



Oct. 18-25, 2026

All Iowa City Book Festival-produced events are free and open to the public. Full Schedule at iowacitybookfestival.org

SUN, OCT. 18

Paul Engle Prize: Christopher Merrill, 2 p.m., Coralville Public Library

The 15th Paul Engle Prize will be presented to Christopher Merrill. A poet, writer, editor, and translator, Merrill retired at the end of 2025 after 25 years as director of the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. Loren Glass, chair of the UI English Department, will interview Merrill as part of the program. The Paul Engle Prize is made possible through the generous support of the City of Coralville.

In the Cards: A Tarot and Poetry Workshop with Paula Cisewski, 5:30 p.m., Porchlight Literary Arts Center. Reading to follow at 7 p.m.

Image, insight, archetype. Your Tarot deck may provide guidance, but how can you also use the deck to generate or revise your poems? Cisewski will give a brief introduction of Tarot for newcomers and provide examples of a couple spreads, and participants will generate work using the cards. After the workshop Cisewski will read from her latest book, *The Becoming Game*.

MON, OCT. 19

Tree Tour: Literary Grove at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, 12 p.m., Dey House Lawn Take a guided stroll through the Literary Grove, where each tree has a story to tell. Arborist Andy Dahl will share the unique histories and literary connections of these remarkable trees, many linked to celebrated authors from the world-renowned Iowa Writers' Workshop.

Marilynne Robinson in conversation with Nicholas Kristof, 7 p.m., MacBride Auditorium

Marilynne Robinson, the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist and essayist who taught at the Iowa Writers' Workshop for 25 years, is joined by Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof for a conversation about civility in modern American discourse. Presented by the Geneva Lecture Series in partnership with the Book Festival. The University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication supports Nicholas Kristof and Marilynne Robinson as 2026 Bernard and Ethel Adler Hurwitz Lecturers.

TUES, OCT. 20

Bonnie Jo Campbell, 6 p.m., Prairie Lights Books Bonnie Jo Campbell brings us a hair-raising winter tale to warm us by the fireside. In *The Spirits*, a contemporary Christmas Carol, Campbell creates a gritty, spooky,

and ultimately heartening holiday story set in an isolated farmhouse. It is the night before Christmas in a small town in Michigan, and a young woman is haunted by her father's death. She has been silently penitent for nine years, but her guilt and grief have estranged her from her community and her family.

Megan Greenwell, 7 p.m., Meeting Room A, Iowa City Public Library

Moderated by Lylz Lenz. Sponsored by the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Acclaimed journalist Megan Greenwell's *Bad Company* unearths the hidden story of corporate greed and the world of private equity by examining the lives of four American workers that were devastated as private equity upended their employers and communities: a Toys R Us floor supervisor, a rural doctor, a local newspaper journalist, and an affordable housing organizer. Taken together, their individual experiences also pull back the curtain on a much larger project: how the relentless pursuit of shareholder value reshaped the American economy to serve its own interests, creating a new class of billionaires while stripping ordinary people of their livelihoods, their health care, their homes, and their sense of security.

WED, OCT. 21

Curator Guided Tour, 4 p.m., University of Iowa Main Library Gallery Join co-curators Collin Vandewalle and Lindsay Moen for a special guided tour of the current University of Iowa Libraries Main Library Gallery exhibition, "It's Been Wonderful Knowing You: Wildlife Conservation and Advocacy Through the Lens of Jay N. 'Ding' Darling." Oct. 21 is also Darling's birthday, so stop by for birthday treats before or after the tour! (Gluten-free and vegan options available.)



Pilar Quintana, 5:30 p.m., Prairie Lights Books Pilar Quintana, the author of five novels and a book of short stories, reads from *La Perra (The Bitch)* which has been translated into more than twenty languages, was on the long list for the Dublin Literary Award, was a finalist for the Premio Nacional de Novela and the National Book Award, and won the Premio Biblioteca de Narrativa Colombiana, an English PEN Translates Award, and the LiBeraturpreis. Quintana appears in partnership with the Refocus Film Festival and the UT's International Writing Program.

Slamovision judging event, 6 p.m., Iowa City Public Library

Attendees are invited to enjoy free pizza while they watch and score submissions from slam poets in 20 other UNESCO Cities of Literature. These scores will be aggregated and submitted for the overall judging that will crown an international Slamovision champion. The finals will be held live at the James Theater on Nov. 1.

Mark Leidner, 7 p.m., Prairie Lights Books

Mark Leidner's third poetry collection, *Elegy for Pangaea*, is as funny, strange, and epic as his two previous collections, *Returning the Sword to the Stone* and *Beauty Was the Case that They Gave Me*. His new poems explore faith, grief, money, myth, parenting, and poetry itself to create a collection as full of tantalizing ideas and dilemmas as "an enormous library with a waterbed floor." As mystical as it is satirical, as audacious as it is personal, as hysterical as it is disconcerting, in *Elegy for Pangaea*, Leidner once again shows us that the only way out of irony is through.

THURS, OCT. 22

A Conversation about Poetry and Humor with poet Mark Leidner, 11 a.m., Frank Conroy Reading Room, Dey House Leidner will discuss the use of humor in poetry in this session presented by the Writers' Workshop.

Melissa Tedone, The Poison Book Project, 6 p.m., University of Iowa Main Library

The Poison Book Project is an interdisciplinary research initiative at Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library and the University of Delaware. This ongoing investigation explores the materiality of Victorian-era publishers' bindings. Research focuses on identifying potentially toxic pigments used in bookbinding components and how to handle and store potentially toxic collections more safely.

Weirdos Writing for Weirdos: A Contemporary Approach to Speculative Fiction, 7 p.m., Iowa City Public Library

Sci-fi, fantasy, and horror used to be the outliers of literature, but now more than ever these speculative genres are growing in popularity—and in quality. With huge properties like *Fourth Wing*, *Dungeon Crawler Carl*, and other "weird" series running rampant across the NYT bestseller lists, it's evident that readers crave these odd genres, and more and more authors are answering the call to deliver captivating stories—many of them independent of traditional publishing altogether. Featuring Ben Wolf, Darby Harn and Seth McDuffie. Presented by the Iowa City Book Festival and ICON, Iowa's Longest Running Science Fiction and Fantasy Convention.

FRI, OCT. 23

IWP Panel, noon, Meeting Room A, Iowa City Public Library Participants in this year's International Writing Program fall residency who live in UNESCO Cities of Literature will discuss what it is like to live and write in a City of Literature. Featuring Sarah Gilmartin (Dublin), Zodwa Nyoni (Manchester), Ingeborg von Zadow (Heidelberg), Yaiza Berrocal Guevara (Barcelona).



Literary Legends: An Evening with Pulitzer Prize Winner Yiyun Li, 7:30 p.m., Levitt Center

Internationally acclaimed author Yiyun Li won the 2026 Pulitzer Prize for her resonant memoir, *Things in Nature Merely Grow*, a deeply moving account of losing her younger son to suicide a little more than six years after her older son died in the same manner. She returns to fiction this fall with the novel *Music Against the Night*. In this event, which recognizes legendary writers with University of Iowa ties, Li will discuss her career with Melissa Febos, director of the University of Iowa Nonfiction Writing Program. Li is a graduate of the nonfiction program and the Iowa Writers' Workshop. The event is held in partnership with the UI Nonfiction Writing Program, Iowa Writers' Workshop, UI Lecture Committee, and the University of Iowa Center for Advancement.

SAT, OCT. 24

Book Fair, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., MERGE A diverse collection of titles, journals, magazines, and book arts from local and regional publishers and literary organizations. A unique opportunity for book lovers to discover new authors and genres. Presented by the Iowa City Book Festival and sponsored by Greater Iowa City, Inc.

Friends Foundation Pop-Up Used Book Sale, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m., Iowa City Public Library Stop by the lobby of the Iowa City Public Library between festival events to browse for a new (to you) book.

Lori Erickson, 10 a.m., Meeting Room A, Iowa City Public Library *Travels with the Muse* is a journey into the creative life, told through Lori Erickson's travels to places where art and spirit meet. Erickson explores what happens when we approach art not as experts, but as beginners willing to pay attention.

October Queer Coffee Social, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m., The Englert Theatre Lounge Englert Theatre partners with the Refocus Film Festival and the Iowa City Book Festival to present this month's Queer Coffee Social, a space for queer folks and allies to meet each other and be in community. Thank you to fix! Coffee for donating coffee for this event.

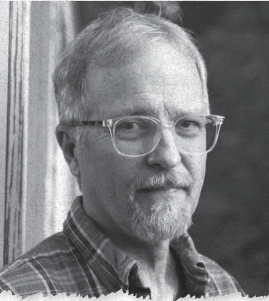
James Geary, 11:30 a.m., Meeting Room A, Iowa City Public Library Aphorisms are literature's hand luggage. Light and compact, they contain everything you need to get through a rough day at the office or a dark night of the soul. In *The World in a Phrase*, Geary explores this world. In a world of disinformation and deepfakes, aphorisms point to the power of fresh debate over tired dogma and inconvenient truths over comfortable lies.

Patricia Foster, 11:30 a.m., Prairie Lights Books In *A Marriage in Startled Air*, Patricia

Foster shares the dramatic story of how the diagnosis of her husband's rare cancer changed the dynamics of their marriage and opened the door to the hidden world of his childhood, revealing the seeds of trauma and childhood PTSD. In vivid, often poetic prose, Foster reflects on how the journey of recovery—and discovery—between two artists in a relatively happy marriage leads to difficult conversations about family, memory, identity, and aging.

Keiran Goddard, 11:30 a.m., Masonic Building Presented in partnership with Refocus Film Festival. Keiran Goddard is an internationally published novelist, poet and social theorist. His first collection was shortlisted for the William Blake prize, his debut novel, *Hourglass*, was listed for the Desmond Elliott prize, and his latest novel, *I See Buildings Fall Like Lightning* has been published to widespread acclaim and is now a major feature film.

Tiffany Hanssen, 1 p.m., Meeting Room A, Iowa City Public Library Gerry Sass is not who he appears to be. On the surface, he is the proud owner of a local country music station outside of Mystic, Iowa. Beneath it, he's a mob-connected hitman-for-hire who launders money through the station WIOA. Alternating between the voices of a grieving and adrenaline-fueled daughter, a guilt-ridden priest with no one he can trust, and the voice of a dead killer not quite yet gone, *My Name Was Gerry Sass* exposes the complicated natures of family, grief, and God in this propulsive and darkly funny novel.



Ron Rindo, 1 p.m., Prairie Lights Books Gabriel Fisher was born an orphan, weighing eighteen pounds and measuring twenty-seven inches long. No one in Lakota, Wisconsin, knows what to make of him. He walks at eight months, communicates with animals, and seems to possess extraordinary athletic talent. But when the older brother who has been caring for him dies, Gabriel is taken in by his devout Amish grandparents who disapprove of all the attention and hide him away from the English world. *Life, and Death, and Giants* is a moving story of faith, family, buried secrets, and everyday miracles.

Scott Heim, 1 p.m. Iowa City Masonic Building Presented in partnership with the Refocus Film Festival. In *Mysterious Skin*, Scott Heim tells the story of Brian Lackey, who at the age of

eight is found bleeding under the crawl space of his house, having endured something so traumatic that he has blacked out an entire five-hour period. Neil McCormick is fully aware of the events from that summer of 1981. Now, ten years later, he is a teenage hustler, unaware of the dangerous path he's on. Then Brian comes to Neil for help.

Tisa Bryant and Sarah Minor, 2:30 p.m., Meeting Room A, Iowa City Public Library

Co-presented with the University of Iowa Nonfiction Writing Program in celebration of the program's 50th anniversary. Tisa Bryant's *Residual* retrieves and catalogs what remains of her home, her psyche, and her creative practice after her mother's death. Drawing on personal memories as well as archives of renowned Black women who died prematurely, Bryant's hybrid memoir details the intimate accretion of ephemera, outrage, and failure in the wake of loss.

In the spirit of John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, Sarah Minor's *Carousel* explores how the pursuit of panoramic vision frames power, distorts reality, and implicates both viewer and subject. Across short, loping sections that weave history with memoir, close looking with confession, Minor masterfully fuses the slide lecture with the lyric essay, tying medieval tapestries to surrealism and Instagram reels to predator drones.

Harriet Clark, 2:30 p.m., Prairie Lights Books In *The Hill*, Suzanna Klein was a baby when her mother got up early one morning to rob a bank with a group of fellow radicals. Now, every Saturday, Suzanna lines up at the prison gates among the other children, each dressed as if for celebration. Inside there is a nursery and a cemetery; there are watchful guards and distractible nuns; there are women counting down to release and women like Suzanna's mother, who will never be released.

Matt Singer, 2:30 p.m., Iowa City Masonic Building

Presented in partnership with the Refocus Film Festival. If you were a moviegoer in the early aughts, you had a front-row seat to a golden age of comedy. Ben Stiller, Seth Rogen, Will Ferrell, Owen Wilson, Steve Carell, and Vince Vaughn became unlikely leading men—a band of rowdy wedding crashers, hungover bachelors, and 40-year-old virgins dubbed the "Frat Pack" that took Hollywood by storm over the span of a single decade. Then, seemingly overnight, Frat Pack movies vanished. Or did they? Learn more in Matt Singer's *Funny Business*.

Nonfiction Writing Program 50th anniversary panel, 4 p.m., Iowa City Public Library As graduates of the UT's

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Presented by the Iowa City UNESCO City of Literature



Find the full schedule at iowacitybookfestival.org



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While most City of Literature events are free to attend, they come with real costs. Your tax-deductible donation helps ensure we can continue offering meaningful programs like this festival.



The prize, established in 2011, honors an individual who, like Paul Engle, represents a pioneering spirit in the world of literature through writing, editing, publishing, or teaching, and whose active participation in the larger issues of the day has contributed to the betterment of the world through the literary arts.

Memorial and Ingram Merrill Foundations. Numerous translation awards, and fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim his honors include a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres from the French government; writings have been translated into nearly 40 languages; his journalism appears widely; of poetry, many edited volumes and translations, and seven books of nonfiction. His Writing Program. He has published more than 10 collections

Christpher Merrill has been named the 15th recipient of the Paul Engle Prize, presented by the Iowa City UNESCO City of Literature organization. Merrill retired in 2025 after 25 years as director of the University of Iowa's International

Christpher Merrill Named 2026 Paul Engle Prize Winner



>> IOWA CITY BOOK FESTIVAL CONTINUED

nonfiction writing program gather to celebrate the program's 50th anniversary, we will hear from three about their most recent work and their time writing in Iowa City: Helen Betya Rubenstein (*Feels Like Trouble*), Stephanie Krzywonos (*The Blue Hours*), and Angela Pelster (*The Evolution of Fire*)

Michael McCarty and Bruce Walters, Prairie Lights Books, 4 p.m. Explore the weird, dark, and mysterious history of Iowa in *Eerie Iowa*, as five-time Bram Stoker finalist Michael McCarty and Professor Emeritus Bruce Walters uncover Bigfoot sightings, a Lake Okoboji monster, a mysterious 1903 sighting, and a premonition of disaster.



Jane Schoenbrun, 4:30 p.m., Iowa City Masonic Building Presented in partnership with the Refocus Film Festival. Trailblazing filmmaker Jane Schoenbrun ("I Saw the TV Glow") will discuss their new novel, *Public Access Afterworld*.

Tickets are available first to Refocus passholders. Public tickets include a copy of the book and admission to the conversation. A very limited number of free seats will also be available.

SUN, OCT. 25
Local Author Book Fair, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m., MERGE Join us as local authors present their latest works, answer questions, and sign books. Browse each author's table where various books will be available for purchase. Presented by the Iowa City Book Festival and sponsored by Greater Iowa City, Inc.

Poetry in Public Reading featuring Iowa Student Poet Ambassador Josie Nabhan-Warren, 12:30 p.m., Meeting Room A, Iowa City Public Library Poetry in Public celebrates Iowa City's literary tradition and local writing talent with poems by writers of all ages. Hear readings from some of the 2026 Selected Poets, along with special guest Josie Nabhan-Warren, the 2026-27 Iowa Student Poet Ambassador. This event will be held in person and streamed live.

Daniel Somtochukwu Umemezie, 1:30 p.m., Iowa City Public Library Daniel Umemezie is a Nigerian-American poet

whose work explores cultural inheritance and displacement, using bodily transformation as both metaphor and form. His poetry develops a realm between interior experience and external reality. His work has appeared in the North American Review, Scholastic, Magpie Journal and many more. He is forthcoming in Polyphony Lit, and has been recognized as the Iowa Student Poetry Ambassador, the Kenyon Young Writers Program, the Iowa Poetry Association, Humanities Iowa, and others. As the 10th National Youth Poet Laureate of the United States, Daniel positions cultural specificity as formal resistance, creating what he describes as "architecture of consciousness."

John Ira Thomas, Daydream Comics, 3 p.m. John Ira Thomas returns to Daydreams Comics for another helping of *TIRE!* He'll be reading from *THE BEST OF TIRE CLASSIFIEDS*, a collection of *TIRE Magazine's* most brazen attempts to get your money, and maybe your soul. Hear about Twinkie groves, UFO abduction resorts, and the New Dolphin Order! Chase the unapproved Stevenson dimes! Find out where your lost hair went! Discover what's really on blank media!



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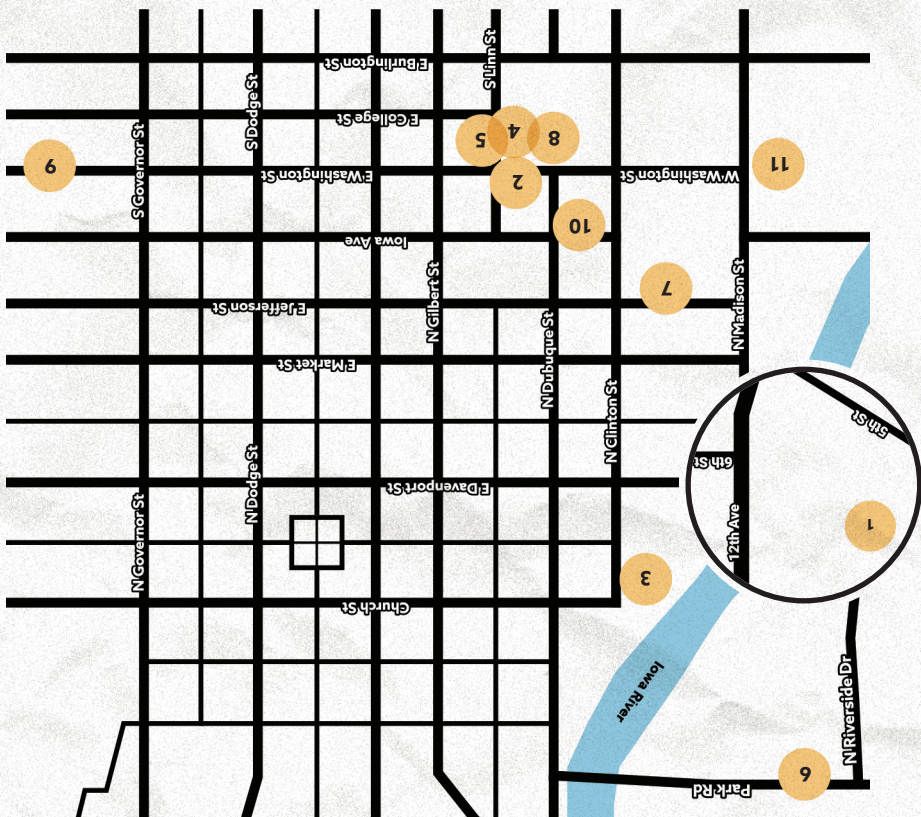


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Find the full schedule at iowacitybookfestival.org



Venues

1. Coralville Public Library, 1401 5th St, Coralville
2. Daydreams Comics, 229 E Washington St
3. Dey House, (Iowa Writers' Workshop Lawn) 507 N Clinton St
4. Iowa City Public Library, 123 S Linn St
5. Iowa City Masonic Building, 312 E College St
6. Levitt Center for University Advancement, 1 East Park Rd
7. MacBride Auditorium, 17 N Clinton St
8. MERGE, 136 S Dubuque Street
9. Porch Light Literary Arts Center, 1019 E Washington St
10. Prairie Lights Books and Cafe, 15 S Dubuque St
11. University of Iowa Main Library Gallery, 125 S Washington St