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Reading Together



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K-Book Trends

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Beyond Space, Into Everyday Life: The Future of a “City That Reads Together,” as Envisioned by the Seoul Outdoor Library

Written by

Ji Eun Oh

Ji Eun Oh | Director of Seoul Library

Oh began a career in libraries as a librarian in the reading room of the Seongdong District Office, and went on to lead on-the-ground innovation as director of the Gwangjin Information Library, winning the Presidential Award in the National Library Evaluation three times. Currently serving as Director of Seoul Metropolitan Library, President of the Korean Public Library Association, and Vice President of the Korean Library Association, Oh plans and runs innovative reading initiatives such as the Seoul Outdoor Library and the “Hip-Dok Club.”

Why We Created the Seoul Outdoor Library

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a clear shift toward preferring outdoor spaces to indoor ones in every season except the height of summer and the depths of winter. In fact, a survey by the Korea Culture & Tourism Institute found that leisure activities outside the home had the highest satisfaction levels, and outdoor activity, including park use, has remained more than 51% higher than before the pandemic. This change in lifestyle has also influenced reading culture: now, reading truly begins only when “good books, good experiences, and good spaces” come together. In particular, with the rise of the “text-hip” trend among Korea’s MZ generation (Millennials and Gen Z), who embrace reading as a form of play that expresses their individuality and taste, reading has become “a new experience and a form of play” to be enjoyed with all five senses in stylish outdoor spaces that bring together nature, music, and trendy programs.

To actively respond to these changes, Seoul Metropolitan Library came to plan the Seoul Outdoor Library. First, by breaking free from the physical limits of a building and extending the concept of space to the outdoors, we sought to move away from the conventional image of the library as a quiet, closed-off place. Furthermore, by making active use of nearby underused spaces instead of constructing new buildings, we aimed to present an innovative model for responding to the climate crisis that keeps carbon emissions to a minimum.

In the end, the Seoul Outdoor Library was born from four converging trends: the shift toward outdoor leisure after COVID-19, the change in reading culture led by the MZ generation, the expanding concept of the library’s space and role, and the value of sustainability.

Three Spaces, Three Reading Experiences

Instead of the conventional approach of having people search for the books they want among vast collections, the Seoul Outdoor Library is designed so that people come across books curated by librarians by chance in everyday spaces and become absorbed in reading. It is the result of thinking beyond “which books to put out” to “in what space and in what way people should encounter them.”

Currently, the Seoul Outdoor Library operates in three locations, each tailored to the character of the site and its target audience.

■ Reading Seoul Plaza: Aimed at families in their 30s and 40s with children. It is a family-friendly space where a playground has been set up in the open plaza, so children can run and play while parents enjoy reading.



Reading Seoul Plaza (Photo: Seoul Metropolitan Library)

■ Gwanghwamun Book Madang: Aimed at young people of the MZ generation, with Bugaksan Mountain and Gwanghwamun Gate as its backdrop. It offers a place in the heart of the city to enjoy a relaxing, atmospheric break and some time to oneself.



Gwanghwamun Book Madang (Photo: Seoul Metropolitan Library)

■ Reading by the Clear Stream (Cheonggyecheon): A restful retreat where the sound of the Cheonggyecheon Stream keeps you company. Foreign tourists can dip their feet in the water and enjoy a unique reading break.



Reading by the Clear Stream (Photo: Seoul Metropolitan Library)

Each space is furnished with bookshelves and book baskets suited to its character to make books more accessible. In particular, spaces such as Cheonggyecheon offer books in foreign languages, so that anyone, regardless of nationality, can experience the culture. Through these three distinct experiences tailored to each space, the Seoul Outdoor Library

brings to life the values of “good books, good spaces, and special experiences.”

Reading Together, the Hip Way: The Future of Reading, Moving Beyond Isolation Through “Loose Ties”

The Seoul Outdoor Library did not stop at spatial innovation. To help citizens go beyond simply reading and become deeply immersed, it branded the act of reading itself as a culture called chaekmeong. Tailored to the character of each space, it spreads “the joy of reading together” in ways that suit the feel of each place through a variety of programs: “Hip Chaekmeong,” where children and families enjoy lively leisure; “Romantic Chaekmeong,” which fills the MZ generation with atmosphere and romance against the backdrop of Bugaksan Mountain and Gwanghwamun Gate; and “Silent Chaekmeong,” where people lose themselves in quiet reflection amid the sound of the Cheonggyecheon Stream.

Furthermore, the Seoul Outdoor Library runs the “Hip-Dok Club,” a public reading club that made headlines when 10,000 citizens signed up within just two hours of recruitment opening, and is building a massive reading community based on “loose ties.” Its signature activities include “Reading Mob,” a reading group where citizens gather in their own ways and stay loosely connected, and “Nomad Reading,” a day-trip reading caravan that sets out to discover hidden reading spots across the country. “Reading Mob” runs in many formats, including the “Doorstopper Busters,” who finish thick books together that would be daunting to tackle alone; the “Favorite Book Pitch Squad,” where members recommend the books that changed their lives; and “Conversations with Authors,” where readers share ideas with writers. “Nomad Reading” travels beyond Seoul to places

such as Unhyeongung Palace, the buckwheat fields of Bongpyeong, and the beaches of Gangneung, extending the horizons of outdoor reading into everyday life as a whole.



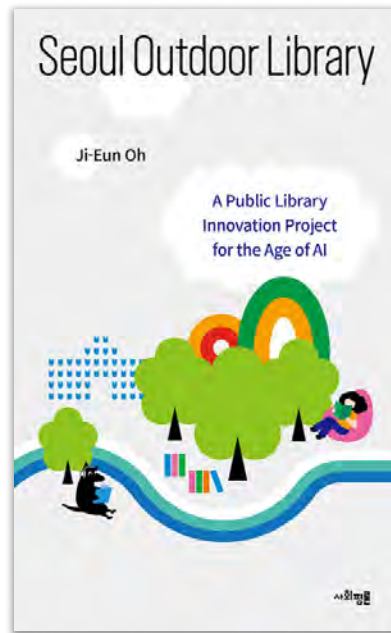
“Nomad Reading” at Unhyeongung Palace and on a beach in Gangneung (Photo: Seoul Metropolitan Library)

The “reading together, the hip way” that the Seoul Outdoor Library pursues means breaking away from the solemn, isolated reading culture of the past and forming a new kind of cultural connection, in which people share their tastes with others in the open air. This unique experience, which goes beyond solitary reflection to create warm connections in everyday life, has transformed reading from tedious study into “cool play” that everyone wants to enjoy.

In the end, the Seoul Outdoor Library is a model example of an eco-friendly response to the climate crisis, having gone beyond the limits of a physical building to turn underused spaces into a library. It is also a “hub for urban community,” where citizens discover one another and find comfort through books. Furthermore, it is an innovative attempt that has redefined the way we read in step with changing leisure trends and brought the once-quiet library back to life as a living space. Starting from a

single book, this small experiment is transforming the city's empty spaces into places full of warmth where people connect with one another, and coloring Seoul as “a city that reads together.”

Related book: *Seoul Outdoor Library*



Oh Ji Eun, *Seoul Outdoor Library*, Sahoipyounghon

Books That Spark Endless Discussion: Recommendations for Book Clubs from Critics Across Generations

Written by

Sollim Lee, Junhyuk Maeng, Mihyang Kim, Dongseok Jang

Sollim Lee | Publishing Editor

As an editor, she looks for books that will last. As a critic, she watches for new releases that demand to be read right now. And as a reader, she dreams of setting work aside to read purely for pleasure, secretly hoping to get locked inside a library one day.

Junhyuk Maeng | Book Editor

Rather than writing polished reviews or introducing books well, what he hopes for is that the sensibility he loves, and that others out there love too, comes across exactly as it is. As a Korean reader in his thirties who loves literature, he wants to speak, carefully, for some small part of that sensibility.

Mihyang Kim | Book Critic·Essayist, IT Service Planner

She worked as a publishing editor for thirteen years, three of them on books and ten on planning and editing a publishing magazine. She is the author of the essay collection *My Mother Said She Wasn't Happy* and a co-author of *Keywords in Korean Publishing 2010-2019*, *What Is Cinema?*, and *A Warning on Merch*. After a stint as creative director at an IT company, she now works as a service planner and storyteller, designing, interpreting, and documenting worlds.

Dongseok Jang | Book Critic

He reads books and writes. Captivated by the vast, deep world of books, he reads against the clock and works out how what he reads connects to our society. He is currently throwing himself into turning books, an endless source of content, into cultural content of every kind. His books include *The Living Library*, *The Rebirth of Forbidden Books*, *The Birth of Different Thoughts*, *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms: A Story Renewed After a Thousand Years*, and *Meeting World Classics for the First Time: A Guide for Teens*.

It's the middle of autumn, a time to quietly look back on the year. October is a month for talking with others over books. For this issue's Special Project, critics from different generations recommended books that are great for book club members to read and share their thoughts on. Each critic looked at the key issues facing Korean society, as well as the anxieties, futures, and happiness of each generation, from the perspective of their own generation. They then recommended books that help us reflect on our lives and prepare for tomorrow.

The 20s Perspective

Lee Sollim, Cultural Critic



Ahn Hee-je, *Love and Stability*, Hankyoreh Publishing, 2026

“You’ve really found your place.” I hear that a lot these days. The conditions for this “place” go roughly like this: a job; a home that’s decent enough for living alone (having moved out of the studio apartment where I could barely lie down); a partner; some savings. According to the familiar life script, the next places would be marriage and “owning a home of my own.”

But I hesitate to bring up marriage. For a generation that can now talk about a life without marriage as a real option, marriage is no longer the obvious next step. Especially now, when the costs a working woman must bear in having a child are so clearly visible, I can understand the puzzled, almost pitying “Why get married at all?” just as well as the age-old question “So when are you getting married?” For some, announcing that you’re getting married can be just as shocking as announcing that you never will.

Love and Stability gathers these complicated feelings about marriage into concrete voices and reads them within a broader context. Ahn Hee-je, a cultural anthropologist who delved deeply into young men of today by interviewing his friend “Woojin” in *Proof and Excuses*, meets nine people born in the 1990s in this new book. He persistently asks “why” of his interviewees, peers who are married, preparing to marry, or still uncertain. Why get married? Why must marriage be the way to achieve that goal? His questions can sometimes feel uncomfortable because asking the reasons for marriage is itself unfamiliar. As the author puts it, “If even asking ‘why?’ about something feels strange, even uncomfortable, then a fairly strong force is at work.” That force is the conventional wisdom that sets marriage as life’s default and turns every other choice into an exception that needs explaining.

As the interviewees talk about marriage, dating and money, housing and work, children and family, and class keep creeping into the question of love. What each of them wants is different, yet strangely, the answers all point to marriage. That’s because Korean society “funnels lives, each tangled in its own unique way, into the single option of marriage.” From the freedom of dating to the stability of marriage, from the market to the family, from doubt to reassurance.

Do we really have to find all of that in one place? Ahn untangles the “stability” that has been bundled together under marriage. Forming a relationship in which you won’t be easily discarded in a dating market where anyone can be replaced at any moment; not being left alone; having someone who will hold you up so you don’t hit rock bottom in a crisis, or who will go down with you and climb back up; and planning “what comes next” together. The things we have believed marriage promises are in fact separate desires, and some of them are already being fulfilled in relationships other than marriage. Conversely, stepping into the place of marriage doesn’t automatically bring stability. A relationship sustained by love can even become precarious once it enters that place in search of stability. Without hastily inflating his interviewees’ words into the voice of an entire generation, Ahn uncovers how society operates amid their different circumstances. Rather than judging whether marriage is good or bad, he asks, one question at a time, what we have been calling love and what we have believed to be stability.

The “why” that Ahn poses to his interviewees crosses over to the reader turning the pages. The author asks whether we have ever really had “a place to properly talk about what love, marriage, and stability mean in our own lives.” I want to carry the space for conversation that Ahn created for these nine people beyond the pages of the book, together with peers who are always hurrying toward some vague “stable place” because none of it comes easily, not a home, not money, not love. Not to answer whether we will marry, but to begin by talking about the shape of the love and stability each of us longs for.

The 30s Perspective

Maeng Junhyuk, Publishing Editor



Han Min, *The Psychology of Kings*, Secret House, 2026

A good book for a book club doesn't have to be one that everyone likes. In fact, the books that stay with us longest are those that lead each reader to side with a different character, and that keep people saying, even after they've closed the book, "Still, didn't that person have their reasons?" In that sense, the book I'd like to recommend to book clubs of working people in their 30s and 40s is cultural psychologist Han Min's *The Psychology of Kings: Yeongjo, Crown Prince Sado, and Jeongjo*. It deals with a famous tragedy of the late Joseon Dynasty, but what readers end up talking about is less history than family, organizations, and themselves within their relationships. It's easy to follow even without much knowledge of history, and for those already familiar with the Imo Incident of 1762, it offers a fresh angle on an event they thought they knew well, which also makes it a great book to read together.

The book doesn't treat Yeongjo, Crown Prince Sado, and Jeongjo only by

their familiar labels: the wise king, the tyrant, and the ill-fated crown prince. Instead, it traces how each man's temperament, anxieties, and inner wounds were passed on to the others. In particular, rather than explaining the Imo Incident only as a clash between the Noron and Soron factions or as a political struggle over royal power, it reads the event as a psychological catastrophe born of a broken father-son relationship. Yeongjo carried a complex about his origins and anxiety about his legitimacy, and he tried to erase them by constantly proving himself. The book interprets this compulsion as something that showed up in others' eyes as control and pressure, eventually tightening its grip on the person closest to him, his son, Crown Prince Sado.

As readers follow Crown Prince Sado's story, the discussion quickly becomes complicated. Was he a victim who fell ill under his father's excessive expectations and judgment, or a perpetrator who must take responsibility for his own violence? How far can understanding a person's wounds and forgiving what he has done go hand in hand? In a book club, opinions are unlikely to settle into one at this point. Some will place greater responsibility on Yeongjo, while others will argue that Sado's actions cannot be explained by psychological pain alone. Even after reading the same scene, people reach different conclusions depending on what they see first: "a parent's responsibility," "individual responsibility," or "illness and moral judgment." That very divergence is what makes this book worth reading together.

With Jeongjo, the questions extend to the workplace and organizations. The book argues that Jeongjo, having witnessed his father's tragedy, turned his guilt and anxiety into a driving force for achievement. To survive, he had to become a perfect king, and as a result, he became the monarch who led Joseon's revival, but he wore himself out under constant tension throughout

his life. We often meet similar people at work: those who try to be more perfect than anyone else to hide their flaws, those who shift their own anxieties onto others in the name of standards and principles, and, conversely, those who use their wounds as fuel for achievement and push themselves relentlessly. The problem is that these attitudes sometimes come hand in hand with outstanding performance. Do being a good leader and being a healthy person always point in the same direction? If the results are good, how far can the anxiety and compulsion behind them be tolerated?

I hope working people in their 30s and 40s will read this book together. People in this age group are someone's children while also becoming parents themselves, and at work they are just beginning to step into roles where they lead junior colleagues. It's a stage of life when it becomes increasingly important not to pass the anxiety and control they received from above down to those below. So while reading about Yeongjo, you might think of your own boss, and then, at some point, find yourself in him instead. Reading about Crown Prince Sado, you may reflect on your relationship with your parents, and through Jeongjo, you may find yourself asking, "What am I trying to prove by working this hard?" Through the relationships among these three figures, readers come to see that one person's flaws don't stay within that person, but can change the atmosphere of an entire family and organization.

The author writes, "My life does not begin just because my flaws disappear." Must we overcome our wounds before we can become good parents and good leaders? Can we carry our wounds without passing them on to others? And how far should we try to understand someone else's flaws? *The Psychology of Kings* is less a book that gives a single answer to these questions than one that keeps us from reaching an answer too easily. Rather

than a book that leaves everyone with the same impression, it is a book that draws out each reader's own experiences of family, work, and relationships. When people gather to read together, that is perhaps the kind of book they need most.

The 40s Perspective

Kim Mihyang, Publishing Critic



Lang Lee, *The Crazy Bitch History of Mothers and Daughters*, Iyagi Jangsu, 2026

What kind of book should a book club read? Rather than a book everyone loves, it's better to choose one that leaves you curious about what others thought after reading it. Even better is a book that leads people to share different stories after reading the same scene, or one where talk about the book turns, before you know it, into talk about your own life. In that sense, the book I'd like to recommend for readers around the world to read together is artist Lang Lee's *The Crazy Bitch History of Mothers and Daughters*.

The title alone is striking. Why on earth did mothers and daughters become “crazy bitches”? To answer that question, Lang Lee traces her way back

through her own family history. At the center of the story are her mother, Lang Lee herself, and her older sister, Lee Seul, who passed away in 2021. But what begins as one family's private confession meets the history of Korean society as it passes through several generations. War and division, the preference for sons and patriarchy, poverty and violence within the family, and the caregiving imposed on women all run through one family's life.

Her mother's story is especially striking. Having suffered from depression when she was young, her mother went to a psychiatrist on her own, but instead of receiving proper treatment, she was branded a "crazy bitch" within the family. Lang Lee brings up the history of labeling women's mental suffering as "hysteria" and asks: Was a woman really crazy? Or did the world around her make her that way?

Yet the book doesn't turn her mother into a simple victim, either. The wounded mother goes on to wound her daughters in turn. That's why, among those reading it together, the questions don't end easily. Is understanding someone's history of being hurt the same as forgiving the hurt they caused me? If I understand the times my parents lived through, must I also understand the wounds I received? How far are loving your family and being responsible for your family the same thing?

Her older sister Lee Seul's life leaves yet another question. Unlike Lang Lee, who left home at eighteen and chose her own life, her sister could not let go of the family. Lang Lee told her again and again to stop, as Lee Seul spent her life caring for their mother and father, their grandmother, and their younger sibling. But her sister said, "I need my family." Feeling that the death of her sister, who gave all her strength to others until she had none left, could not be explained by existing words alone, Lang Lee gave it a new name: *sojinsa*,

“death by depletion.”

Korean readers may think of the term “K-eldest daughter” here. But what about readers from other cultures? Who is entrusted with caring for the family? Is there a culture that demands special responsibility from the eldest daughter? How does society judge the one who leaves the family and the one who stays behind to care for it? In this way, a very specific story about a Korean family becomes a question that sheds light on families in other societies.

In fact, this book was published in Japan and Taiwan before it came out in Korea. A manuscript so deeply personal that the author initially had no intention of even publishing it in Korea crossed borders first to meet its readers. Perhaps the reason this book, though it deals with the particular history of a Korean family, could be read in other languages lies in the contradictions of family itself. Being hurt because you love, wanting to leave yet being unable to, and missing someone once they’re gone even though you resented them: these feelings know no borders.

The book’s physical design is just as striking. On its black hardcover is a photo of a woman in heavy smoky makeup and black clothes, smoking a cigarette, and its fore edge is silver, flashing when it catches the light. Combined with its rough, provocative title, the book stops readers in their tracks before they even open it. But after following a story filled with death, violence, and grief all the way to the end, the cover and title you first saw look a little different. That’s because what remains at the end of this book is, unexpectedly, life and love.

Lang Lee believes that the reason humans constantly crave stories is to gather data on “how to get through life.” Through stories, we encounter

countless lives we could never experience within our own single life, and in doing so, we learn how to live. If so, a book club may be a place that makes that data even richer, because people read one person's story together, and those who have lived different lives add their own experiences to it.

So for book clubs reading this book, I'd suggest trying one more thing after the final discussion: following "Chronology_I Have Lived a Life," which appears at the end of the book, and writing your own chronology. It doesn't have to be a grand autobiography. Just pick a few years and events that made you who you are, write them down, and share the moments you'd most like others to hear. If you can, add at least one social event that changed your family's life. It will also give you a chance to think together about how far one person's personal history belongs to that person alone, and where it becomes history.

A story that began with one family in Korea crossed over to Japan and Taiwan, and now readers in yet another country are reading it. And when they close the book, those readers begin writing their own "I Have Lived a Life." In this way, one person's story calls forth another's.

Perhaps reading together means lending one another ways to live.

The 50s Perspective

Jang Dongseok, Literary Critic



Written by Yoon A-hae, illustrated by Jo Won-hee, *There's a Lion Outside the Door*, Tteuindol Children, 2023

Many people still think of picture books as “books for children,” because they assume these are books that simply pair a few short sentences with pictures. But today’s picture books each hold stories of their own, and their illustrations, paired with brief text, are rich and varied enough to “click” even with a generation raised on short-form videos. It’s no exaggeration to say that picture books are not just for children, but for every generation. *There’s a Lion Outside the Door*, written by Yoon A-hae and illustrated by Jo Won-hee, is one such book. If you take in its illustrations, with their well-judged use of primary colors, as one continuous flow, they offer every bit as much enjoyment as a video.

The greatest strength of *There’s a Lion Outside the Door* is that it can be read and discussed with every generation, children included, because the narrator, who fears the lion outside the door, is ultimately all of us. “Everyone has a lion outside their door. There’s no life without a lion. Not a single one....”

The narrator is afraid of the lion outside. It's scary, but the wish to go out is just as strong. Yet the narrator keeps finding reasons not to. A lion's canine teeth are a full eight centimeters long, sharp, with a powerful bite. And what about its molars, built for slicing and chewing meat? The narrator thinks, "I can't let myself become a nice, chewable piece of meat." The terrifying claws a lion keeps hidden most of the time but bares when hunting are yet another reason the narrator can't step outside.

Even so, the narrator wants to go outside, knowing that staying in out of fear of the lion means never being able to do anything at all. "I want to see the big world and learn about it. I can't just keep hiding inside the house like this!" The lion is lying in wait outside the door because it's hungry. Suddenly, the narrator comes up with a clever plan: use the lion's hunger to distract it. First, lure the lion with the smell of grilling meat, then fling the meat out the door. Of course, opening the door and throwing the meat is terrifying beyond words. While the lion bounds off after the meat, the narrator thinks, "Now's my chance!", throws open the door, and dashes out. After running far away, the narrator shouts at the top of their lungs, "Hooray! I finally made it out!"

The world spread out before the narrator is breathtaking. The mountains in every color stretch out ahead, and the sky glowing with a red sunset is just as beautiful. A sky pouring with stars is a whole new world the narrator has never experienced before. Once you step outside the door, there's more than enough to do. Of course, even when one door opens and a new world unfolds, "another door" may still block our way. The narrator, too, happily climbing a mountain, ends up standing before "something." What that "something" is, I'll leave for you to discover in the book. Children aren't the only ones who face "doors." Teenagers, college students, people in their 30s, and seniors all have doors in front of them. Let's talk with one another about

what our own doors are, and share honest conversations about how we might step out through the doors that lie before us. *There's a Lion Outside the Door* is a picture book more than capable of awakening the minds of adults as well as children. That's why I recommend it to every adult.

Summary

Lee Sollim: A Book That Turns the Single Answer of Marriage Back into a Question

Maeng Junhyuk: *The Psychology of Kings* for Professionals in Their 30s and 40s

Kim Mihyang: A Book That Invites Us to Look Back on Our Own Lives and Family Histories by Reading One Family's Wounds and Love Together

Jang Dong Seok: How to Meet the Colorful World Outside the Door

Captivated by a Passion for Books and the Classics: Behind the Scenes of Publishing Ko Myung-hwan's Latest Work in Japan

Written by

Yuko Motoki

Yuko Motoki | Editor at Discover 21, Inc.

Yuko Motoki serves as an editor at Discover 21, Inc., focusing primarily on self-help literature and planners. Notably, she has led the planning and editing of the Japanese editions for renowned author Ko Myung-hwan.

This spring, Japanese readers welcomed a new book on the classics by popular Korean comedian Ko Myung-hwan: 『どん底から最高の人生に変わる「古典」の知恵』 (Donzokokara Saikou ni Kawaru “Koten” no Chie, original Korean title: 『고전이 답했다: 마땅히 살아야 할 삶에 대하여』 ; translated here as *The Wisdom of the Classics That Can Transform a Life from Rock Bottom*). At a time when the Japanese market already offers a wide range of works on reading, books and the classics, why did we decide to bring this particular title to Japanese readers? As the editor in charge, I would like to share the story behind this project, the readers’ response, and the unique challenges we faced along the way.

How the Previous Book Led to This Project

What led me to this project was my earlier experience editing the Japanese translation of another book by Ko Myung-hwan, 『本は人生を生き抜く最強の武器である』 (Hon wa Jinsei wo Ikinuku Saikyo no Bukidearu, original Korean title: 『나는 어떻게 삶의 해답을 찾는가』 ; translated here as *Books as the Strongest Weapon for Getting Through Life*). In the course of working on that title, what came through most powerfully was the author’s extraordinary passion for books and his unwavering faith in reading itself. I was especially struck by the intensity of that passion, which felt markedly different from what one often finds in Japanese books on similar themes by scholars or critics. I still remember how amazed—and deeply drawn in—I was by the realization that reading can truly save a person’s life, and that there are people who have genuinely lived that experience.

Later, through the publishing agent, I learned that the author had published a new book on the classics. I have long loved the classics myself, and the moment I heard that this author had taken up the subject, I felt a strong

desire to read the book in Japanese. That feeling eventually led me to pursue a Japanese edition of 『고전이 답했다: 마땅히 살아야 할 삶에 대하여』

A Quiet Resonance Among Readers

While the previous book still leads in total sales, the response to this new title has been far from small. Feedback like “This made me want to pick up a classic for the first time in years” has been especially rewarding, making me feel as though we’ve gained new fellow classic-lovers. Some readers even shared on social media that it was one of their favorite books of the first half of the year. It has generated a deep, genuine connection with readers that cannot be measured by sales figures alone.

Overcoming the Wall of Cultural Differences

The production process presented three main challenges:

Translation choices for quoted works: Some of the books quoted by the author had never been translated into Japanese. We had to decide whether to reference existing Japanese translations or create new ones. Ultimately, we decided to have our translator retranslate all quoted passages, except for those originally written by Japanese authors.

Navigating cultural context: The book contains many of the author’s personal experiences. Because cultural contexts differ between Korea and Japan, the translator and I spent considerable time determining how to adapt the narrative so it felt natural to Japanese readers. We addressed this by adding explanatory notes where necessary.

Building brand recognition: This is only the second book by Ko Myung-hwan to be published in Japan, and his name recognition here remains low. In a market crowded with self-help and classic literary guides by established Japanese authors, finding ways to make this book stand out is a challenge we are still actively tackling.

Even so, both as a reader and an editor, I am confident that the author's love for the classics has truly reached Japanese readers. I hope to build on this momentum and help the book reach as many people as possible.



『どん底から最高の人生に変わる「古典」の知恵』 (Donzokokara Saikou ni Kawaru “Koten” no Chie, original Korean title: 『고전이 답했다: 마땅히 살아야 할 삶에 대하여』 ; translated here as *The Wisdom of the Classics That Can Transform a Life from Rock Bottom*)

A Book for Reading Together, Recommended by Sungryemun Hakdang: *Bartleby, the Scrivener*

Written by

Min-young Kim

Min-young Kim | Board Director, Sungryemun Hakdang Learning Community / Writer

A reading group expert and writer who has launched some 500 reading groups and given more than 10,000 lectures over the past 20 years. Kim's books include Reading Groups for My Life and I Go to Book Club Again Today, among others.

About This Recommendation

Founded in 2008, Sungryemun Hakdang is a learning community that aims to offer reading groups for all ages. We have worked hard to pave the way from reading alone to reading together, from reading in a secluded room to reading in the public square. We are a community of organizers who have created reading groups at schools, libraries, and local governments all across the country. Like the words of writer Go Mi-sook, “Learn so you can give it to others!”, our members enjoy the kind of learning that can be shared. We find joy in learning that is given away and spread widely. When we find a good book, we recommend it, share our thoughts after discussions, and even research discussion questions, all to create better reading groups. We are a research group that pursues discussion-question-based reading groups, which broaden and deepen the value of a book, rather than reading groups that end in mere chatter or small talk.

Naturally, this leads us to focus on sifting through and selecting books that are good for reading groups. From classics to new releases, we have been steadily reviewing books across every field. Even so, when asked to recommend a good book for reading together, we hesitate. We keep looking back to see if we’ve missed any books. Even if it isn’t the best possible recommendation, we want it to be the best we can offer. When it comes to recommending books, we don’t want to fall behind.

The Joy of Discussing a 170-Year-Old Classic



Bartleby, the Scrivener Written by Herman Melville, Greenbee, 2024

After much deliberation, the book we chose is *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (Greenbee, 2024). It is a novella by Herman Melville (1819–1891) that is still read in many different ways more than 170 years after its publication. First published in 1853, the story is set in a law office on Wall Street in New York. The narrator, a lawyer, hires a young scrivener named Bartleby to take on his growing load of paperwork, but soon runs into trouble. How to view Bartleby, who repeats nothing but “I would prefer not to,” is a question left to the reader, and so lively discussions unfold. Some take issue with the attitude of the lawyer, who had been pleased with Bartleby’s outstanding productivity. Some see the lawyer’s requests as falling outside Bartleby’s job, while others argue that he could at least do that much. The discussion reaches its peak with the rather heated view that the lawyer did nothing wrong and that all the blame lies with Bartleby. Quite a few people share their own experiences, saying they would be too angry to put up with a coworker or employee like Bartleby. When people say they were startled

because it looked just like their own workplace, or that it feels like a recently written novel, we rediscover the lasting presence of the classics. It is a work that lets the conversation widen to how difficult it is to understand others, and even to what it takes to survive at work without burning out.

Some members say that when they read it alone, they couldn't grasp what it was trying to say or why it was so famous, but the group helped them make sense of it. Others follow with the reflection that classics truly reveal their value when read together. If you'd like to explore more of Herman Melville's work, we also recommend his novel *Moby-Dick* (Munhakdongne, 2019). It's a two-volume doorstopper, but reading it together in a small group makes it possible to finish. It is the novel the main character loved in the drama *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*. Based on Melville's own experience aboard a whaling ship, this vivid epic of the sea showcases his remarkable powers of observation and imagination. Reading together is a wonderful deadline that helps you finish any book, whether it's vast, thick, old, famous, or difficult. For people of all ages who want to grow closer to books, why not try "one person, one reading group"?

How Koreans Read Together

Written by

Won-Keun Baek

Won-Keun Baek | Books & Society Research Institute

A researcher of the book ecosystem, he has taken part in a wide range of reading-related studies, including the National Reading Survey, as well as reading promotion programs run by local governments and civic organizations. He writes regular columns for *The Hankyoreh*, *Korea Reading Education News*, and *Japan's The Bunka News*.

“Reading together” refers to a culture of reading that goes beyond the individual, built on shared empathy and conversation. In Korea, these groups go by many names: reading groups, reading circles, reading societies, and book clubs. In the modern era, as the education system developed, reading was largely confined to study or personal pursuit. Today, however, all kinds of reading groups meet within communities where people actively connect, from schools, libraries, bookstores, and workplaces to local neighborhoods and online spaces.

As of September 2026, the Reading Club Support Center website, run by the Book Culture Foundation, one of Korea’s leading civic reading organizations, lists 10,754 reading clubs by region. Since registration on the site is voluntary, the actual number of clubs active across the country is estimated to be at least ten times higher. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism’s 2025 National Reading Survey supports this: among adults who take part in reading-related activities (3.8% of readers), 37.3% participate in reading groups.



Korea's Reading Culture Promotion Act encourages reading groups in schools and workplaces. Most elementary, middle, and high schools have student reading clubs, and elementary schools also run reading clubs for parents. Workplaces of a certain size often have reading groups in the form of hobby clubs. In addition, companies and institutions that practice reading management sometimes support the cost of purchasing books or holding meetings.

Some local governments also run programs to support citizens' reading clubs. Seongnam, in Gyeonggi Province, for example, selected 130 reading clubs this year and provided support for book purchases worth 450,000 won. The city also supported joint discussion forums among the clubs and author talks. Such programs are usually carried out by public libraries under local government jurisdiction. Public libraries across the country actively support reading groups by lending books for their meetings and providing meeting spaces.

Bookstores can be considered the most active organizers when it comes to creating and running reading clubs. In particular, local bookstores located in the neighborhoods where people live and go about their daily lives run several reading groups each, drawing a wide range of customers, including children, teenagers, adults, and seniors, depending on the character of the bookstore. The fields and topics covered in these groups are highly diverse, including picture books, literature, philosophy, business and economics, science, and the arts, and book talks featuring invited authors are also popular. Reading groups come in many forms, ranging from regular biweekly or monthly gatherings where members read the same book and talk about it freely, to groups that meet almost every day to read together, to groups that divide roles between presenting and discussing, much like an academic seminar.



Meanwhile, paid reading groups are also thriving in Korea. A leading example is TREVARI, a community platform for reading groups, where 509 paid reading groups are currently active. The main participants are readers in their 20s and 30s, mostly women, and the groups typically discuss books together with authors or experts. These are seasonal programs that usually consist of four meetings, held once a month, at a cost of around 250,000 to 350,000 won, which is by no means cheap, yet participants keep signing up. This shows that there are quite a few young people willing to invest generously in their personal growth. There are also many reading groups that meet online instead of in person. Free from the constraints of a physical meeting place, they allow people who live far apart to set a convenient time, join in, connect through books, and grow together, making them reading groups for the digital age.

As such, the culture of “reading together” in Korea spans a very wide spectrum. Most groups make the joy of reading part of everyday life and place great value on human connection, while others use book groups as a means of learning and personal growth. Korea has the highest college

means of learning and personal growth. Korea has the highest college enrollment rate in the world, yet there are growing concerns that the culture of reading is gradually declining due to the rise of smartphones and video and entertainment content. An effective way to counter this is “reading together.” To create an environment where even non-readers, who do not usually read books, can take part, a reading movement is also underway to set aside about 20 minutes of “reading together time” in schools, workplaces, the military, and elsewhere. More effort and attention are needed to build a society where everyone can enjoy the benefits of reading, which enhances human values and quality of life.

Changbi: Enriching the Minds and Hearts of Korean Readers

Interview by

Kang seo-young, Lee ji-young, Cho bu-na

Kang seo-young, Lee ji-young, Cho bu-na | Changbi Publishers

They run “Club Changbi,” the book club service of Changbi Publishers. By exploring the questions today’s readers need to ask, they are broadening the possibilities of a culture where people read together and share their thoughts.

Changbi has been a driving force in Korean publishing, releasing books across a wide range of fields, including humanities titles, fiction, and children's books. Since launching the quarterly *The Quarterly Changbi* in 1966, it has steadily published fine books in literature and scholarship, serving as a strong foundation for the Korean publishing industry. We asked Changbi about its distinctive strengths, how it is preparing for the future, and its many activities, including the book club "Club Changbi."

Q. Could you briefly introduce Changbi? We'd also love to hear what first brought you to Changbi, and what you see as its distinctive strengths from working there.

We are Kang Seo-young, Lee Ji-young, and Jo Bu-na, and we run "Club Changbi," Changbi's reading membership program. Watching a book come into the world, meet its readers, and grow into new ideas and conversations is exciting every single time. Each of us came to love books for different reasons, but we all entered the publishing industry with the same love for books, and now we work together to introduce Changbi's books to readers.

We plan a wide range of activities that help readers experience books more closely and deeply, from selecting books to our reading group "Salon," book talks and lectures, and reading and writing programs. We create many points of connection so that readers of all ages, from children to adults, can discover books that fit their own lives and interests and talk about those books with others.

Changbi began in 1966 with the launch of *The Quarterly Changbi*. As a general publisher that reaches readers of every generation, with titles spanning literature, the humanities and social sciences, children's and young

adult books, picture books, and quarterly journals, Changbi's greatest assets are the fine books, authors, and community of readers it has built up over many years. Another of Changbi's strengths is that it has consistently published books that combine literary merit with broad appeal, without losing sight of the important questions of our time.

We believe that helping a book be read for years to come and spark new conversations is how Changbi connects its history and content with today's readers.



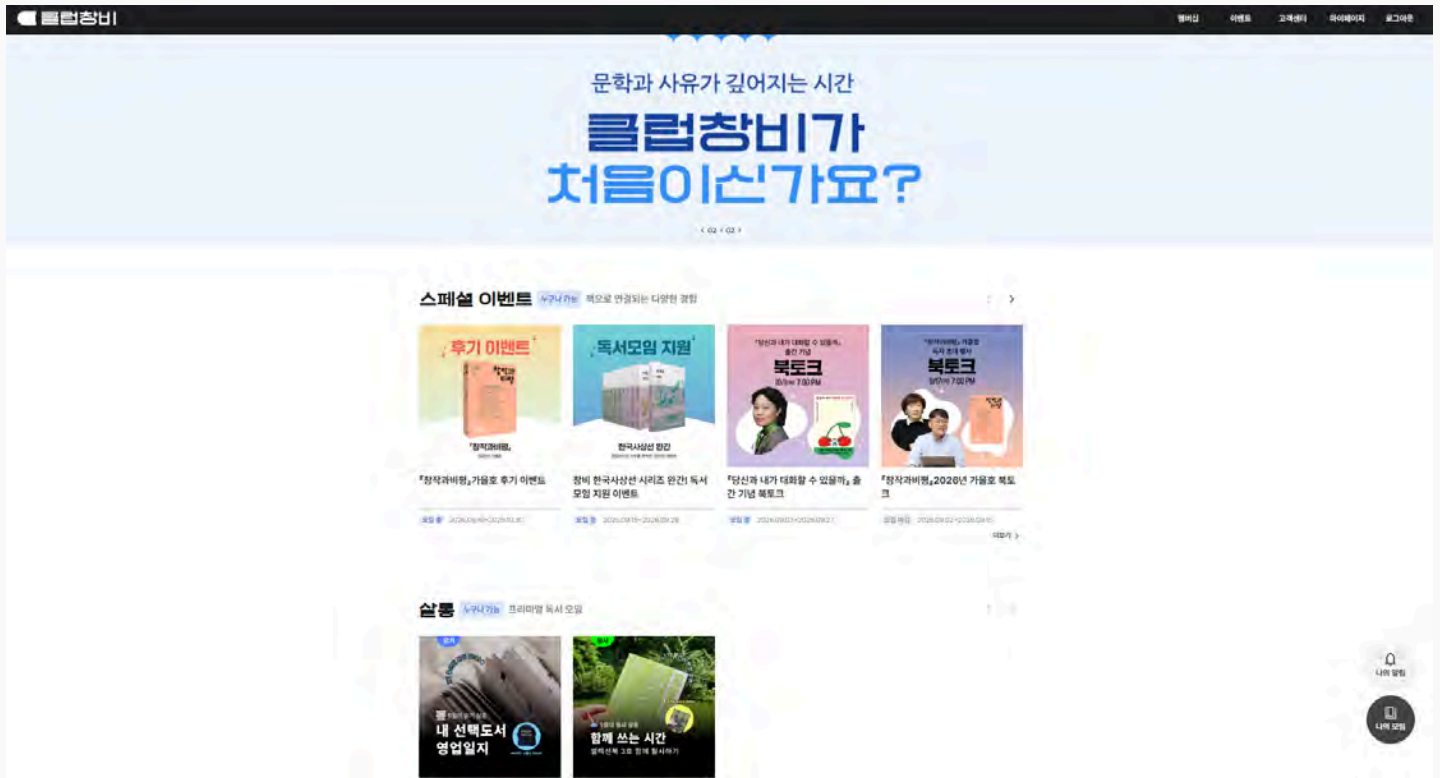
The Club Changbi team, pictured in front of the Changbi office

Q. What makes “Club Changbi” meaningful and distinctive as a book club run by a publisher?

“Club Changbi” is a reading membership program that Changbi runs to meet and connect with readers on an ongoing basis. Rather than stopping at buying books or receiving news about new releases, it connects the entire process of readers choosing books themselves, reading them, and sharing their thoughts with others into a single reading experience. Along with membership books, it offers the reading group “Salon,” book talks and lectures, reading materials for members, and a variety of cultural programs.

The biggest feature of “Club Changbi” is that each season’s activities are tied together by a central theme and question. Over about ten months, we suggest books from various fields centered on one big theme and introduce programs connected to each book one after another. Because the books and events aren’t scattered individually but are linked under a single question, readers can meet different books and people and think deeply about the same issue from many directions.

Building on the publishing content and reader base that Changbi has accumulated over many years, the publisher and readers create stories together. We believe this effort is the unique role “Club Changbi” is shaping in the Korean publishing industry today.



The homepage of “Club Changbi”



“Club Changbi” members taking part in an event

Q. What role do Changbi's books play in a culture of reading together? Could you introduce a few of your key titles?

The value of reading together doesn't lie in everyone understanding the same book in the same way. It lies in sharing different memories and feelings over a single book and discovering worlds you couldn't see when reading alone. Changbi has consistently published books and ideas that allow readers of different generations and interests to naturally start a conversation.

The Quarterly Changbi, which celebrates its 60th anniversary this year, has broadly covered major issues in literature and society since its founding in 1966, creating a space where readers can read and discuss Korean society together. By bringing together voices from different fields and generations and steadily raising the questions our era must grapple with together, *The Quarterly Changbi* has shown that reading together can be an experience that goes beyond the individual, expanding a community's thinking and exploring change in our times.

Jeong Ji-a's novel *Jjinnie Alert*, published this year, tells of the uproar surrounding two young women who settle in a mountain village where the average age is seventy-eight, exploring prejudice and hospitality, aging and care with humor and warmth. It's a wonderful book for readers of different generations to read and talk about together.

The Black Cat Ggamnyang, the *Problem Solver* series, widely loved by young readers, follows Ggamnyang, a cat who meets people in all kinds of places and solves problems big and small. Having sold more than one million copies, the series offers children the joy of reading and gives parents a chance to talk with their children about everyday life and relationships.

The First Encounter with Fiction series, which pairs short stories with rich illustrations, was designed so that children and teens who aren't used to long texts can approach the world of literature without feeling burdened. These works show that reading together can grow beyond a time for passing on knowledge into an experience of understanding one another and sharing our hearts.

Q. As part of the Changbi team, how do you see Changbi's future? Please share the vision you'd like to pass on to your readers.

Changbi's vision lies in preserving the values and content it has upheld for many years, while connecting them to today's readers in new language and new ways.

Yu Hong-june's *My Exploration of Cultural Heritage*, whose first volume was published in 1993, is a prime example of this direction. The series transformed cultural heritage from a subject of study reserved for experts into a living place that anyone can visit in person and talk about, sparking a nationwide craze for heritage trips. It is a monumental work in the Korean humanities, read by five million readers, yet its significance does not end with past achievements. Today, amid the global K-content boom and growing interest in Korean history and culture at home and abroad, *My Exploration of Cultural Heritage* holds even greater potential as content that tells the stories within Korea's cultural heritage in contemporary language, leading readers to discover the depth and appeal of Korean culture anew.

From revised editions that update the content and information for the times, to a series for teenage readers, to *A Pilgrimage to the National*

Museums, which explores Korean history in chronological order, Changbi aims to turn its accumulated content not into a preserved relic of the past, but into living, evolving knowledge that meets the questions of the next generation.

In 2027, the Changbi Children's Book Series, launched in 1977, will celebrate its 50th anniversary. The series has carried on its commitment to making books that can be recommended to children with complete confidence, growing alongside Korean children's literature. Changbi will continue to respect children as independent readers and citizens and to create books that can be read together across generations. Drawing on our past as an asset while asking new questions every day, we will remain by our readers' side for years to come as a publisher that imagines a better society through books.

“A Children’s Story Is a Friend to Share Your Heart With”: Hong Min-jeong

Interview by
Hong Min-jeong

Hong Min-jeong | Writer

In spring and fall, Hong Min-jeong visits schools and libraries to meet her young readers, and in summer and winter, she writes new stories. She hopes to write stories that bring readers to tears, whether they laugh until they cry or are moved to tears. Her best-known works include *Black Cat Ggamnyang*, *the Problem Solver* and *Bongbong, Romanticist Puppy*, as well as *The Worry Laundry* and *A Funeral Where Everyone Smiles*.

If you're into children's books, chances are you've come across a certain black tuxedo cat at least once. That's Ggamnyang. This adorable, lovable problem solver was born from the pen of author Hong Min-jeong. We reached out to Hong, who has written many children's books, including the *Black Cat Ggamnyang, the Problem Solver* series and the *Bongbong, Romantic Puppy* series, to ask about her imagination and what her readers mean to her. Let's take a look at her creative world and the way she sees the world around her.

Q. Could you tell us how you became a children's author, and introduce yourself as a writer?

Hello, readers of <K-Book Trends>! I'm Hong Min-jeong, a children's author. I'm delighted to have the chance to talk about myself and my books with readers and publishing professionals around the world.

Since my first book came out in 2014, I've published some 50 books. The best known is *Black Cat Ggamnyang, the Problem Solver*, published by Changbi Publishers in 2020. Its hero, Ggamnyang, is a sly, self-assured stray cat. Looking for a place to spend the night, he wanders into an apartment complex's security office, ends up becoming the security guard, and solves the residents' problems. Since then, Ggamnyang has traveled to a pizza shop, a taekwondo studio, a convenience store, a school, a baseball stadium, and more, proving himself a first-rate problem solver wherever he goes. The series has been a steady favorite among young readers, passing one million copies in total sales this February, and the latest installment, Volume 9, is set at a baseball stadium.



BLACK CAT GGAMNYANG, THE PROBLEM SOLVER Vol. 1

I first became interested in children's stories around the time I was leaving my last job. While I was figuring out my next move, I signed up for a class on writing children's fiction. After I quit, I worked as a freelancer and wrote practice stories whenever I had spare time. Then, in 2012, I won a spot in the Sinchun Munye, the New Year's literary contest held by Korean newspapers, and that's when I truly set out on the path of children's literature.

Q. The characters in your books are adorable, yet they also offer children comfort, encouragement, and all kinds of knowledge. What do you think is the greatest value of children's stories?

Before I met my young readers in person, I thought the value of children's stories lay in giving kids the fun and joy of reading, along with a little lesson or two. But meeting children who had read my books at schools and libraries changed my mind. I came to realize that for children, a story is "a friend to share their heart with."

Ggamnyang, the hero of *Black Cat Ggamnyang, the Problem Solver*, is a stray cat, and children believe Ggamnyang is a real cat living somewhere out there. So they ask me how Ggamnyang is doing and tell me to be sure to bring Ggamnyang along next time. Some even draw pictures of fish, tuck them into envelopes, and ask me to deliver them to Ggamnyang. Not long ago, I received a letter from a child in Russia, who wrote about hoping to introduce their own cat to Ggamnyang someday.



The Russian edition of *Black Cat Ggamnyang, the Problem Solver* and a drawing of Ggamnyang by a young reader in Russia

If Ggamnyang is a cat everyone loves, then Bongbong, the hero of the *Bongbong, Romantic Puppy* series, is a puppy everyone roots for. I based Bongbong on my own dog, Haengbogi, whom I adopted from an animal shelter in July 2015. In the stories, Bongbong lives a lonely life tied to a short leash until meeting two stray cats, Bolt and Nut, and finally breaking free. Together, the three set off to explore the world. Of course, adventures for a puppy and cats with no one to take care of them come with their share of danger. Children who read the series often tell me they hope Bongbong will soon find a loving family and live a safe, happy life. The final installment of

the series, which came out recently, reflects those very wishes.



Bongbong, Romanticist Puppy Vol. 1 and Haengbogi, the dog who inspired the story

Q. Your books are loved by many children and their parents and caregivers. Are there any other books you'd like to introduce to the young readers of this interview?

The Worry Laundry is about a main character who worries far too much, and what happens after all those worries get washed away. *Tear-Absorbing Sponge*, from the same publisher, follows Uram, a child who cries easily. After using a sponge that soaks up tears, Uram runs into an unexpected side effect: emotions start drying up, too. In the story, the sponge comes from a shop called Mongttang Mart. That mart is full of amazing items that haven't made their way out into the world yet, ones that only I know about. Someday, I'd like to write their stories as well.

My new series, *Dunggu & Ttaeng: Partners on Patrol*, is about a ten-year-old child and a ten-year-old dog who go on special patrols together. In the first story, they help find a missing stray cat. In the second, they track down

the culprit who broke a pot of geraniums in front of a hair salon.



The Worry Laundry, Tear-Absorbing Sponge, Dunggu & Ttaeng: Partners on Patrol Vol. 1

Q. Are there any subjects you'd like to turn into children's books in the future? We'd also love to hear, briefly, what you see as the strengths of Korean children's books, and of your own.

Besides my series *Black Cat Ggamnyang*, the *Problem Solver* and *Bongbong, Romanticist Puppy*, many of my other books feature animals, too. There's a dog in *Dunggu & Ttaeng: Partners on Patrol* as well. Because of that, children often ask me things like "Do you like animals?" or "Are you going to keep writing animal stories?" Some even come right out and place an order: "Please write a story about a lizard!" I used to answer, "I think I'm going to stop writing animal stories now." But now that you've asked, I don't think I need to go out of my way to avoid them. If it's a story I can write well and have fun with, one I can really lose myself in, I'm ready to take it on, whatever it is.

Among my books, the only one written for upper elementary readers is

A Funeral Where Everyone Smiles. It's about a grandmother who is ill and doesn't have long to live, so she holds her own funeral before she dies. It's the book that has made the most readers cry. Going forward, I'd like to write more books that older children can read and talk about together.



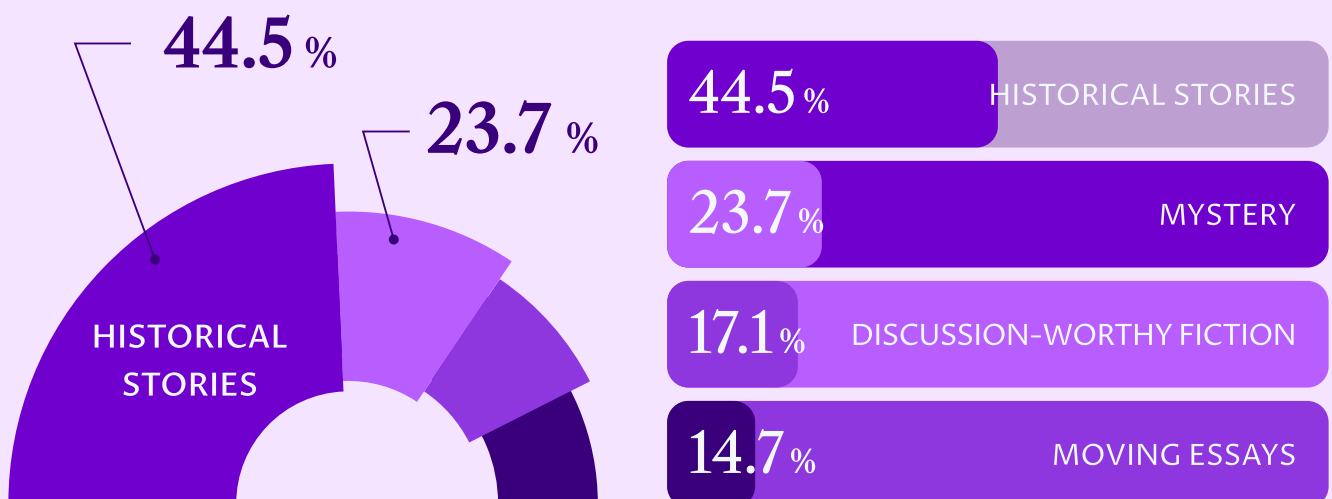
A Funeral Where Everyone Smiles

Read Together, History Becomes Many Stories

Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

Q. Which type of Korean book would you most enjoy reading with a book club?



“What type of Korean book do you think would be the most fun to read together in a book club?”

In this survey, stories about history came out on top with 44.5% of the vote, followed by mysteries at 23.7%, novels that spark discussion at 17.1%, and moving essays at 14.7%.



My Father's Liberation Written by Jeong Ji-a, Changbi Publishers

Stories about history suit book clubs so well because they go beyond simply teaching us about the past. Readers can come away with completely different interpretations of and feelings about the same events and people, so the more we read together, the more stories emerge. In that sense, Jeong Ji-a's *My Father's Liberation* is a great fit for a book club.

The novel unfolds around the death and funeral of a father who was once a partisan fighter. Through the stories of those who come to pay their respects, his daughter discovers sides of her father she never knew, and in the process, she comes face to face with the Korean War, ideological conflict, and the history of a divided nation. Yet rather than weighing readers down with history, the novel paints a rich, multifaceted portrait of one man's life

through the memories of his family, neighbors, and friends.

“Can we judge a person by their ideology alone?”

*“How different is the history a family remembers from the history
a society records?”*

Every reader will come away from the same book with different answers.

And perhaps that’s the greatest joy of reading historical fiction together: not searching for the right answers about the past, but discovering one another’s different memories and perspectives. That’s why *My Father’s Liberation* captures the appeal of “stories about history,” the top choice in this survey, while naturally opening the door to lively discussion.

Conflict and Reconciliation Within the Walls of Family

Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

Welcome to *Book Grocery*, a monthly K-Book Trends feature that recommends books based on readers' real stories. If you would like to receive a book recommendation tailored to your concerns or situation, please submit your story through the form below.

[Submit your story](#)

This October, Book Grocery shares a story from a subscriber living in China. After a falling-out with their brother, they went a long time without speaking, until a book opened the door to reconciliation.

A Story from China

My brother and I went through a long period of barely speaking after a family disagreement neither of us wanted to bring up first. One day, I left a novel on his doorstep, one I knew he'd loved as a teenager with no note attached. A week later, he texted me just one line: "finished it, chapter 12 destroyed me." That single message became the first real conversation we'd had in months. We never directly addressed what caused the silence between us, but somehow, through that shared book, we found our way back to each other.

Reaching Toward Each Other



There are times that are all the harder because they involve family, and they can leave small wounds on our lives. Like the story in this issue, fights between siblings and conflicts between parents and children are probably an unavoidable part of life. Precisely because we're family, we sometimes trade sharp words we would never say to anyone else. Even so, we can feel the courage it took for our subscriber to be the first to reach out and make peace.

With warm admiration for that courage, we'd like to recommend a short story collection about family love and conflict: *Stories That Embrace* by Jeong Ji-a, Son Bo-mi, and five other writers. This book puts into print the conflicts and reconciliations of many families, and our own stories of hurting one another yet having no choice but to hold each other close. The short stories in this collection show many different forms of family, including families formed not by blood but through the bonds people make. Though the shape and meaning of family may differ, each story speaks to the warmth found within the shelter we call "family."

Why not take some time today to reflect on what you mean to your family, and what your family means to you?

How Korean Media Franchises Transformed the World of Books

Welcome to *I Read*, a K-Book Trends feature that shares readers' reviews, suggestions, and stories about Korean books. If you would like to share your thoughts or experiences related to Korean books, please submit your story through the form below.

[Share Your K-Book Reading Review](#)

We are excited to share an article contributed by a reader in Morocco about Korean literature. Our contributor highlights a fascinating dynamic: how original books are adapted and reimagined across multiple platforms, turning imaginative worlds into vivid visual experiences. They also share how these media franchises have transformed what used to be a solitary reading experience into a shared global journey.



Pachinko (『파친코』), *Omniscient Reader's Viewpoint* (『전지적 독자 시점』)

Dear K-Book Trends,

Discovering Korean book-based media franchises has been one of the most exciting parts of my reading journey. What starts as a simple novel or web novel often blossoms into webtoons, hit dramas, and even films, creating rich worlds that reach audiences everywhere.

One story that deeply impressed me is *Pachinko* (『파친코』). Lee Min-jin's powerful novel about a Korean family's multi-generational saga was beautifully adapted into an Apple TV+ series. The way the book explores identity, resilience, and home across decades felt so alive on

screen. It helped me gain new perspectives on history and human strength through heartfelt characters and sweeping storytelling.

Another favorite is how web novels like *Omniscient Reader's Viewpoint* (『전지적 독자 시점』) expand across formats — from online serialization to webtoons and upcoming movies. The idea of stories saving the world and readers becoming heroes resonated strongly, showing the magic that happens when books inspire broader creative universes.

These franchises turn personal reading moments into shared global experiences. They bring comfort, excitement, and fresh insights into everyday life. Korean storytelling continues to inspire me to explore more books and their vibrant adaptations.

A Small, Steady Conversation Toward an Equal Society

Written by

Jung-Ah Shin

Jung-Ah Shin | Culture Critic, Adjunct Professor, Division of Performing Arts, Baekseok Arts University

TV documentary writer who has scripted over 400 episodes, the author is deeply interested in the intersection of cultural content and humanistic imagination. With a love for the stories of people and the world embedded in media, she believes in the power of good content to change the world. Major publications include *Elderly in Media*, *Elderly outside Media*, *Living with AI*, *New Media and Story-doing*, *Cultural Content and Transmedia*, and *Media Literacy Education for Digital Literacy*, etc.



Jang Hye-young, *An Equal Ordinary*, Humanitas, 2026.

Jang Hye-young's *An Equal Ordinary* tells the stories of marginalized people who have to fight just to live an ordinary life. She patiently and thoroughly unpacks the social pressure behind that familiar advice to “just live a normal life like everyone else.” Even “ordinary,” the author points out, has its own hierarchy. To count as ordinary, you need a college degree, a respectable job, a salary above a certain line, and a home in the Seoul area. Failing that, you should at least be investing in stocks or crypto. And it doesn't stop there. There's a standard for everything: you have to try the desserts trending on social media, and there are rules about what to wear and which handbag to carry to a friend's wedding, and what kind of car to buy.

Yet another layer of conflict and hierarchy emerges between those worn down by a relentless race to meet these standards and those who can't even get a foot in the door. The very meaning of an “ordinary life” has shifted. Family, neighbors, friendship, love, health, education, a job, a safe home and safe streets, social recognition: the basic things anyone needs to pursue an ordinary kind of happiness are turning into privileges that not everyone gets

to enjoy.

An Equal Ordinary makes the case for an anti-discrimination law as a way to reclaim an ordinary life for everyone. Ordinary happiness is also what Jang Hye-young and her younger sister Hye-jeong, who has a developmental disability, have long hoped for. Hye-jeong had lived in a residential facility for people with disabilities for 18 years when a whistleblower exposed repeated human rights abuses there, and she moved out. Their belief that such facilities offered better care was shattered, and a hard road lay ahead for the sisters. Hye-young had to start working right away to make a living, so they urgently needed a personal care assistant for Hye-jeong, who would be home alone. But because they hadn't met the residency requirement, they ran into difficulties.

Jang documented her sister's transition out of the institution in a documentary, "Grown Up", and published a book of the same name. To fund the film and her sister's care, she launched a crowdfunding campaign and many people took part in supporting it. With countless people cheering on the sisters as Hye-jeong took on the challenge of leaving institutional life behind, their story gradually reached a wide audience. Through her work across various media and activism, Jang pushed for a society where people with developmental disabilities could live independently in communities of their own choosing. She later set out on a new path, as a member of the National Assembly.

An Equal Ordinary gives a detailed account of the comprehensive anti-discrimination bill that the author pushed for during her term in the 21st National Assembly, covering both how it was introduced and what it contained. On June 29, 2020, just a month after the 21st National Assembly

convened, Jang and several fellow lawmakers introduced the bill. It listed 23 grounds of discrimination: sex, disability, age, language, national origin, ethnic origin, race, nationality, skin color, region of origin, physical characteristics such as appearance, marital status, pregnancy or childbirth, family type and circumstances, religion, ideology or political opinion, a criminal record whose sentence has been expunged, sexual orientation, gender identity, educational background, employment type, medical history or health condition, and social status. The author explains that the purpose of the law is not to impose criminal punishment on those who discriminate, but rather to focus on helping people correct discrimination they committed unknowingly, through measures such as corrective recommendations from the National Human Rights Commission of Korea.

The anti-discrimination bill was never passed in the 21st National Assembly. In *An Equal Ordinary*, the author sets out to explain the social prejudice and stigma surrounding the bill from her own perspective and to persuade readers. After losing her race in the 2024 general election, Jang returned to life as a private citizen and continues her work in many different settings today. The book leaves readers with a weighty question: can an “ordinary life” ever be something everyone can take for granted?

September Bestsellers: Welcoming Autumn

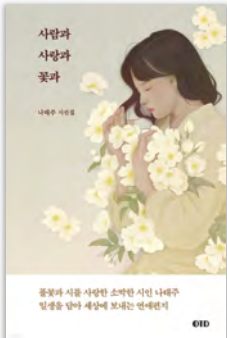
Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

For our October issue, we conclude our series on major Korean bookstore franchises by looking at the bestsellers at Arc N Book. Much like Jongno Books, Arc N Book offers various sales charts but lacks a unified list that integrates both online and offline sales. Therefore, this article focuses on its online rankings.

Taking the top spot at Arc N Book in the second week of September is the children's comic book *Hunhan Nammae 21*, continuing the immense popularity of this beloved series. Right behind at number two is Na Tae-joo's poetry collection, *People, Love, and Flowers*, which is a rare and remarkable achievement for poetry on the bestseller charts. Overall, Arc N Book's September chart stands out for its strong showing in both children's literature and fiction. Prominent novels that have maintained steady popularity throughout the year, such as *Contradictions*, *Goethe Said Everything*, and *Honmono*, share the rankings alongside popular children's titles like *Mom Became a Ghost!* and *Disney Zootopia 2: Movie Storybook*.

For a complete breakdown of the rankings, please see the table below

Arc N Book Bestseller List for the Second Week of September 2026			
Rank	Cover	Title / Author / Publisher / Genre	
1		<i>Hunhan Nammae 21</i>	
		Hunhan Nammae (Original Work) / Baek Nan-do (Author) / Yoo Nan-Hee (Illustrator)	
		Mirae N Iseum	
		Children's Books	
2		<i>People, Love, and Flowers</i>	
		Na Tae-joo	
		OTD	
		Poetry	

Arc N Book Bestseller List for the Second Week of September 2026

Rank	Cover	Title / Author / Publisher / Genre
3		<i>Contradictions</i>
		Yang Gui-ja
		Ssuda
		Fiction
4		<i>Goethe Said Everything</i>
		Yui Suzuki (author) / Lee Ji-su (translator)
		Leaf
		Fiction
5		<i>Honmono</i>
		Seong Hae-na
		Changbi
		Fiction
6		<i>Mom Became a Ghost!</i>
		Nobumi (writer, illustrator) / Lee Gi-Ung (translator)
		Gilbut Children's Books
		Children's Books
7		<i>Disney Zootopia 2: Movie Storybook</i>
		Erin Falligant (author) / Disney Storybook Art Team (illustrator) / Lee Ji-an (translator)
		Applebee Books
		Children's Books

Arc N Book Bestseller List for the Second Week of September 2026

Rank	Cover	Title / Author / Publisher / Genre
7		<i>Disney Zootopia 2: Movie Storybook</i>
		Erin Falligant (author) / Disney Storybook Art Team (illustrator) / Lee Ji-an (translator)
		Applebee Books
		Children's Books
8		<i>Children's Scary Math Puzzles You Can Use Right Away 2</i>
		Hannal (author, illustrator)
		Blue Gargen Books
		Children's Books
9		<i>We Will Always Meet Again</i>
		Yoon Yeo-rim (author) / Annyung Dal (illustrator)
		Wisdom House
		Children's Books
10		<i>Rapid(Today's Young Writers 40)</i>
		Jeong Dae-geon
		Minumsa
		Fiction

A Season Scented with Chrysanthemums: Midang Literary House and Jilmajae Pass in Gochang

Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

October: Gochang and Its Literary Museums Where Literature Comes Alive

In October, the area around Seonun-ri in Gochang, Jeonbuk Special Self-Governing Province, transforms into a landscape where literature comes alive. This is the birthplace of Seo Jeong-ju (Midang), a prominent figure in modern Korean poetry, as well as the setting that inspired the spirit of his renowned poem, “Beside a Chrysanthemum”. Just as the cries of the cuckoo and the thunderous sounds that echoed from spring through summer ultimately blossom into a single autumn chrysanthemum, Jilmajae Pass in October welcomes a season that feels as though a poem has stepped directly into reality.

The Midang Literary House (also known as the Midang Poet House) offers a dedicated space to explore the poet’s life and literary world. Housed in the renovated building of the former Seonun Elementary School, the museum invites visitors to trace his creative legacy through handwritten manuscripts, first-edition poetry books, and personal effects from his lifetime. What makes this museum truly distinct is how it moves beyond conventional indoor exhibits to encompass the surrounding landscape. The moment you step outside, the ridge of Jilmajae Pass and the open fields of Seonun-ri unfurl like the poet’s own language, transforming the act of reading literature into a journey through the village itself.



Panoramic View of Midang Poet House (Source: <https://midang1915.dongguk.edu/main>)

Standing on the rooftop of the literary house, visitors can take in a bird's-eye view of Seonun-ri Village alongside Jilmajae Poet Village. This area, also known as Jinma Village, is where the poet Seo Jeong-ju was born and raised, serving as the real-life setting for his prose poetry collection, *The Legend of Jilmajae*. As the poet once wrote, “It was eight parts wind that raised me,” the wind sweeping over Jilmajae Pass still brushes past the stone walls and thatched roofs of the village today. Deep inside the village, the restored house of his birth allows visitors to walk through the spaces of his childhood. Strolling along the ancient dolmens and narrow alleyways, the sense of nostalgia and warmth found in “Songs of Jilmajae” naturally comes back to life. Connecting the literary house, the birthplace, and the village paths into a single route, this journey offers an experience akin to reading a volume of poetry with your feet.



Autumn at Seonunsa Temple (Source: Seonunsa Temple, www.seonunsa.org/)

Not far from the literary house, Seonunsa Temple comes alive in autumn with deep crimson foliage and the gentle scent of chrysanthemums, offering a glimpse into the backdrop where the poet's literary spirit took root. The tranquil landscape of this mountain temple resonates naturally with the themes of waiting and maturity painted in "Beside a Chrysanthemum".

Gochang's local specialties further enrich the seasonal atmosphere. Delicate chrysanthemum tea, sweet and tangy bokbunja (black raspberry wine), and Pungcheon jangeo (grilled freshwater eel), a famous autumn staple for vitality, convey the village's present day through flavor. Here, literature does not remain confined to the pages of a book; it awakens once more within the village scenery, the daily lives of its people, and the fragrances of the season.

In October, Gochang is more than just a place with beautiful chrysanthemums. It is a space where Seo Jeong-ju's literature forms a collective memory for the community, and where his signature masterpiece defines the seasonal landscape of an entire region. As you tour the Midang Literary House, wander through Jilmajae Poet Village and his birthplace, and encounter the autumn light at Seonunsa Temple, the lines of "Beside a Chrysanthemum" naturally blossom in your heart once again.

Address

Midang Literary House (Midang Poet House): 2-8 Jilmajae-ro, Buan-myeon, Gochang-gun, Jeonbuk State / Hours: 09:00–18:00 (Winter season: until 17:00) / Closed every Monday and January 1 / Free admission

Jilmajae Poet Village (Jinma Village in Seonun-ri): Area around 2-8 Jilmajae-ro, Buan-myeon, Gochang-gun, Jeonbuk State

Birthplace of Seo Jeong-ju: 16 Jinmaan-gil, Buan-myeon, Gochang-gun, Jeonbuk State

Seonunsa Temple: 250 Seonunsa-ro, Asan-myeon, Gochang-gun, Jeonbuk State

Winners of the 2026 Korea Picture Book Awards

Edited by

The Contents Factory Co., Ltd.

The winners of the 2026 Korea Picture Book Awards, organized to support the continued growth of Korean picture books on the global stage, have been announced.

A total of 506 titles were submitted this year and evaluated based on artistic excellence, creativity and innovation, diversity and inclusion, and global export potential. Here are the nine picture books selected as this year's winners.

INFO

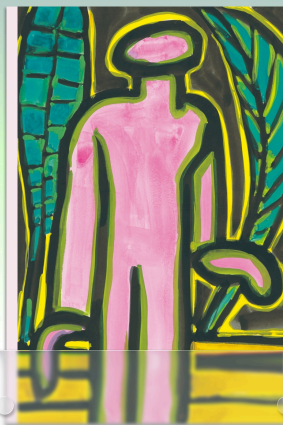


K-Book Trends

Grand Prize

대상

Fiction



To the Fish in the Sea, the Birds in the Sky, the Animals in the Forest, and to Humans

바다 안 물고기에게 하늘 안 새에게
숲 안 동물에게 그리고 인간에게

written and illustrated by Jeon Mihwa,
published by Borim Press

글·그림 전미화 | 출판 보림출판사

Non-Fiction



Wormderful Worms
: How to Live with Worms as Pets

지렁이 키우지렁
: 나의 첫 반려동물, 지렁이와 함께 사는 법

written and illustrated by Kim Jiweon,
published by RH Korea

글·그림 김지원 | 출판 알에이치코리아

Special Prize — Minister's Award

특별상 (장관상)

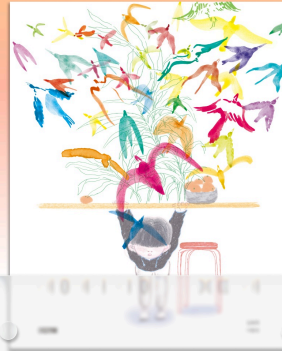


The Hollow Jam

구명청

written and illustrated by Baek Heena,
published by storybowl

글·그림 백희나 | 출판 스토리보울



The Most Wonderful Bird in the World

세상에서 가장 멋진 새

written by Kim Bok Hui and illustrated by Lee Myung Ae, published by Sakyejul Publishing Ltd.

글 김복희 | 그림 이명애 | 출판 사계절출판사

Special Prize — KPIPA President's Award

특별상 (원장상)

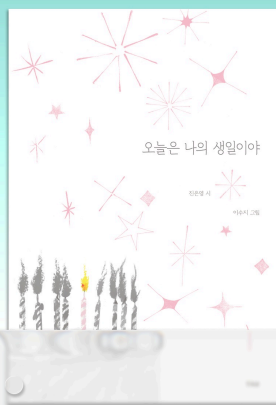


All the Ways We Say Goodbye

세상의 모든 안녕

written and illustrated by Kirim Nam,
published by GOMGOM

글·그림 남기림 | 출판 곰곰



Today Is My Birthday

오늘은 나의 생일이야

written by Jin Eun-young and illustrated by Suzy Lee, published by Woorischool Publishing Co.,Ltd.(CHOROKGYUL)

글 진은영 | 그림 이수지 | 출판 우리학교

Special Prize — KPIPA President's Award

특별상 (원장상)



The Haenyeo's Table: A Taste of Jeju's Past and Present

코시롱 해녀 밥상

written and illustrated by Yun-kyoung So,
published by Woongjin ThinkBig Co., Ltd.
글·그림 소윤경 | 출판 웅진씽크빅



I Can Do It

할 수 있어요

written and illustrated by Kim Hyo-eun,
published by Changbi Publishers, Inc.

글·그림 김효은 | 출판 창비

Rookie of the Year

신인상



There's a Song I Want to Play for You

너에게 들려주고 싶은 노래가 있어

written and illustrated by Yeo Seo Yoon,
published by Sakyejul Publishing Ltd.

글·그림 여서윤 | 출판 사계절출판사



Winners

Grand Prize

<Fiction>

To the Fish in the Sea, the Birds in the Sky, the Animals in the Forest, and to Humans

(written and illustrated by Jeon Mihwa, published by Borim Press)

<Non-fiction>

Wormderful Worms : How to Live with Worms as Pets

(written and illustrated by Jeon Mihwa, published by Borim Press)

Special Prize — Minister's Award

The Hollow Jam

(written and illustrated by Baek Heena, published by storybowl)

The Most Wonderful Bird in the World

(written by Kim Bok Hui, illustrated by Lee Myung Ae, published by Sakyejul Publishing Ltd.)

Special Prize — KPIPA President's Award

All the Ways We Say Goodbye

(written and illustrated by Kirim Nam, published by GOMGOM)

Today Is My Birthday

(written by Jin Eun-young, illustrated by Suzy Lee, published by Woorischool Publishing Co.,Ltd.(CHOROKGYUL))

The Haenyeo's Table: A Taste of Jeju's Past and Present

(written and illustrated by Yun-kyoung So, published by Woongjin ThinkBig Co., Ltd.)

I Can Do It

(written and illustrated by Kim Hyo-eun, published by Changbi Publishers, Inc.)

Awards Ceremony

Date & Time: Nov. 3, 2026 (Tue), 2 PM

Venue: Ferrum Hall, 3F, Ferrum Tower

Congratulations to all the winners of the 2026 Korea Picture Book Awards. We look forward to seeing these outstanding Korean picture books reach and inspire readers around the world.