books. And those three especially are ones that kind of softened my heart a little bit. But then, in early January of 2017, I picked up in short order Evicted by Matthew Desmond and Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson. And that's when my heart broke all the way open. So ever since then, and you guys have seen it now, for the last two and a half years on the podcast. This is a huge part of not just my reading life, but my identity. And I credit those two books, especially with being the key that unlocked me and brought that part of my identity out. And I didn't I didn't Of course, hindsight is 2020. But at the time, I did not realize how much it would become this essential part of who Kaytee is, because that can sneak up on you right when that change starts to happen. It doesn't happen in a in a flashpoint, it happened slowly, learning more and more and more. And I loved this opportunity right here to go back and trace that evolution on on Goodreads. And really take a look at the authors that changed me. And that changed my reading life and pointed it toward the arc of justice. And I'm so grateful for it. So that's my little emotional spiel about my genre convincers for social justice, which which absolutely starts with Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson and Evicted by Matthew Desmond.

Mary Heim 35:32

I love hearing that Kaytee and I love getting kind of that reminder, you know, kind of a window into where that started for you where that was really born. I love that.

Kaytee Cobb 35:41

All right, let's press some books. Did you know immediately what you wanted to press for this episode, Mary,

Mary Heim 35:46

You know, it's funny. I had thought a couple of weeks ago that I was like, Oh, this book in particular, I feel really strongly about it. I don't see it on the press list. I haven't heard much chatter about it. It's pretty backlist. And I knew that it was the book I wanted to press and after we chose the deep dive I was like, wait a minute, this perfectly fits. This can be kind of like a little bonus category for our deep dive as well for a genre convincer into a narrative nonfiction which is now I think, probably my favorite nonfiction category, what I gravitate to most often. So my press this week is maybe a little bit of wishful thinking as I watched the snow continue to pile up outside in Wisconsin, and just dream and dream of my garden. And like I said, it is also one of my earliest loves for narrative nonfiction and was totally a genre convincer for me. That press this week is Animal Vegetable Miracle by Barbara Kingsolver.

Kaytee Cobb 36:42

That IS backlist.

Mary Heim 36:43

It's backlist, it's I don't even think I was old enough to pick this book up when it was initially like it would not have been on my on my radar when it first came out. Maybe I'm wrong, but I discovered it when it was already backlist. So Kingsolver is best known for her literary fiction but this is a bit of a departure for her because she details her family's journey to live on a self sustaining farm kind of homesteader style. She intermingles throughout the story, you know, personal story, their process of homesteading over the course of a year with chapters on science kind of the larger scale information on the impact of our current food systems on the planet and its inhabitants. It's convicting it's also escapist, it will make you want to run out and start planting your own garden beds immediately. I really loved it. I think I'm well overdue for a reread I will say it's been a couple years since I read this one. So I would love to read it again with a bit more you know, kind of a lens on for like equitable food systems. I don't know that she touches much on food deserts and how feasible a dream like this is kind of across socio-economic, socio-economic status How... so I can't speak to that. But I will say that this is a good one if you can maybe pair it with something else that speaks to those food systems. It would be a great one to read as we are approaching gardening season and I think it is a solid choice for that narrative nonfiction genre. So I am going to press this week Animal, Vegetable, Miracle by Barbara Kingsolver.

Kaytee Cobb 38:15

I like that. Nicely done Mary.

Mary Heim 38:17

Thanks Kaytee

Kaytee Cobb 38:17

It does it makes me think of like springtime and being outside and watching little like green shoots poke through the earth,

Mary Heim 38:25

you know, will that ever come? I'm crossing my fingers someday soon.

Kaytee Cobb 38:29

February lasts 25 years, but eventually it will eventually it will.

Mary Heim 38:33

Okay, what have you got for us?

Kaytee Cobb 38:35

Okay, my, my choice this week is also another genre convincer. And as I was thinking about our deep dive, I knew that I had to squeeze one more in there. So this is Children of Blood and Bone by Tomi Adeyemi. So there's there's two things about this press. First, of course, it was a genre convincer that I love. YA fantasy, especially when it's written by BIPOC authors. And it brings in mythology and legend from other cultures. And ever since I read this one, it's been like a huge part of my wheelhouse, which is why this February, I found myself on a binge of YA and middle grade fantasy written by Black authors. And it's been totally awesome. And every time I think about, you know, I just finished a book,

it's time to pick up the next one. I should definitely move away from that and get some Nope, I just end up like merrrr going right back to it. So the March episodes might be a little bit repetitive. I'm gonna try and mix it up, I promise. The second thing about this press is that it's the first one in a series so if you really love this, YA fantasy genre and you haven't picked up this first one, there's more to come after that, which is my favorite kind of YA fantasy to get into because then you know that you can keep going with these same characters and the world is already built for you.

Mary Heim 39:51

That was an excellent book and she does a killer job of world building in this novel. I mean, I felt like I was right there. Love it. Good press. Yeah.

Kaytee Cobb 40:00

So good. Okay, so let me set it up a little bit though. Our main characters are Zelig and Amari and they live in Orisha, where magic used to run through everything, but not anymore. Everything changed the night that magic disappeared under the orders of a ruthless king. Magi were killed, leaving Zelig both without a mother and her people without hope. Now Zelig has one more chance to bring back magic. As you can probably guess, Amari wants to be sure that that never happens, because magic is dangerous, and it's out of control. So there's this tension between these two main characters, the way that unfolds, the imagery she uses to tell you about what happens. The way that she brings magic to life is so incredible. I loved this book. It's Children of Blood and Bone by Tomi Adeyemi.

Mary Heim 40:48

Good press such a good press.

Kaytee Cobb 40:50

Okay, I think those were both great presses. I'm excited to see what people think of them. And I'm really excited friends for us to get to hear about your own genre convincers. What made you convinced that a genre either was for you, or was not for you, after you read a certain title?

Mary Heim 41:06

I cannot wait. I'm very excited to check in on our socials and be present on the group this week with our bookish friends to hear. Well,

Kaytee Cobb 41:13

Yes, it'll be a great one I'm excited too. Okay, so that's it for this week. As a reminder, here's where you can connect with us. You can find me on Katy at @notesonbookmarks on Instagram.

Mary Heim 41:23

And you can find me at @maryreadsandsips on Instagram.

Kaytee Cobb 41:27

Full show notes with the title of every book we mentioned in the episode and timestamps. Thank you, Megan, can be found on our website at currentlyreadingpodcast.com

Mary Heim 41:36

You can also contact us directly at @currentlyreadingpodcast on Instagram, or via email at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com.

Kaytee Cobb 41:45

And if you really want to help us, there's a number of things you could do. You could become a patron. You could rate and review us on Apple podcasts. Or even more importantly, you can shout us out on social media. That makes a huge difference in our being able to find our perfect audience.

Mary Heim 41:58

Yes, a recommendation from you to your bookish friend is the best possible way to pass along your love of this podcast to others and help us grow.

Kaytee Cobb 42:06

Alright, until next week. Happy reading Mary.

Mary Heim 42:08

Happy reading Kaytee.