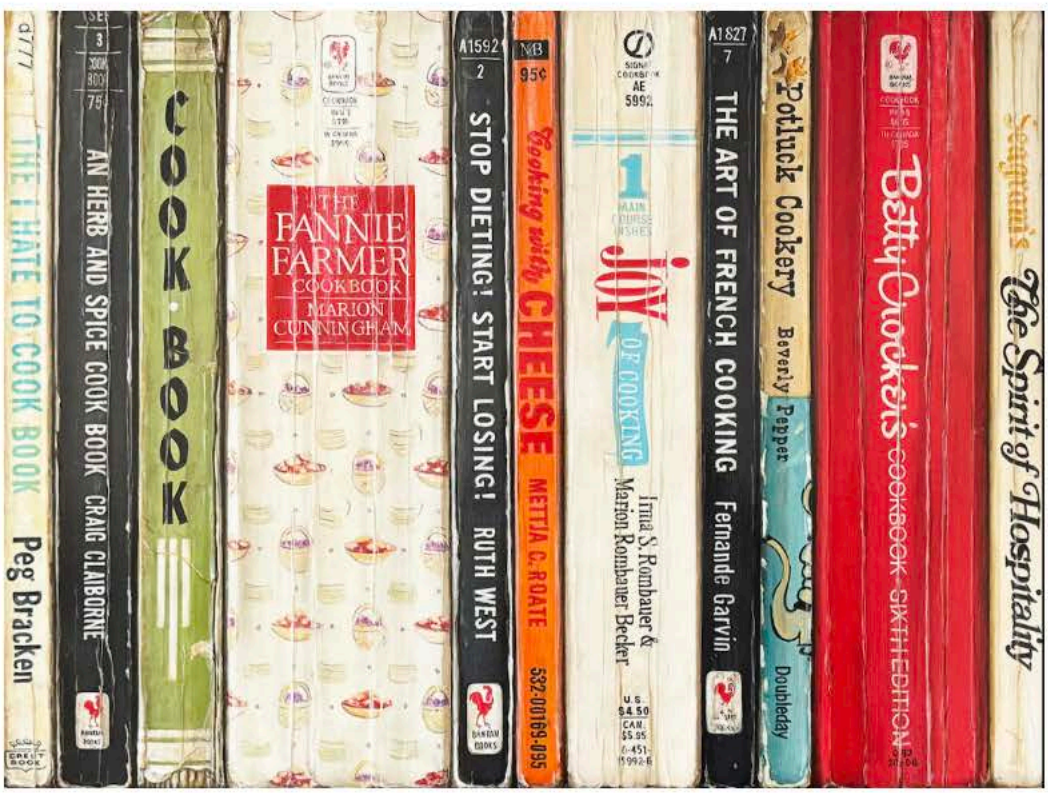
ARTS & CULTURE

# Books to Give & Literary Activities to Take In



by **Janet Arvia** November 6, 2026

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Paperback Cookbooks by Holly Farrell, 18× 24 inches, acrylic & oil on board. Available through Mira Godard Gallery.

It's NaNoWriMo! No, that's not what inebriated writers slur when they can't drink any more wine. It stands for National Novel Writing Month, which challenges aspiring authors to craft a 50,000-word draft throughout November.

By the time December holidays arrive, sober readers will be searching for good books to give and hunker down with. As such, here's a list of pen-generated presents and authoritative events bibliophiles of all kinds are bound to appreciate.

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**Celebrating the Write Stuff**

In tandem with the *Pulitzer on the Road: Prize-Winning Works That Inform, Empower & Inspire* exhibition, Harold Washington Library Center is hosting a live storytelling event (Dec. 1) featuring Pulitzer-winning journalists Laura Rodriguez Presa, Liz Sawyer, Mary Schmich, Nicole Carroll, and more. "*Pulitzer on the Road* was created to bring Pulitzer Prize-winning journalism and storytelling to communities across the country, showcasing the exceptional work that has been honored since the prizes were first awarded in 1917," says Marjorie Miller, administrator of The Pulitzer Prizes. "It is our intent to bring the exhibition to cities across the U.S., both large and small, but we are particularly excited to debut the exhibition in Chicago, a city that has played a prominent role in shaping the cultural fabric of our nation."

Cynthia Pelayo (*It Came From Neverland*), Dawn Turner (*Majestic Hills*), Kathleen Rooney (*Man Overboard!* ), and Sara Levine (*The Hitch*) are among those who made the shortlist for the 2026 Chicago Review of Books Awards. Known as the CHIRBies, these prizes are determined by the *Chicago Review of Books*. "Since the *Chicago Review of Books* was founded ten years ago, we've seen our literary community flourish to a level that indicates a renaissance," notes Michael Welch, the organization's Editor-In-Chief. "The CHIRBy Awards brings together authors, booksellers, readers, and community advocates to celebrate the writers who are showing the world the diversity and depth of our storytelling here in Chicago." The winners will be revealed at in a free and open ceremony at the Fine Arts Building (Dec. 3).

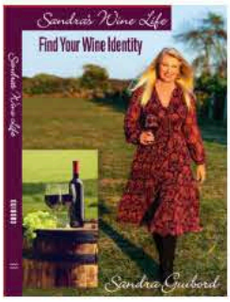
Brass Tack's Gold Coast Literary Club meets monthly at Waldorf Astoria Chicago's signature restaurant to savor books, food, and conversation. The series is hosted by Ladies Who Lit which has built its community around literary fiction by women thanks to founder Kaylen Ralph.

At the American Writers Museum, *American Prophets: Writers, Religion, and Culture* (through March 22, 2027) incorporates interactive displays spanning genres and mediums of more than 100 different creative works and writers from Emily Dickinson to Madonna.

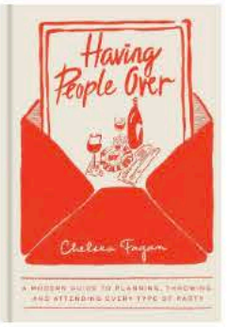



American Writers Museum

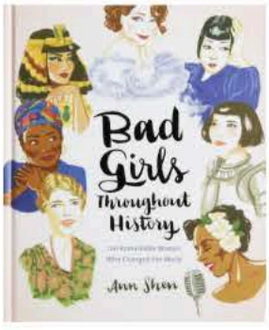
**Paging All Book-Givers**



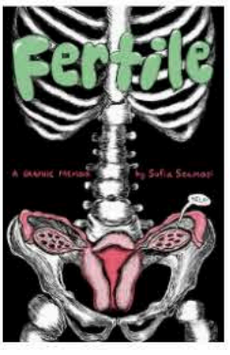

*Sandra's Wine Life: Find Your Wine Identity* pours out sip-worthy suggestions on entertaining for beginners, seasoned connoisseurs, and those in-between. As a sommelier, Sandra Guibord shares wine choices, recipes for pairing, and conversational tips that go down as smoothly as a glass of Olianas Vermentino. Speaking of, the author offers selected labels—from Anne Pichon Sauvage Viognier and Elizabeth Rose Chardonnay to Mi Mi en Provence Grande Reserve Rosé and Simonnet-Febvre Chablis—for sale on her website.



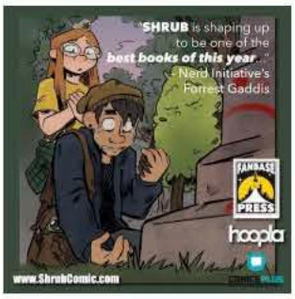

"Having people over is incredibly fun. But I would argue that, in a culture that is increasingly estranged from itself, with communities fraying at the edges, gathering is an important act. We can get into the sociopolitical details later, but suffice it to say that bringing people together is one of the most powerful things we can do right now. We were meant to be a village, and that village was meant to gather in the home," writes author Chelsea Fagan in her book *Having People Over: A Modern Guide to Planning, Throwing, and Attending Every Type of Party*. The CEO and co-founder of *The Financial Diet*, shows aspiring hostesses how to invite guests, set the table, plan a menu, create a mood, and actually enjoy the soiree.




Author and illustrator Ann Shen brings retro rebellious women to life in *Bad Girls Throughout History: 100 Remarkable Women Who Changed the World*. The 224-page publication features watercolor portraits and brief essays on Anna May Wong, Aphra Behn, Billie Holiday, Cleopatra, Coretta Scott King, Dolly Parton, Frida Kahlo, Edith Head, Eleanor Roosevelt, Harriet Tubman, Hedy Lamarr, Joan of Arc, Joan Jett, Mae West, Marie Curie, Mary Shelley, Maya Angelou, Sojourner Truth, and others.




Through words and pictures, Sofia Szamosi's 224-page book *Fertile: A Graphic Memoir* (available Dec. 1) follows her bumpy road to motherhood. "I always knew I wanted to have babies," says the author. "My mom, despite our fights and failures, taught me about the magic of motherhood. I imagined a sparkly magic cord connecting us through time and space...it connected me to my future offspring. This idea felt like a magical promise...a reason to grow up. But it turns out, nothing is ever really promised. And my journey would be anything but linear."




Published by the GLAAD award-winning Fanbase Press, Shane Portman's *Shrub* follows a sentient shrub and a pair of grieving siblings who hit the road in search of connection. As part of an illustrated fiction sub-genre, the graphic medicine comic blends words and pictures with healthcare discourse. At the end of each issue, there is a testimonial by someone who has experienced grief—from the book's colorist Celia FitzGerald and the author's mother to grief doula Kat Primeau and licensed marriage/family therapist/co-founder of Geek Therapy Ariel Landrum. "Grief can be isolating, especially when you're young," says Portman. "This story is stitched together with things that I wanted to hear when I was a kid dealing with loss. My hope is that *Shrub* meets readers where they're at in their journey and gives them some reassurance that they're not alone and that, if they let grief take root, they can grow from it."