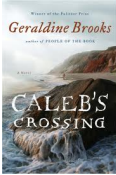


## Caleb's crossing

# Books Plus for June



In *Caleb's Crossing*, Pulitzer-Prize winner Geraldine Brooks returns to the seventeenth century setting she captured so well in *Year of Wonders*, but this time around she's chosen the New World for her location. The novel tells the story of a deep friendship between a young Pilgrim servant girl, Bethia, and a member of the local Native American tribe, Caleb Cheeshahteaumuck, who later became the first Native American to graduate from Harvard. Before becoming a novelist, Brooks was an investigative reporter who covered the international beat. She brings her investigative and research skills to this novel, and a sense of narrative developed by writing many pieces of journalism and several nonfiction books.

Please join us this Sunday as we discuss this novel with its historical American themes. Here's what the *New York Times* said about it: "*Caleb's Crossing* could not be more enlightening and involving. Beautifully written from beginning to end, it reconfirms Geraldine Brooks' reputation as one of our most supple and insightful Æ-novelists."

Books Plus meets the first Sunday of each month. All are welcome. Join the discussion or simply come to listen.

No registration necessary. **Drop in.**

### **2 p.m., First Sundays**

See the full summer schedule below.

#### **June 3 - *Caleb's Crossing* by Geraldine Brooks**

Discussion Leader: Sarah Bowman

"In 1665, Caleb Cheeshahteaumuck of Martha's Vineyard graduated from Harvard, whose 1650 charter describes its mission as 'the education of the English and Indian youth of this country'. That much is fact. That Caleb befriended Bethia Mayfield, the free-spirited daughter of the island's preacher, is of course fiction--but it's luscious fiction in the capable hands of Pulitzer Prize winner Brooks." -- Library Journal

#### **July 1 - *The Johnstown Flood* by David G. McCullough**

Discussion Leader: Sarah Bowman

Graced by David McCullough's remarkable gift for writing richly textured, sympathetic social history, *The Johnstown Flood* is an absorbing, classic portrait of life in nineteenth-century America. It also offers a powerful historical lesson for our century and all times: the danger of assuming that because people are in positions of responsibility they are necessarily behaving responsibly. - Book description

#### **August 5 -- *Snobs* by Julian Fellowes**

Discussion Leader: Dory Lynch

"Julian Fellowes, the writer of the popular mini-series *Downton Abbey*, penned this comedy of manners about the British aristocracy in the 1990s. "I couldn't put *Snobs* down: Who could resist a great story of a beautiful, ambitious girl on her climb to the turreted top of the castle-hopping set? As witty as he is smart, Julian Fellowes is the Oscar-winning, Oscar Wilde of the minute." - Plum Sykes

Posted by sbowman on May 29, 2012

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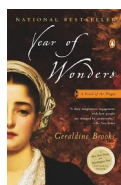
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[Caleb's crossing](#)

## Year of Wonders and Caleb's Crossing

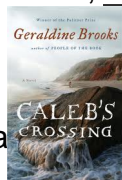


Year of Wonders is a book about the plague, but it is also so much more than that. Anna

lives in a small village in England in 1666. She has two small children and a hard working husband. Despite her struggles with her relationship with her father, and a new minister, things are generally going well for Anna. Unfortunately the true history of the village, as discovered by Brooks, creates a tragic backdrop for Anna's fictional life. First, Anna's husband dies in a mining accident, and to help ends meet, Anna takes in a boarder from London. Shortly after this, her boarder suddenly dies, and people in her village begin falling fatally sick. The death of Anna's husband is only the beginning of the upheaval that Anna is to survive. Near the end of the book, everything that she has known was turned up on its head.

Geraldine Brooks came upon a sign at the location of the village and did quite a bit of research to create fictional characters and events. Though all the action takes place in the small quarantined village, the language is lush and the characters vivid.

Like Year of Wonders, Caleb's Crossing is based on a few brief true historic details that Brooks



uses to create a powerful female character and weave a truly engaging story. We learn

that in 1665 a native Wampanoag man, Caleb Cheeshahteumauk, graduates from Harvard - true story. Using that small bit of truth, we meet the characters Caleb and the island's minister's daughter, Bethia in Brooks' newest novel. They forge a friendship in their early years, drawn together by a strong curiosity about the natural world and a deep love of learning. As they grow older, religion and family place pressures to keep their friendship a secret. Bethia's formal education goes nowhere. Her frustration and resignation about this is extremely touching and powerful.

These women are survivors in books with a strong sense of place, and I am reminded of Miss

July from The Long Song by Andrea Levy even though the time period is very different.  
Posted by sbowman on December 27, 2011

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Information, Answers & Reviews

**Reviews Subjects:**

American History

Britain

Fiction

Historical

**Reviews Titles:**

Year of wonders : a novel of the plague

Caleb's crossing

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