Long Island Reads
2015 Reader’s Guide

The MUSEUM of EXTRAORDINARY THINGS

ALICE HOFFMAN

Long Island Reads is sponsored by
The Nassau Library System &
The Public Libraries of Suffolk County

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About Long Island Reads

One Island-One Book

One Book projects are community-wide reading programs. The first One Book project was initiated by the Washington Center for the Book in 1998. Since then, the concept has spread across the United States and around the world. Seattle librarian, Nancy Pearl, author of Book Lust and More Book Lust, and NPR book critic, is the mastermind behind the One City, One Book phenomenon. If your city is interested in starting its own program, you can obtain “How To” information by going to Seattle Reads (www.spl.org).

To see a listing of One City, One Book projects visit the Library of Congress website at www.read.gov/resources/. Projects are listed by state, city and author. While at the Library of Congress site, check out their Center for the Book.

The Long Island Reads Committee is a group of librarians and library employees from Nassau and Suffolk counties on Long Island, New York who volunteer to work on this Island-wide reading initiative. Each spring people in Nassau and Suffolk read the same book, participate in discussions of the selection, and enjoy related events in public libraries.

Many Long Island Reads events take place during National Library Week, April 12-18, 2015

For more information about Long Island Reads One Island-One Book visit:

www.longislandreads.org
About Alice Hoffman

Alice Hoffman was born in New York City and grew up on Long Island. After graduating from Valley Stream High School North in 1969, she attended Adelphi University, from which she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1973. She then earned a Master of Arts in Creative Writing from Stanford University in 1975, where she was a Mirrellees Fellow. Hoffman, a skillful storyteller whose books have been published in more than 20 translations and more than 100 foreign editions, currently resides in Boston, Massachusetts. Her novels have received mention as notable books of the year by numerous high-profile publications.

Hoffman’s more than 30 bestselling works of fiction include: *Practical Magic*, a major motion picture starring Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman; *Here on Earth*, an Oprah Book Club selection that was a modern reworking of some of the themes of Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*; the highly praised historical novel *The Dovekeepers*; and *The Museum of Extraordinary Things*. Her books for teens include *Green Angel*, a post-apocalyptic fairy tale about loss and love; *Green Witch*, *Incantation*, a story about hidden Jews during the Spanish Inquisition, chosen by *Publishers Weekly* as a best book of the year; *The Foretelling*, a book about an Amazon girl in the Bronze Age and *Aquamarine*, also a major motion picture. *At Risk*, concerning a family dealing with AIDS, can be found on the reading lists of many universities, colleges and secondary schools. Committed to encouraging young writers, Alice Hoffman founded the Hoffman Teen Writing Program, held every summer at Adelphi University in Garden City, NY. Her advance from *Local Girls*, a collection of inter-related fiction about love and loss on Long Island, was donated to help create the Hoffman Breast Center at Mt. Auburn Hospital in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Synopsis

The spellbinding New York Times bestseller from the author of The Dovekeepers is an extraordinary novel about an electric and impassioned love affair—“an enchanting love story rich with history and a sense of place” (USA TODAY).

Coralie Sardie is the daughter of the sinister impresario behind The Museum of Extraordinary Things, a Coney Island freak show that thrills the masses. An exceptional swimmer, Coralie appears as the Mermaid in her father’s “museum,” alongside performers like the Wolfman and the Butterfly Girl. One night Coralie stumbles upon a striking young man taking pictures of moonlit trees in the woods off the Hudson River.

The dashing photographer is Eddie Cohen, a Russian immigrant who has run away from his community and his job as a tailor’s apprentice. When Eddie photographs the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, he becomes embroiled in the mystery behind a young woman’s disappearance, and he ignites the heart of Coralie.

Alice Hoffman weaves her trademark magic, romance, and masterful storytelling to unite Coralie and Eddie in a tender and moving story of young love in tumultuous times. The Museum of Extraordinary Things is “a lavish tale about strange yet sympathetic people” (The New York Times Book Review).
Alice Hoffman & *The Museum of Extraordinary Things* Online

**REVIEWS**

*BookPage* newsletter had this to say about *The Museum of Extraordinary Things*: [tinyurl.com/n6hwg8k](tinyurl.com/n6hwg8k)

See what the *New York Times* had to say about *Museum of Extraordinary Things* here: [tinyurl.com/mnnesue](tinyurl.com/mnnesue)

*Boston Globe* review: [tinyurl.com/nwsno4k](tinyurl.com/nwsno4k)

*Museum of Extraordinary Things* was an Editor’s Pick in *Oprah* magazine: [tinyurl.com/kxr59gd](tinyurl.com/kxr59gd)

*Kirkus*: [tinyurl.com/k4oyx72](tinyurl.com/k4oyx72)

*Jewish Book World Magazine*: [tinyurl.com/leyabp8](tinyurl.com/leyabp8)

**SOCIAL MEDIA CONNECTIONS**

Follow Alice Hoffman on Facebook: [tinyurl.com/n7admd2](tinyurl.com/n7admd2)

See what readers like you thought of *Museum of Extraordinary Things* on Goodreads: [tinyurl.com/kwcv39f](tinyurl.com/kwcv39f)

Watch the trailer for *Museum of Extraordinary Things*: [tinyurl.com/oz4ywnk](tinyurl.com/oz4ywnk)

Listen to excerpts from *Museum of Extraordinary Things*: [tinyurl.com/mg7tsos](tinyurl.com/mg7tsos)

Look at all the pins on Pinterest for *Museum of Extraordinary Things*: [tinyurl.com/lxr4fwn](tinyurl.com/lxr4fwn)

Here is the Long Island Reads Pinterest Board for *Museum of Extraordinary Things*: [tinyurl.com/lcjo9kh](tinyurl.com/lcjo9kh)

**INTERVIEWS**

A Sunday *New York Times, By The Book* Interview With Alice Hoffman: [tinyurl.com/nll728q](tinyurl.com/nll728q)

Alice Hoffman and Judith Light discuss the audiobook of *Museum of Extraordinary Things*: [tinyurl.com/kfc5xj](tinyurl.com/kfc5xj)

Alice Hoffman talks about how she writes in this *Boston Globe* interview: [tinyurl.com/n3gex6x](tinyurl.com/n3gex6x)
Suggestions for Reading Critically

Adapted from the Library of Congress Center for the Book Guidelines

The best stories are those that connect to human experience. They reveal an important truth, or provide a profound sense of kinship between reader and writer. Searching for, identifying, and discussing these truths deepens the reader's appreciation of the story. Asking questions, reading carefully, imagining yourself in the story, analyzing style and structure, and searching for personal meaning in a work of literature all enhance the work's value and the discussion potential for your group. Here are some helpful suggestions on how you can become a more critical reader.

Make notes and mark pages as you go. Reading for a book discussion – whether you are the leader or simply a participant – differs somewhat from reading purely for pleasure. As you read a book in preparation for a discussion, ask questions of yourself and mark down pages to which you might want to refer again. Make notes like, "Is this significant?" or "Why does the author include this?" Making notes as you go slows down your reading but saves you the time of searching out important passages later.

Ask tough questions of yourself and the book. Obviously, asking questions of yourself as you read means you don't know the answer yet, and sometimes you never will discover the answers. Don't be afraid to ask hard questions because often the author is presenting difficult issues for that very purpose. Look for questions that may lead to in-depth conversations with your group and make the readings more meaningful.

Pay attention to the authors' messages. As with any skill, critical reading improves with practice. Remember that a good author uses every word in a text deliberately. Try to be aware of what the authors are revealing about themselves and what they want you to learn about life from their perspectives.

Analyze themes. Try to analyze the important themes of a story and to consider the premises with which the author started. Imagine an author mulling over the beginnings of the story, asking, "what if" questions.

Get to know the characters. When you meet the characters in the book, place yourself at the scene. Think of them as you do the people around you. Judge them. Think about their faults and their motives. What would it be like to interact with them? Are the tone and style of their dialogue authentic? Read portions aloud to get to know the voices of the characters.

Notice the structure of the stories as well as the organization of the entire book. Sometimes the structure of the book illustrates an important concept or helps to create a mood. Notice how the editor structured the book. How do the stories relate to each other? How are the individual stories and selections structured?

Who are the narrators? How does the sequence of events unfold to create the mood of the story? Is it written in flashbacks? Does the sequence of actions make sense to you?

Make comparisons to other stories and works. Compare the book and the stories to others that have a similar theme or style. Often, themes run through an author's works that are more fully realized by comparison. Comparing one author's work to that of another can help you solidify your opinions, as well as illuminate qualities you may otherwise miss.
Suggested Book Discussion Questions

1. The novel is framed by two spectacular fires. Why do you think the author chose to structure the novel this way? What effect does each fire have on the major characters and on the people of Manhattan and Brooklyn?

2. How does Raymond Morris, known as the Wolfman, change Coralie’s perception of her father and their circumscribed world? What parallels does Coralie find between her own life and those of the characters in Jane Eyre?

3. Why does Coralie keep Maureen in the dark about her night swims and her father’s sexual exploitation? Would Maureen have been able to protect Coralie if she had known?

4. Eddie says “the past was what we carried with us, threaded to the future, and we decided whether to keep it close or let it go” (139). Was Eddie able to let his past go? Did you sympathize with his decision to move away from his father?

5. Why does Eddie feel compelled to solve the mystery of Hannah Weiss’s disappearance? What makes him a good “finder”?

6. When Coralie steps into the lion’s cage, the trainer Bonavita tells her “you have a form of bravery inside you” (196). Do you agree? Does Coralie agree? In what instances does she defy her father, and when does she acquiesce to his demands?

7. Why did the author emphasize animals, water, fire and dreams?

8. Consider Coralie’s claim that “curiosity had always been my downfall” (253). Did her curiosity about her father and the outside world worsen her situation or improve it? How naïve is Coralie?

9. What did you make of the living wonders at The Museum of Extraordinary Things? How did their treatment differ at Dreamland? What enables some of the wonders, such as the Butterfly Girl, to achieve a semblance of a normal life?

10. What sort of atmosphere does Alice Hoffman create by using dreams as a recurring motif? How do Coralie’s and Eddie’s dreams expose their inner lives and connect them to the past and future?

11. What is the actual Museum of Extraordinary Things? Is it New York City or Professor Sardie’s enterprise? Why?

12. Professor Sardie and Abraham Hochman both present themselves as things they are not. How did you feel about their deception and self-aggrandizement? Do circumstances make one worse than the other? In what ways did the culture of early-twentieth-century New York City favor the corrupt and those who bent the rules?

13. How do you interpret the epigraph from Walt Whitman?
Suggested Book Discussion Questions

14. Where, and to whom, did Eddie look “to find what [he] was missing” (327)? What did Moses Levy, Abraham Hochman, the hermit, and Mr. Weiss each have to teach him?

15. Who had more to overcome, Coralie or Eddie?

16. Why did Maureen choose to stay with the Professor and Coralie, in spite of his treatment of her? Of the lessons that Maureen taught Coralie, which were the most important?

17. Was Eddie’s treatment of his father and rejection of his roots reasonable?

18. Consider the role that animals play in the novel. Why does Coralie save the tortoise? What is the symbolism of the trout that Eddie cannot kill? In what other instances do animals reveal something about a character?

19. Did the use of alternative narrators enhance the storytelling?

20. In thinking of her father, Coralie says “perhaps there is evil in certain people, a streak of meanness that cannot be erased by circumstance or fashioned into something brand new by love” (246). Do you think a person can be innately evil? Are the morally ambiguous actions of other characters, such as Eddie or the liveryman, redeemed?

21. What was the difference in the way that Eddie and Moses saw things?

22. Hoffman’s portrait of New York City is of a rapidly evolving, volatile place. Which historical details stood out most vividly to you? If you’ve spent time in New York, was it hard to imagine the city as it was in the early-twentieth-century? What places are currently undergoing similar transformations or experiencing similar tensions?

23. Did the author’s use of magical realism enhance or confuse the historical aspects of the novel for you?

24. Some years, like 1911, seem more “epic” than others. What other years can you think of when change was in the air?

25. What compels us to continue reading about unpleasant characters such as Professor Sardie and about disturbing events such as the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory and Dreamland fires?
If You Liked *The Museum of Extraordinary Things...*

**Fiction**

*Triangle* by Katharine Weber — Esther Gottesfeld is the last remaining survivor of the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, a believable and memorable witness to the horrors of that day.

*Swim to Me* by Betsy Carter — Delores is a Brooklyn girl who moves to 1970s Florida and reinvents herself as the star mermaid at Weeki Wachee Springs.

*Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern — The black and white tents of Le Cirque des Reves, a circus that arrives without warning, are the setting for a magical story.

*Water for Elephants* by Sara Gruen — Recounts the wild and wonderful years Jacob Jankowski spent with the Benzini Brothers Most Spectacular Show on Earth, a traveling circus he joined during the Great Depression.

*The Golem and The Jinni* by Helene Wecker — Ahmad and Chava become unlikely friends and soulmates with a mystical connection in 1899 Manhattan.

*The Light Between Oceans* by M. L. Stedman — Tom Sherbourne is a lighthouse keeper on Janus Rock. When a baby washes up in a rowboat, he and his young wife, Isabel, decide to raise the child as their own.

*My Notorious Life* by Kate Manning — Axie Muldoon’s story begins on the streets of 1860s New York. The impoverished child of Irish immigrants, she grows up to become one of the wealthiest and most controversial women of her day.

*Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* by Michael Chabon — In this Pulitzer Prize winning novel, two cousins, one from New York, the other a refugee from Prague, create a popular comic book series.

*Ragtime* by E.L. Doctorow — Captures the spirit of America in the era between the turn of the century and 1914, following the stories of real and fictional characters.

*Away* by Amy Bloom — 22-yr-old Lillian Leyb has fled the pogroms which killed her family in Russia. After arriving in New York in 1926, she sets out west across the country determined to find her daughter at all costs.

*The Alienist* by Caleb Carr — A riveting historical mystery set in New York in 1896 that features a cast of real figures, including then Police Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt, and a fictional search for a serial killer.

*Elizabeth Street* by Laurie Fabiano — The Italian immigrant experience in early 1900s New York is told through the eyes of Giovanna Costa, who makes a life in her new world in spite of reeling from a series of personal tragedies.

*The Electric Michaelangelo* by Sarah Hall — A Man Booker finalist, this sweeping novel explores loss and redemption in a coming-of-age story about a tattoo artist from England who reinvents himself on the boardwalk in 1930s Coney Island, N.Y.

*Dreamland* by Kevin Baker — A vast, sprawling carnival of a novel set at in the early 1900s and featuring Coney Island and the Lower East Side, midgets and gangsters, Bowery bars and opium dens, Sigmund Freud and the Triangle Factory fire.
If You Liked *The Museum of Extraordinary Things*...

**Nonfiction Sources For Additional Background and History**

*The Lost Tribe of Coney Island: Headhunters, Luna Park, and the Man Who Pulled Off the Spectacle of the Century* by Claire Prentice — The incredible true story of the Igorrotes, a group of headhunting, dog eating tribespeople brought to Coney Island’s Luna Park in 1905 from the Philippines.

*Coney Island and Astroland* (Images of America Series) — A collection of more than 200 vintage photographs and memories of Coney Island and Astroland, once billed as the theme park of the future.


*The Downtown Jews: Portraits of an Immigrant Generation* by Ronald Sanders — Focuses on the political culture of the Lower East Side at the turn of the century and on the thoughts, life, and writings of Abraham Cahan, the editor of the Jewish *Daily Forward*.

*Alfred Stieglitz New York* by Bonnie Yochelson — Iconic images of the city from one of the masters of photography in an homage to the lost New York of the early 20th Century.

*Alfred Stieglitz: Camera Work* by Pam Roberts — Photographer, writer, publisher, and curator Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) was a visionary far ahead of his time. This volume is a collection of *Camera Work*, an avant-garde magazine he began publishing in 1903 devoted to voicing the ideas, both in images and words, of the Photo-Secession.

*The Hudson: A History* by Tom Lewis — A blending of social, political and literary history, art history, geology, and natural history in telling the story of the Hudson River, including the environmental activism which developed in the 1960s and 1970s.

*Brooklyn: A State of Mind* by Michael W. Robbins — Through 125 essays (written by such celebrities as Spike Lee and Arthur Miller), interviews, and hundreds of photos, a broad array of Brooklyn history is explored, including a section on Coney Island.

*Topsy: The Startling Story of the Crooked-Tailed Elephant, P.T. Barnum, and the American Wizard* by Michael Daly — In 1903, on Coney Island, an elephant named Topsy was electrocuted and many historical forces conspired to bring Topsy, Thomas Edison, and 6600 volts of alternating current together that day.

*Triangle: The Fire That Changed America* by David Von Drehle — Explains the sociopolitical context in which the fire occurred and the subsequent successful push for industry reforms.
### The Long Island Reads 2015 Committee

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Special thanks to Astoria Bank

Contact your public library for more information about Long Island Reads events during National Library Week, April 12-18, 2015
Long Island Reads 2015 Evaluation

1. Have you read, or do you plan to read, *The Museum of Extraordinary Things*? Yes ___ No ___.

2. Have you visited the Long Island Reads website at www.longislandreads.org? Yes ___ No ___

3. What Library do you belong to?______________________________________________________________

4. Please let us know what you thought about today’s program:_______________________________________________________________________________

5. Have you participated in any Long Island Reads events in the past? Yes ____ No ___

   If yes, which one(s)? _______________________________________________________________________________________

6. Are you in a Book Club? Yes ___ No ___

   If you are in a Book Club, please tell us a little about your club: (For example: How often and where do you meet? How do you select the books? How many members? What type of books do you read?)

   ________________________________________________________________________________________________

   ________________________________________________________________________________________________

7. If you would like to suggest an author or title for Long Island Reads 2015, please do so below. Please tell us why you think this would be a good choice.

   ________________________________________________________________________________________________

   ________________________________________________________________________________________________

Your name (optional) _____________________________________________________________________________________

Are you a library employee? Yes ___ No ___

Do you reside in Nassau__ or Suffolk___

Please return this form to a member of the LI Reads committee here today or to:

   Deborah Clark Cunningham
   Head of Adult Reference
   Harborfields Public Library
   31 Broadway
   Greenlawn, NY 11740

Thank you for participating in Long Island Reads!