



Season 3, Episode 43: Challenging Your Reading + Special Guest Traci Thomas!

Mon, 6/7 • 53:10

Kaytee Cobb 00:10

Hi readers. Welcome to the Currently Reading podcast. We are bookish best friends who spend time every week talking about the books that we've read recently. And as you know, we do not shy away from having strong opinions. So get ready. We are light on the chitchat, heavy on the book talk and our descriptions are always spoiler free. We'll discuss our current reads, a bookish deep dive, and then we'll press books into your hands. I'm Kaytee Cobb, a homeschooling mom of four living in New Mexico. And I love challenging myself in my reading. This is episode number 43 of season three, and we're so glad you're here. Today I'm joined by Traci Thomas. Traci is the host of The Stacks, a podcast about books and reading where she interviews authors, actors, activists and book lovers about the books that have shaped their lives. New episodes release every Wednesday. She also runs The Stacks Instagram page at @thestackspod, hosts literary events and is a columnist at shereads.com. Traci, thanks for being with me on Currently Reading.

Traci Thomas 01:08

Thank you for having me.

Kaytee Cobb 01:10

I'm so excited to get to talk to you. You have been an often requested guest by many of our listeners. So

Traci Thomas 01:16

Yay, thank you listeners.

Kaytee Cobb 01:18

We love the overlap that you that you have with our audience as well. So today, before we get started, I'm going to let everybody know, our deep dive is about Traci's reading life, we get to hear a lot about the reading lives of people you talk to you on your podcast, but I'm excited to hear a little more from you. So we're gonna get started though, the way that we always do, which is with our bookish moments of the week. And Traci as my guest, I'd love for you to go first.

Traci Thomas 01:41

Okay, I know you wanted me to have a bookish moment of the week. I my whole week is bookish. I don't have like a moment. I don't I read a lot. And I read a lot like I don't know, my whole life is bookish. So there's not like a moment of the week? I don't know, I don't have one is what I'm trying to say.

Except for that I do have one in the sense that basically every moment of my life is revolves around reading,

Kaytee Cobb 02:06

which is so great. And yes, same, right. I it becomes more and more of a struggle for me to come up with these like 150 episodes in... like, oh, what, what specific thing do I want to talk about this week?

Traci Thomas 02:19

Yeah, I mean, it's like, I don't know, I didn't go to the library. Because I don't go anywhere because of the pandemic. And I read like three books this week, because it's a week. And I read to my kids every day like there's no special any book thing that's different than any other week. I don't know, I don't I I saw it. You know, you sent me like a little pre preparation sheet of like, these are things people say, and I was like, Yeah, I don't know. I do that all the time.

Kaytee Cobb 02:48

Okay, well, my bookish moment this week is on episode 41. So a couple weeks ago, Meredith mentioned a book that's called When You Reach Me by Rebecca Stead. And she said it would be a great book to buddy read. I love buddy reading as our listeners. Now I'm very like social about my reading. And so I knew I was gonna be looking for a buddy. As soon as that episode aired, my mom reached out to me and said, I have a copy of that book on my shelves. Do you want to buddy read it with me, which is my bookish moment. Because even though my mom and I are both big readers, and we read a lot of the same books, we have never intentionally read something together. And so I'm really excited to do that. That's nice. Yeah, it made me think of your episode talking about The Giver with your mom. I loved getting to hear your conversation together. And of course, I'll link that one in the show notes. But I'm excited to get to talk to my mom about a book that neither of us has read. And we get to go through it together. So that'll be that'll be fun. Yeah. All right, let's get into some current reads. What have you been reading lately?

Traci Thomas 03:49

Okay. The book that I finished was Long Division by Kiese Laymon, which is out June 1. It's his rerelease of his first novel, and it's really, really, really good. And it's about teenagers. I don't, I don't want to give anything away because one of the things I loved about reading it was not knowing what I was supposed to expect. But what I will say is that it's about teenagers, and has some time travel elements. And it's funny, but it's not a comedy book, because I posted about it the other day, and someone was like, I don't like comedy books. And I'm like, well, it's not a comedy book. Because if it was, I would have said that. Also thanks like, Okay, great, but it's not a comedy book, but Kiese just really gets into these characters, and they're teenagers. And you know, like, people are, you know, generally funny, and they make fun of each other. And they crack jokes with each other. And so this book does that in a really authentic way where I was laughing out loud because I was like, I can hear Kiese saying this to someone like I can I'm in this vibe.

Kaytee Cobb 04:51

Perfect. So my first current read this week is Starfish by Lisa Fipps. I thought about going all nonfiction this week because I know, Traci, that you are a big nonfiction reader. But I was sure that I could tie this

one back around to something that I might try and talk you into. So this is a middle grade novel in verse, and it centers on our awesome protagonist, her name's Ellie. She wore a whale swimsuit and made a big splash at her fifth birthday party earning her the nickname whale and a childhood steeped in fat shame. So now she's in middle grade, and her mom is obsessively, constantly trying to help by suggesting new diets obsessively monitoring her food intake. And this poor girl is just fed up. So thankfully, she has an amazing and supportive relationship with her dad, who is a fierce ally, and her new neighbor, Catalina who pulls Ellie directly into this loving friendship. I wanted to bring it to you, Traci for this table talk because you recently read Every Body looking for The Stacks Book Club. And so I already heard you recently talk about a verse novel with my ultimate author crush, Nic Stone. I picked that one up also. And it had really tough topics and was a lot more character driven than this one. So because this one is middle grade, which I know as adults, sometimes we're like, yeah, I'm, I'm done with middle grade, like I've graduated from that I'm good now. It just is really approachable. And you just fall in love with Ellie. She's such a fantastic protagonist. And the whole way through, you're rooting for her, you, you know what her dad is doing to kind of work against her mom behind the scenes. And even though Every Body Looking has a lot going on under the surface, this one is similarly complex, without it being bogged down by the writing. And without it feeling like you have to really struggle through it to get to the next thing that's happening. So I love the way that middle grade really brings a magic to the page. And this one just sparkles and gives you all the feels. It's called Starfish by Lisa Fipps. Let's talk about your second read this week. What else have you been reading lately?

Traci Thomas 07:07

So my second read is I just started I'm only 15 pages. And so I cannot tell you anything about it, really. But it's called Seven Days in June. I think it's a romance maybe I don't even know. It's funny, because you said I love thick nonfiction. I do. And all three of my books this week are fiction because well, it's not so strange, so much as I have read like 12 books already this month. And all of them up until Long Division were nonfiction. So I just was like, and I've been trying to read things that are coming out in June just because I like to be ahead. And so I read all the June 1 nonfiction that I wanted to read. And so I've moved on to June 8. And I was like, I should just do some fiction because I haven't done any yet. And I just want a break because all the nonfiction I read earlier in the month was so good that I was like let me not try to let me not push, push it. Anyways. So that's why it's all fiction, but not you know, this is all a lie. This is not who I am. But anyways, I'm reading a romance novel,

Kaytee Cobb 08:13

not an accurate portrayal.

Traci Thomas 08:14

This is this is basically not who I am at all. I am fake. So I'm reading Seven Days in June. It's by Tia Williams. It is a romance, which I've already said five times. And I don't know much about it. What I know is that it's she's a woman, author, black woman author who has written some books about like vampires and things. And she has not had sexy time in a long time. And she suffers from really bad migraines. I'm believing. And that's where I fell asleep last night at 930. So that's the book don't spoil it. Nobody tell me anything.

Kaytee Cobb 08:54

Nobody's spoiling anything,

Traci Thomas 08:56

But it's supposed to be good and fun. So I don't know. I'm excited. We'll see.

Kaytee Cobb 08:59

It is it's a good one. I recently finished that one. It has a very interesting first page. Right that very first page without spoiling anything. She is having an incident. Oh yeah, with her "quarterback". And I was like, wow, that's the kind of book we're reading here. I love her romance franchise that she writes and I'm excited to hear what you think about it. I'll be looking for that review because that is a good one. So that was seven days in June by Tia Williams. Yeah. Okay. My second book this week was influenced by The Stacks. It is Black Futures by Kimberly Drew and Jenna Wortham.

Kaytee Cobb 09:37

So good. This book, it It feels cheap to even call it a book. Right? Because it's more like an experience. It's like an adventure. To me, li reminded me a little bit of the Choose Your Own Adventure books. But did you read those when you were child?

Traci Thomas 09:37

So good.

Traci Thomas 09:52

No.

Kaytee Cobb 09:53

No? Oh, Traci...

Traci Thomas 09:54

I didn't know I I read a lot of like, adult things when I was young.

Kaytee Cobb 09:58

Did you? You and Meredith would get along, she was reading like Amityville Horror when she was eight years old. Okay, so Choose Your Own Adventure, you would start a story. And then you would have to make a decision. And at the bottom of each page, it would say, if you walk into the cave, go to page 58. And if you walk around to the lake, go to page 63. And so you would follow the pages that told you and, and each person would have their own adventure reading this book. And Black Futures is a lot like that. Because it's this whole collection of essays, images, conversations, recipes, poetry, memes, screenshots. And each page or each item has related pages. So you can rabbit hole down one topic for a while, and then pick up the book the next time, have a totally different experience, and read completely different things. And I loved the way that they constructed it and put it together. And the way that it really brought this this huge, multifaceted experience to reading about Black life and Black culture, and Black power and Black beauty. It was, it was so well done, absolutely enhanced by the author interview that you had on The Stacks Pod. So of course, I will link that as well. And it's just it's

this great, like fast moving passionate conversation between Tracy and Kimberly and Jenna on her show. And I can't recommend the two items together enough as like an experience. So that's Black Futures, by Kimberly Drew and Jenna Wortham.

Traci Thomas 11:37

And let me just say that if you don't listen to Still Processing, which is Jenna Wortham's podcast with Wesley Morris from the New York Times, you definitely should. That's how I found my way to Jenna and her work. And I just she's like one of my all time favorite. She was on my original bucket list for the podcast before I ever recorded an episode was having Jenna on the show. So she's just such a dream and I Still Processing is my probably my most favorite podcast ever.

Kaytee Cobb 12:05

That's fantastic. And that's the best to when you get to talk to your dream guests. And you're just like, I can't believe this is my life right now.

Traci Thomas 12:12

Yeah, very cool. I cried. Whoops. Okay, my third book is part of my shake the stacks challenge, which is me reading through all 37 of Shakespeare's plays, though, there's a 38th one that I wasn't originally going to do. But now I'm going to do it because my friend who I used to perform in Shakespeare with and she used to direct me, she was like, you need to just read Two Noble Kinsmen and stop being an idiot. And I was like, okay, fine, but I am on play. 33,34 I don't know. I'm almost done. Yeah, it's Cymbeline. So I just started this yesterday. I know some lean a little bit because I did a scene from it and college. But it's about a king who who's got one heir, his daughter, Imogen. Some people pronounce it enegen. I don't know why, but some people do. And she wants to be married to one guy, but he wants her to be married to his queen's son from a previous marriage. So basically her stepbrother and then there's other stuff because it's Shakespeare. But that's basically the plot a little bit or one of the plots, and I don't know, I'm not that excited about it, but I am going to finish it like all of them, because I have read 33 or four already and I'm so close. After this, I just have Winter's Tale, The Tempest, King Henry the Eighth, I think, and Two Noble Kinsmen. So I guess this is 30 This is the 34th of 38.

Kaytee Cobb 13:36

Yeah, that is just so impressive. And how long have you been working on this project?

Traci Thomas 13:41

I started it I believe in May 2018. And so I think there were two or three months where I didn't read my Shakespeare on the month that I was supposed to do. So I'm a few months behind. I think I'm two maybe three months behind perfect. Pretty good.

Kaytee Cobb 13:57

That's so impressive. I don't have any author that I deep dive into like that. I'm so glad for for nerdy theater people that are willing to go through the whole canon. Amazing Okay, my third book this week is, is comedy, unlike Kiese Laymon's book. So it's You'll Never Believe What Happened to Lacey by Amber Ruffin and Lacey Lamar written by two sisters. Amber has been working as a comedy writer for

Seth Meyers in New York City and hosts her own comedy show. She's hysterical. Lacey still lives in their childhood state of Nebraska. The things this poor girl has experienced are jaw dropping even for Amber, who has the same genetics, the same Black skin, the same hair. The sister says that Lacey is a lightning rod for astonishing behavior, whether it happens in JC Penney or a donut shop, at her job, at a fashion show. This book has everything from stories about dating apps, to mistaken Black identities, and having the actual book in front of you so you can see that pictures and screenshots is an absolute must because they are hilarious. But then I also got the audio from libro.fm because of Indie Bookstore Day, they were like you submit a receipt, you get one book of your choice for free. So I picked it up because I was in love with it. And having them tell you the story on audio is so fantastic. So basically, unfortunately for everybody, I am saying you have to get this in both formats. You have the paper version, and the audio version, because that's the only way to really fall in love with it the way I did. So it was recommended to me by one of our bookish friends. Her name is Maudeen. I'm super glad she made sure that I was aware of it because it's completely up my alley. I love memoir, I love personal essay. I love being read a book by the author. And I definitely love a little shot of comedy in there. So it's *You'll Never Believe What Happened to Lacey* by Amber Ruffin and Lacey Lamar.

Traci Thomas 15:51

And they were on Sam Sander's podcast *It's Been a Minute* when the book first came out, and it was really great. So if you like them, or you're curious about more about the book, it's really fun. And I think they tell one of the stories on the show, and it's great.

Kaytee Cobb 16:04

Oh my gosh, all these stories are so funny. I was like taking pictures of pages and sending them to my best friend. And then I was replaying chapters because they were making me laugh so hard. But I mean, but it's, it's genuine like hard hitting legitimately, "I had to deal with this incident against me", she's not playing off racism as like, no big deal. But the way the stories that they chose are not extremely difficult. You know, there's not hate crimes in this book. It's microaggressions, right, which is a terrible term, but it's its lower level, just *You'll never believe that this happened to this poor girl over and over and over and over again*. And of course you do. Alright, those were our six current reads. And that means we are ready for our deep dive, which I'm very excited about because we like I said, get to hear a lot about Traci's guests and what they've been reading and what they're snacking on. But we don't often get to hear from Traci about her own reading life. So we already talked a little bit about the Shakespeare reading challenge, which I was very excited that you brought one of those because I'm so interested in this idea of challenging yourself for three years straight to read plays. And like, okay, so you were doing theater, you're just like I I want to have read all of Shakespeare or?

Traci Thomas 17:19

I guess it really started, I had re-read *Othello* for an episode of *The Stacks* that I did on this book called *New Boy* by Tracy Chevalier, which is a retelling. It's like Hogarth did this whole retelling of Shakespeare series. So there was a bunch of like, *Vinegar Girl* is one of those. There's like a bunch of books. And so I picked with my guest Vella Lovell, who I went to college with who's an actress from *Crazy Ex Girlfriend*. She I think she's on *The Mayor* now on whatever with Ted Danson anyways, she and I were like, let's do this retelling because we love Shakespeare. It'll be really fun and great. The book is supposed to be good... Book - horrible. But I re-read *Othello* to just to prepare. And I was like,

Oh my god, I forgot how incredibly good this play was. And then I was talking with my sister-in-law. And she was like, have you read them all? And I was like, you know, I haven't, I probably read like 20 of them. And then I was like, I should just read them all. So that I've done it. So I just decided the thing that's hard is that there's a lot of different ways you could do it because no one knows the exact order in which he read them. So I wrote them. So I'm using a list that I found from this website called Open Source Shakespeare, which I really like they it's a great website if you're interested. But anyways, they have a list. But if you check any other lists, their list is wrong. And every list is different. So I just picked that list and stuck with it. So that's the order. It's also because a lot of the lists say that he started with the history plays and I just really did not want to start with Henry, Part Four, part one or whatever. I don't I just wasn't into that idea. So I take this list because it started with Two Gentlemen of Verona or something that I already knew really well. Or maybe not that maybe Comedy of Errors, I can't remember. Anyways, so that's why I decided to do it. I was like, I just want to do it. And the truth was, there were a few plays that I'd never read that I was like, I just need to read them. So I'd never actually read or seen a production of Hamlet, which I know is like most people's gateway. And so and I have no interest in Hamlet and I know why after reading it. I knew that I didn't want to read it because I don't care about Hamlet and I am feel that way still now. And I don't get it but revisiting some of the ones that I like had read as a kid like Romeo and Juliet still hold up still fantastic. Still one of his best. Othello, still one of his best. Macbeth, I get it, very good. Two of the ones that really surprised me that I loved were Richard II - great, and Titus Andronicus - shockingly incredible, very early play. Very good. So those two surprised me in a good way. I mean, again, a lot of them I'd already read and had feelings about and then like I had seen Richard II and I didn't remember liking it at all. And then when I read it, I was like, this is so good. I don't know why people aren't doing this all the time. And then just to plug another podcast... in case you can't tell, I listen to podcasts all the time. It's called Lend Me Your Ears. And it's all it's about six different Shakespeare plays kind of like and what they mean for the modern moment. And the guy who created it is this guy, Isaac Butler, who was one of the co-authors of the oral history about Angels in America, called The World Only Spins Forward. And he was my guest on The Stacks, but I did not realize that he was the same person who had done Lend Me Your Ears. So I had listened to this podcast. And then when I was prepping for our interview, I was like, Oh, my God, this is Lend Me Your Ears, guy. So if you go back and listen to that episode, you can hear me and him start, like gushing over Shakespeare in the middle because I was secretly more excited to talk about that than the book. But so that's how the project came around. And I don't know, it's just my own thing. I invited people to do it with me. But who else is silly enough to do this? No one.

Kaytee Cobb 20:47

So do you have a plan? Or are you like, I'm never doing a challenge again, for when you've finished all 38 plays?

Traci Thomas 20:55

I don't know. I might read through all of August Wilson. Same thing: I knew I know, some of his plays, but I haven't read all them. It's only 12. So that will be no big deal. But no, not really. This was more sort of just, I was close anyways. And I feel like I can say that I did this thing. But a lot of people haven't even like big nerds like me. And now I can be like, I don't like Hamlet. And here's exactly why. Because now I so yeah,

Kaytee Cobb 21:21

right. You can have your strong opinions and be like, well grounded in them. Yeah. Perfect. And then is there any other way like you have a background in theater, you were in plays? Is there any other way that theater shows up in your reading life? No. Is it just this one challenge?

Traci Thomas 21:38

I mean, just this one challenge, I guess. I mean, I like plot. And I think that comes from the theater. Like I like,

Kaytee Cobb 21:45

right, it's hard to do a character driven play.

Traci Thomas 21:47

Well, there are characters driven, a lot of character driven plays. But I think that what theater does better than a lot of novelists who write quote unquote, "character driven" books is that playwrights recognize that the words are being said out loud, and so they're not show they're, they're showing you they're not telling you. And I feel like novelists like, will sit down and like I'm writing a book about people and their relationship. I'm like, Okay, well, if you are good, you would write a book that had plot and character interwoven together, because that is life, you know, like, no one's life is like, I don't know, like, totally free of conflict. And just like about, you know, folding laundry, like there's something going on there. And I feel like in the theater, you can see that even if the person is just folding laundry, like you can see their inner life. And I feel like so many authors try to show you their inner life or, like, tell you about what they're thinking about. And it's like, we don't actually need that if you set up the scene, and you, you know, work through it in other ways. You wouldn't have to spend 10 pages explaining the sheet or whatever, like, we don't care. No one cares what the sheet looks like, you know. So I guess that might be one way. And I'm sure there are people listening. Like I do care about the sheet and like to you. I say "good luck in life." But I'm glad I don't have to read with you. I'm glad we're not in a buddy read together because we went hate each other. Yeah, exactly.

Kaytee Cobb 23:13

Well, it could be impassioned. I guess your discussion of that, buddy read. What about Okay, what about reading plays aloud? What do you read them aloud?

Traci Thomas 23:22

The Shakespeare?

Kaytee Cobb 23:23

Yeah,

Traci Thomas 23:24

Sometimes if I'm in a room by myself, I will or sometimes if I'm having a hard time following what's going on I will. But yeah, I mean, plays are meant to be heard. So I but when I read I always hear myself reading. I'm not one of them. Some people don't like to read out loud to themselves. So yeah, and in with Shakespeare, a lot of it's an inverse. And so it has the iambic pentameter. So I do read with

iambic pentameter in mind. And, and so I don't read out loud, but sometimes I read a like, I'll do like the like out loud quietly to myself, if I'm like having a hard time, but

Kaytee Cobb 23:59

so you can keep the clip going right?

Traci Thomas 24:00

Well, yeah. And just like sometimes it's, it makes sense. When you hear it out loud or like the consonants will hit different or like, something will become more clear in the hearing of it because they were written to be heard. They weren't written to be read. And so if I'm having a hard time imagining what's going on, I might like take it out loud, so I can hear it.

Kaytee Cobb 24:18

Do you do many audiobooks? like would you ever (inaudible overlap)

Traci Thomas 24:22

I would, but I don't do Shakespeare on audiobooks, because a lot of them are like, acted performances that are recorded. And so it's hard for me to follow who's talking. And I definitely don't hold an audio book, or hold a physical book and read an audio book because to me, that defeats the purpose of like, that's like a waste of my time. It takes way too long for me, so I don't, but sometimes I'll watch the movie after I finish it or like, I'll try to find a performance if I can. But I've tried I tried to do an audio book of one of them. And because a lot of the plays are mostly most of the plays are mostly men. Actually, all of the plays are mostly men. Because of that, it's really hard on audiobook. There's different actors who I can't see to differentiate, and I can't really tell their voices apart and I'm like, wait, is that Bassanio? Or is that you know, like it's so I don't

Kaytee Cobb 25:12

Fair. Okay, so let's pivot a little bit to nonfiction reading because because I know you're a big nonfiction reader. Do you do stats very much anywhere?

Kaytee Cobb 25:22

Do you know your like percentage

Traci Thomas 25:22

Yes.

Traci Thomas 25:23

I think so far Actually, I can tell you this year I am at 61% nonfiction and 39% fiction but included in the fiction are all the Shakespeare plays I've read and most of the poetry collections, so it's even less. So that includes so I've read 20, 18 fiction books, but four of them were plays and five of them were poetry so if that changes how you think about fiction and nonfiction it's a lot of them.

Kaytee Cobb 25:54

A full on half of your of your fiction was plays and poetry. Wow, gosh, that's a lot too. Okay, so but 61% nonfiction I don't know if I know any other reader... Not that you and I were like friends hanging out but that I know, in the internet space any other reader who reads such a high percentage of nonfiction? What do you think it is that draws you into nonfiction store?

Traci Thomas 26:18

I think that that is like I think that just actually shows like, how skewed the like bookstagram universe is because in the in like the real world, most people read nonfiction. Nonfiction books sell way more than fiction books like nonfiction is the moneymaker for most publishers. So I think that that's just like a skewed universe that we both reside in. Because most people I know, in the outside of bookstagram, read nonfiction, whether it's self help, or business books, or pop psychology, like Malcolm Gladwell, or whatever that looks like. But so so to me, I'm like, I feel like I read more fiction than most people do. But I just I like a true story. I feel like I don't I don't know I don't. There's so much incredible, crazy, wild, different, heartwarming, joyful, whatever things that happen in the real world, that unless your book of fiction is really, really well done. I just I don't I could read a true story that deals with these things, you know, so that's how I think about it. I also don't mind like reading being difficult. If something's really academic, like that doesn't bother me. I'm excited to learn new things. And yeah, sometimes I want to read something for an escape. But also I find that there are a lot of nonfiction books that can do that for me without having to read a fiction book where I'm going to be annoyed because someone's talking about folding sheets, you know?

Kaytee Cobb 27:43

Do you have favorite nonfiction wheelhouses like true crime?

Traci Thomas 27:48

I like memoir. I like essays and then my favorite if I can find it and has to be really good. I don't like bad of this but I like really good of this is investigative journalism. Ideally about a crime and/or corruption. So like Columbine, I love. Blood in the Water I love.

Kaytee Cobb 28:18

Empire of Pain

Traci Thomas 28:19

Empire of Pain I loved. So that those kinds of books like I like if it can tie into history, I like but it has to be really well done like not I feel like the ones that are bad of those don't ever get much traction because it's like pretty impossible to read a bad investigative journalism book. But really, really good. Are those are always my favorite books. You know, like if I'm like ranking my favorite books of all time, which I never would do. And please don't ask me to those books always would show up very high on the list, like, more concentrated at the top. Because I think like when it's done well, it's just like, Mind blown. Bad Blood is another one. That's really good.

Kaytee Cobb 29:00

I was gonna ask if you had read that one. Okay. You say don't ask me to rank my favorite books of all time. But last year, you put up all the books you read for the year in ranked order.

Traci Thomas 29:09

I did.

Kaytee Cobb 29:09

I was gobsmacked. I was like, how is she doing this?

Traci Thomas 29:12

I couldn't I was inspired by Daryl of @dsweet_library. Cuz he does it every year. And I think it's fun. I like to rank things. But ranking the books that I read in the year was easy. I couldn't go back and rank everything I've ever read is what more what I imagined. But it was fun. I only did it on my stories. I didn't save it because I didn't want to hurt anybody's feelings. So I figured if you weren't looking you missed it and that's fine. But it was actually kind of a fun exercise. And I liked it. I was very nervous to do cuz I didn't want people's feelings to be hurt, but also it's just my opinion and like I think I put a quote from Kiese Laymon where he was saying something where he was like, not like you have Gladys Knight and The Pips. Not every book is Gladys Knight, some of y'all got to be The Pips. And so that's kind of how I approach that like, that's my Pips, you know, like it might be your Gladys Knight but to me it was just The Pips. You know, and that's fine. And we need The Pips. Because otherwise who's gonna sing back up on the midnight train to Georgia? I don't know. Right?

Kaytee Cobb 30:09

So yeah, nobody, and that would be terrible. I did it. Okay, what about what about the podcast and your reading life because we, we started Currently Reading probably within six months of you starting The Stacks. So we've both been kind of tracking, like learning a lot and figuring out like, how much time it takes to edit an episode and to prepare for interview and all of that. What do you feel like, has been like one of some of your biggest lessons you've learned in these three years? Or how do you feel like the podcast has changed your reading life? I feel like it forces you to read more fiction.

Traci Thomas 30:43

Yeah, I read more fiction because of the podcast. But also, I have, in this past year, really worked on reclaiming what I want the show to be and not feeling like bullied by publishers or authors because they want to be on the show. But like, be like, do I actually want to talk about this, but I actually want to spend the time to read it, because I'm actually a very slow reader. And so it takes me a long time. And actually, I don't know if I'm a very slow reader, I am a slower reader than a lot of people. I don't know what a very slow reader or a very fast reader even means. But to me, I don't read through things that quickly. I just spend a lot of time with my books. So like, I might finish a book in a day, but it means that I was probably reading the book all day and didn't do anything else. Like I'm not one of people who can sit down for three hours and finish a book like know, like, when the thing on my Kindles, like, "average reader takes three hours" I'm like, Okay, and then it tracks my reading. It's like 12 hours. I'm like, really? Oh, no. So that is definitely I read more fiction, I read more, but also in a good way. Like I read authors that I never would have heard of, or like books that I never would have tried to read, but I you know,

end up liking or whatever. And then lesson I tell everything's a lesson. I think, like, the biggest lesson I've learned is just like, do make the thing, do the thing. And then, you know, you can evaluate how you did after the fact but don't not make the thing because you're worried you're gonna do a bad job, because chances are, you're going to do a bad job. You know, like, I'm my toughest critic, I, you know, I'll come out of an interview, and I'll go to my husband and be like, this episode sucks. And I hate that I have to put it out in the world. And then I put out in the world. And then I move on to the next episode, you know, like, I, I'm not precious about my work in that way. I do everything that I can to prepare as much as possible, because that's my personality. You know, I try to read as much of the person's work or if they're an actor, I try to watch their show or like, I try to do as much research research as I can, you know, I prepare questions. I try to have my stuff together. But after that, you can't control how an interview goes, you can't control how the guest is like, you can't control. You know, for example, I had Patrick Radden Keefe on the show. He was wonderful and amazing. But he had to record outside we had to, he had to be outside. And so there was background noise. And that was a bummer. Because I know some people are probably irritated by the wind, but also like, it was one of my favorite episodes. I think it was great. I loved him so much. And I think he had really interesting things to say, I can't control the fact that his wife has, she's a lawyer, and she needed to be in the office that they share that day, for whatever reason, and he had to go outside like, you know, so I guess that's probably the biggest lesson that I would say. And also, you know, I don't know, let other people tell you no, you should just keep asking and like, keep trying. Yeah. Because if you tell yourself no, then you're never going to ask and it could have been a yes. And usually it is yes. So few nos anymore.

Kaytee Cobb 33:34

It does feel like there are more yeses than nos Yeah. Often

Traci Thomas 33:38

I would, at least on this space. I mean, I don't know that's not true for a lot of people and a lot of spaces. But like, I still firmly believe, you know, you get 0% of the things you don't ask for so...

Kaytee Cobb 33:50

Well it absolutely shows that you spend this, this amazing amount of time really making sure that you're going to have good questions for your authors and, or whoever else you have on, because the conversations flow really great. And so like, round of applause. Great job.

Traci Thomas 34:08

Thank you.

Kaytee Cobb 34:08

I know, I know. You're like I'm not a journalist, but I do like being called a journalist. And if there's anything that gets close in the podcast realm, I'd put it on your on your show.

Traci Thomas 34:18

Official journalist. You heard it here first. Well, you heard it here. I don't know if it's first.

Kaytee Cobb 34:22

You've heard it a lot of places already. I

Traci Thomas 34:24

Just you've heard me say that I'm a journalist. It's not real, but I love to pretend.

Kaytee Cobb 34:28

Well, you're I mean, you're getting published in shereads now like doing your book pairings. It's pretty. It's pretty impressive.

Traci Thomas 34:34

It's journalist adjacent.

Kaytee Cobb 34:36

Oh, I like that. I like that. Okay, so what about is there effort when you're picking your Stacks book club picks? Like you're doing Anna Karenina tomorrow in relation to when we're recording this episode. Has has an author ever come to you have been like, I seriously want to talk about this book and you're like, oh, no. No. I do not want to read that and go away!

Traci Thomas 34:56

If someone comes in really enthused about a book which is rare, but if they do, we almost always do it. Because my thinking is that at least for the book club, my thinking is that if they're really excited to talk about it, that's going to be a better conversation no matter what I think of the book, like if someone came to you and was like, Oh, my God, Kaytee, this amazing thing. And you were like, no, like, I don't I think that's like not I don't think that's a good idea. But there have been times where people have suggested books and for different reasons, I have said, Okay, I'm getting that you want to talk about a generational family drama? How about this instead? But usually, that has more to do with just the programming of the show, like I had done The Bluest Eye in October of 2018. And someone who was my guest, in like, December, January of 2019, wanted to do Beloved, and I was like, No, we can't do Toni Morrison, because we just did it. Can we do X, Y, and Z, you know. So it's like that. Or sometimes they want to do an author who's like, a straight white guy. And we just did a straight white guy. And I'm like, I really don't want to do two straight white guys in a row, like, Can we pivot in that way? But it's never, it's never the I don't want to read the book. Because a lot of the times, I don't want to read the book, you know, like, it's not, it's not a book that I've ever heard of, it's not on my list. Like, it's not something that I would have said, I want to read this, our June book, which will have been announced by now. My guest came to me, and I usually say like, why don't you send me a few books you want to talk about? And they came back with just this book, and I looked it up. And I said, Okay, let's do it. Never heard of it didn't know anything about it. And it's good. Like, I'm excited that we're doing it. But I usually trust that the person that I'm having on is really interested in the topic and wants to talk about it, but I will be fine.

Kaytee Cobb 36:43

Yeah, I mean, agree. And, and there's something to be said, for just having the conversation even if you like, even if you're not gonna like the book.

Traci Thomas 36:50

Yeah. I mean, we've done plenty of books that I have not liked on the show. And I've said, I did not like this book. And like, you know, for Anna Karenina, I, Jenny and I had talked about doing it a long time ago. And then when it came time to do it, I actually had to be like, I think we should do it. And she's like, Are you sure? Are people really gonna want to read it? And I was like, I think we should like, I feel like, we should just do it. And she was like, Okay, if you don't want to do it while I'm there. And I was like, Yeah, let's do it. So sometimes it's me pushing, you know, sometimes it's too strong on her. Yeah. And sometimes people say they don't know, you know, it takes sometimes it takes a few emails back and forth. And sometimes it's as easy as this is the June book, which was like, I want to do this book. And I said, Great, let's do it. You know, so just depends.

Kaytee Cobb 37:29

Oh, man, that's, that's great. And I like as somebody who has to choose book club, buddy reads, whatever for our patrons. It's exhausting.

Traci Thomas 37:41

Well, but you (inaudible overlap) Do you let other people help you pick?

Kaytee Cobb 37:45

Sometimes. I'm kind of a control freak. Yeah.

Traci Thomas 37:47

Well, so am I. But that's what makes it easier for me is that if I have someone else picking, then it's not on me if the book sucks, you know, I can be like, Oh, the guest picked that like, I don't know, I just I'm not. Again, I'm not that precious about a lot of this, like, I trust in my guests. Because if I want to talk to you for two hours, like I trust that I want to talk to you for two hours, they're gonna have interesting things to say. I trust that my audience, you know, understands that, just because I pick a book, it's not an endorsement of the book, like, right, yeah. So I you know, it's I'm not Reese Witherspoon. I'm not being like, "everyone has to read this book and so great". Like, no, I'm like, we're gonna talk about this book in detail, read it. And folks, like, I don't want to read it. I don't care. Like, that's fine. You don't have to read it, like read anything else, or don't read this month or whatever. Like, it's not that serious to me. And I don't think it should be that serious to anybody else. I'm always happy when people do read. And I find that you know, my job, the way that I think about it, my job is just to make sure that the episode is good and interesting when we talk about it. You know, I can't control what someone else wrote, I can't control if someone else is going to be offended by a book or not like it because of xy and z. I can't control if the author's name is the same as your ex husband. Like I can't none of those things are in my control. All I can do is try to come together with questions and topics to talk about that I think are going to be worthwhile for someone who spent the time to read with me which I always am so appreciative of.

Kaytee Cobb 39:09

Do, are you like taking notes in a notebook while you read?

Traci Thomas 39:12

I take notes on my phone when I read books for the podcast. So if it's a book club book, or a guest, I always take notes on my phone, otherwise, I just read to read unless I'm like, I really want to remember this for my review, which happens basically never.

Kaytee Cobb 39:28

Fair. I have one more question. We have to do talk about this next question. I know snacks on The Stacks. We have to talk about Traci's snacks. Yeah, Traci, what do you like to snack on when you are reading?

Traci Thomas 39:38

So I feel like this is gonna be really I just like a snack. So I just eat whatever. So like right now I'm really into monster trail mix from Target. It's the it's the trail mix that has the least good for you things and the most bad for you things so it's peanut oil, so I'm allergic to tree nuts. So the only nuts I can have are peanuts. So I cannot almonds cashews, pistachios. Whatever walnuts whatever disgusting. That's all of you people eat I can't have those. So my favorite trail... but I like trail mix because I like raisins and chocolate. So monster trail mix is peanuts, peanut butter chips, chocolate chips, m&ms and raisins, super healthy, super delicious. Don't call your nutritionist on me. So that's a snack I'm into right now. Obviously, I'm famously known for the pescatarian, which is Goldfish and Swedish Fish. But any gummy sweet thing with any salty thing as a combo. So sometimes I don't have Swedish Fish. I'll do raisins and goldfish. Sometimes I will do I like a cream cheese on a pretzel thin, or it's not Alouette brands but it's that other cheese spread or, it is Alouette brand like not boursin and it's like a garlic herb which is also very good on a pretzel thin. No, sometimes too salty. Also great on a pita chip. The other thing I'm really into is I make my own tzatziki because I don't like dill, but I do like mint so I put mint instead of dill and my tzatziki and it's delicious. And I make it by like the Fage yogurt like the big not the giant one bucket, not the giant one but the like 16 ounces one. So I make like one a week and I eat that with pita chips. I also like sweet potato chips from Terra, but just the sweet potato not the mixed with all those other disgusting weird potatoes are weird. I don't I'm here for a potato chip and a sweet potato chip. I am not here for like your weird white spotted like gross chip

Kaytee Cobb 41:29

or like purple. No, thank you.

Traci Thomas 41:31

Yeah. Okay, so those are all I love a gummy love of chocolate covered raisin. I'm really going hard on raisins. I also love my tea with milk and sugar. So that is what I'm drinking now. But also oftentimes I'll have that instead of a snack when I read because usually I read early in the morning, or late in the evening, and I like to have a warm milky beverage.

Kaytee Cobb 41:52

I love that. I'm like super hungry now. Wow, that was like not a good plan on my part. The

Traci Thomas 41:59

Only snacks I don't like are healthy things. So like I don't like cucumber or whatever weird thing or like a carrot stick or like an or like no, celery, celery. Celery is my nightmare. Celery. Celery is my arch nemesis. I also don't famously don't like many vegetables. And so I'm also a very picky eater. So I eat this. I eat like a four year old in the sense that I can eat the same food over and over and over and have absolutely zero problem eating it the next day. I don't I don't have that thing. It's like, Oh, I had that yesterday. I'm like, Nope, I had that yesterday, and I'll have it again tomorrow.

Kaytee Cobb 42:31

And you're like spaghetti again, tacos.

Traci Thomas 42:34

Plain pasta with butter and salt is what I eat every night that my husband is on call because I don't have to cook for us. And it is my favorite.

Kaytee Cobb 42:41

I do white rice with butter and salt. That is my favorite like non food food. Oh, non meal meal.

Traci Thomas 42:46

No, it's a meal for me.

Kaytee Cobb 42:49

That was great. I'm so excited to let our listeners get a little better feel for who Traci is outside of the very professional journalist that we hear on The Stacks every week.

Traci Thomas 43:00

And so not professional, which I think is hilarious. Someone once told me they were like, I'm so glad to have you on. You're so serious. I was like, Am I? On my show I don't feel serious, but maybe I am. I don't know.

Kaytee Cobb 43:11

No, I don't feel like you're serious.

Traci Thomas 43:13

I don't think I'm serious. But I also don't

Kaytee Cobb 43:15

I feel like you, It sounds like you're having fun. I don't know,

Traci Thomas 43:18

I'm very far from serious. If you knew me in life, you would know I'm not serious at all.

Kaytee Cobb 43:24

But you do prepare well, and that is what a professional intense that is true. intense. There's a good way the intense journalist Traci Thomas on The Stacks. Okay. So now we're gonna transition into one of our favorite parts of the podcast. It's the books we want to press into listeners hands, Traci, I mean, sometimes this is a very big decision for people. Did you know automatically what you're going to press this week?

Traci Thomas 43:48

I've been on a few other podcasts and so I was pushing different books. So I'm just gonna push something that I didn't push on those other podcasts so that if you've been listening to me this week, because they're all coming out within a few days of each other, I think or a few a week or two each other. So I tried to pick something that I hadn't recommended somewhere else. And, you know, it just depends on my mood. I don't know it's hard for me because all I do is recommend books all the time. And so usually if I recommend a book, it's because I want people to read it. I don't know, it's it's always hard. And it's not the only I don't know, the way you I'll frame it as like the book you want people to read like, Oh, I feel like there's a lot of pressure there. But I review every single book that I read on my Instagram page, so if you don't like this recommendation, come follow me @thestackspod on Instagram. Every single book I've read since I started The Stacks in 2018 has a review on there except for the 10 books that I am behind on reviewing currently. So with that being said that disclaimer, I'm going to do a backlist book that I love and have loved and if you know me, you've probably heard me talk about it. But my own mother had never heard me talk about it allegedly even though she allegedly listens to me on podcast so I don't know she's either faked or she's not listening love you mom. And it's called Jesus Land by Julia Scheeres it's a twofer, because I'm also going to tell you to read her other book A Thousand Lives. But Jesus Land is her memoir. And she is from Indianapolis, Indiana, Southern Indiana. I want to say Indianapolis but could be outside. And she's white. She has white parents, her birth parents who are white, and her birth parents adopt two children who are black. And they are not great parents. And they are... I'm trying not to spoil. And they are not great. And Julia and her brother get sent to a camp, Jesus camp. And it's about their family and their relationship. And it's I'm not doing a great job explaining it. But if you know me, just trust me that this book is actually incredible. It's one of I read it in 2009. I still think about it. I still am trying to get people to read it. I think it's a fantastic book. Now, if you buy the book because of this conversation, and you have a newer edition of the book, listen carefully, do not read the introduction written by Julia Scheeres because it was added to the book for the 10 year anniversary of the book or whatever. And it's an article she wrote for Oprah Magazine, and it has major, major, humungous red flags spoilers, I do not know why they put it as an introduction instead of as like a post, whatever. But they did. So if you get the new book again, do not be mad at me if you listen if you read it, because that is your mistake. I'm telling you now do not do it. It will ruin the book. It won't ruin the book. The book is still great, but it literally gives away the number one big twist in the book. It's so silly. I have no idea I do not get it. It's terrible. But then the other book which I'm pressing in your hands also. And this book is one of those amazingly delicious nonfiction investigative journalism, incredible books is called A Thousand Lives it's also by Julia Scheeres s c. h. e. r. e. s. Scheeres. I know, it's tough. It's about Jonestown, Jim Jones Jonestown. But its focus is primarily on the people who were there and their lives and their stories. And it is investigative journalism. At some of its best, it's very heartfelt. It's very emotional. You know, the spoiler I won't spoil in case you're not familiar with Jonestown. But she talks about all that stuff that you're thinking about. She also frames

you know, what happened there as you know, people call it a cult and all this and she talks about why that language is really problematic and why it's not that and it's just such an incredible book. So if you're more of a memoir, vibe, go with Jesus Land if you're more of a, I want to read a nonfiction book that is gonna probably haunt me but also is incredible, read A Thousand Lives both by Julia Scheeres.

Kaytee Cobb 48:07

I love that. I really like it when people are like, okay, you gave me these parameters. And also, I'm pressing two books, so too bad. Yeah,

Traci Thomas 48:15

I mean, too bad for everyone who tries to tell me to do something. It's never gonna happen how you want it. You shouldn't have invited me if you wanted someone to do exactly what you want it.

Kaytee Cobb 48:24

Perfect. No, I love that. I think that's great. Okay, my book that I'm going to press is also memoir, essays, nonfiction. It's Here For It by R. Eric Thomas, you've read this one.

Traci Thomas 48:37

He was a guest on The Stacks. I think right before you started listening, maybe right after May 2020.

Kaytee Cobb 48:43

Because I went to look for interviews with him.

Traci Thomas 48:46

He's got a great interview with again, Sam Sanders from It's Been a Minute. Both great interviews. He's great. And I have an Instagram Live with him from the fall, which was really fun. I love R. Eric, I stan hard. But go ahead. Do your pitch.

Kaytee Cobb 49:06

No, yeah, no, this is great. It's a cosine then. So I want to be sure during June especially to continue to press great books by and about LGBT authors, and protagonists during Pride Month. So this week, one of my very favorite books of 2020. Here For it is a collection of essays memoir style biting social commentary, hilarious turn of phrase. R. Eric is a gay Black man who grew up in the church and is now married to a pastor. So his point of view feels fresh and new while also providing with like personal connection through humor that makes some topics that are a little tougher, much easier to connect with. I full on laughed out loud multiple times during this book, and my highlights on my Kindle version include the sentence, I was crying in front of everyone. I was making new friends just so I could cry in front of them. I would literally scroll through my phone and ask myself who haven't cried out yet. And those of you who have been listening to Currently Reading for a long time know that that's totally me. If I have not cried in front of you, we're not even really friends. So R. Eric, he made me laugh and cry. And I'm pretty sure that makes us friends. And I hope everyone else finds the same thing. And these pages, it's Here for It by R. Eric Thomas. And the cover is amazing. And I love this book.

Traci Thomas 50:20

And the audio book is also great.

Kaytee Cobb 50:22

I don't haven't listened to the audiobook.

Traci Thomas 50:23

It's really good. Yeah, I had they sent me. I don't know, I somehow I got the audio book. I can't remember. But I listened. I read some of it. And then I listened to it and he reads it. And again, R. Eric is the best.

Kaytee Cobb 50:33

He is hysterical. Yeah. I mean, I love him. Okay, that is it for this week. As a reminder, you can connect with us on Instagram. I'm Kaytee @notesonbookmarks on instagram. Meredith is @Meredith.reads. Tracy, where are we gonna find you everywhere?

Traci Thomas 50:51

@thestackspod on Instagram, @thestackspod_ on Twitter, The Stacks episodes come out every Wednesday. Thestackspodcast.com

Kaytee Cobb 51:18

Perfect, full show notes with all that good stuff we just mentioned and every book we mentioned in the episode and timestamps, so you can zoom right to where we talked about it on our website @currentlyreadingpodcast.com. You can find the podcast on Instagram at @currentlyreadingpodcast or contact us by email at currentlyreadingpodcast@gmail.com We would love Currently Reading and The Stacks would both love for you to rate and review us on Apple podcasts. Shout us out on social media or become a patron right Traci that is the best way to help the show grow.

Traci Thomas 51:49

Yes, become a patron patron

Kaytee Cobb 51:51

Patreon, that's what all the cool kids are doing it you guys Patreon is the place to be makes a huge difference.

Traci Thomas 51:56

But If you can't if you can't do it, I get it times are tough, whatever. We don't understand that. But honestly, please do review the show on Apple podcasts that actually is a super free and easy thing and it takes like 30 seconds. However, if you're gonna give it zero or one stars, you don't have to do that. So don't waste your time and be a hater. Only waste your time and be nice and loving because it does make a big difference and it's super meaningful and it's 100% free. And if you're one of those people that has an Android which I know some of you exist, you can still go on iTunes. So don't try to give me that I don't have an iPhone but you can't do it. It's true. You're probably at your computer at some point

in your life. So you know, anyways, not to bully you into doing this but to bully you into doing this please rate and review the podcast on Apple podcasts.

Kaytee Cobb 52:32

Any podcasts you love, I promise they want you to do this you guys go be bullied into rating and reviewing. Okay, recommendations, shares, Patreon support that all helps us grow and get closer to our goals. Until next week, Happy reading Traci.

Traci Thomas 52:53

Happy reading Kaytee.