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Mary Doria Russell’s Book, ‘The Women of the Copper Country,’ Chosen as 2021-22 Great Michigan Read

Novel Tells the Story of a Woman Who Leads Striking Calumet Miners in 1913

LANSING, Mich. — Residents throughout Michigan were invited today to join in reading and discussing “The Women of the Copper Country,” Mary Doria Russell’s riveting account of 25-year-old Annie Clements as she stood up for the miners and their families during the 1913 copper strikes. The book is Michigan Humanities’ choice for the 2021-2022 Great Michigan Read and is being unveiled during Women’s History Month.

“This fictionalized account of the very real and dangerous conditions Upper Peninsula copper miners faced and Annie Clements’ willingness to fight for a better life for them and their families will have readers cheering as Big Annie takes on the company owners in one of the first tests of the American labor movement,” said Shelly Hendrick Kasprzycki, Michigan Humanities president and CEO. “At a time when women were expected to keep house and raise children, Annie Clements’ decision to become a leader and take a stand is a story of courage. She’s a wonderful example of the strong and principled women who have made history in Michigan and across the country, and it’s especially important to share her story during Women’s History Month.”

Kasprzycki said she hopes Michigan citizens can read, discuss and learn from Annie’s inspiring example as “America’s Joan of Arc” during an engaging Great Michigan Read program that addresses labor history, women’s history and a critical period in Michigan history when jobs dependent on the state’s ample natural resources – copper, iron, lumber – were switching to new jobs on production lines at Henry Ford’s auto factories.

The Great Michigan Read aims to connect Michigan residents by deepening readers’ understanding of our state, our society, and our humanity. A statewide panel of teachers, librarians, community leaders and book lovers selects the Great Michigan Read every two years. The 2019-2020 book was “What the Eyes Don’t See,” Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha’s account of her discovery that Flint’s children were being poisoned by lead leaching into the city’s drinking water. The 2017-18 book was “X: A Novel,” a fictionalized account of the early life and Michigan roots of civil rights leader Malcolm X. A Great Michigan Read logo is available [here](#) and [here](#).

The 2021-22 Great Michigan Read is presented by Michigan Humanities and supported by national, statewide and local partners, including the National Endowment for the Humanities, The Meijer Foundation, and Martin Waymire.

Widely praised for meticulous research, fine prose, and the compelling narrative drive of her stories, Russell is the award-winning author of seven bestselling novels, including the science fiction classics “The Sparrow” and “Children of God”; the World War II thriller, “A Thread of Grace”; and a political romance set in 1921 Cairo called “Dreamers of the Day.” With her novels “Doc” and “Epitaph,” Russell has redefined two towering figures of the American West: the lawman Wyatt Earp and the dental surgeon Doc Holliday. She holds a Ph.D. in biological anthropology from the University of Michigan and taught anatomy at the Case Western Reserve University School of Dentistry. She lives in Cleveland, Ohio. A photo of Russell is available [here](#).

“I’m so honored Michigan Humanities chose ‘The Women of the Copper Country’ for the 2021-2022 Great Michigan Read,” said Russell, who spent time in Michigan’s Keewenaw Peninsula walking through the streets of Calumet, touring the mines and visiting local museums as she prepared to write her fictionalized account of the real-life Big Annie. “The copper strike itself has been studied and written about by historians and legal experts, but those accounts are not meant to engage the reader’s emotions. That was my job – to combine imagination and empathy with research.

“Here was a 25-year-old woman who is central to a strike against the most powerful company in the most dangerous industry of her time. A child of despised immigrants. A housewife with a simple education in a time when women couldn’t vote and weren’t supposed to take part in public life. Somehow, she mobilized 10,000 miners and kept everyone going, day after day, month after month. So, my task was to tell readers: What makes a woman like Annie Clements?” Russell added.

The Great Michigan Read kicks off in September 2021 and runs through fall 2022. In addition to free books, Great Michigan Read partners receive free reader’s guides, teacher’s guides, bookmarks, and other supplemental materials. Schools, libraries, colleges, arts and cultural institutions, and a range of other nonprofits are eligible to be Great Michigan Read partners. Registration is open now through [Michigan Humanities](#). Russell will participate in an author’s tour, with times, locations and decisions on in-person or virtual events to be made at a later date.

The 2021-22 Great Michigan Read title was selected by seven regional selection committees representing all corners of Michigan. After reading books with Michigan themes or locations from June through September 2020, the selection committee chairs met virtually in November 2020 and selected “The Women of the Copper Country” – a novel published by Simon & Schuster in 2019 – as the next Great Michigan Read. An image of the book’s cover is available [here](#).

Action grants of up to \$750 will be available to help support registered partners’ Great Michigan Read programming centered on the themes found in the book’s title. Sponsorship opportunities also are available to support partner events throughout the state. Contact Michigan Humanities to find out how to get involved.

About Michigan Humanities

Michigan Humanities inspires Michigan residents to come together in creative and freely expressed ways to deepen our understanding of ourselves and enrich our communities. In carrying out this mission, Michigan Humanities builds awareness and excitement for humanities in everyday life, achieves best practices and sustainability for all humanities programs and services in Michigan, and upholds the following key values: inclusion, diversity, and equity; discovery and understanding; authentic conversation; respectful collaboration; and meaningful experiences. Michigan Humanities’ vision is for all people of Michigan to experience and understand the importance of humanities to enrich lives.

About the Great Michigan Read

The Great Michigan Read kicked off in 2007-08 with “The Nick Adams Stories” by Ernest Hemingway. During the 2019-20 program, more than 300 participating organizations shared 10,000 copies of “What the Eyes Don’t See” with readers in 80 of Michigan’s 83 counties, and Hanna-Attisha spoke at nearly 30 in-person and virtual author events.

Previous Great Michigan Read books include “Stealing Buddha’s Dinner,” by Bich Minh Nguyen (2009-10); “Arc of Justice,” by Kevin Boyle (2011-12); “Annie’s Ghosts,” by Steve Luxenberg (2013-2014); “Station Eleven,” by Emily St. John Mandel (2015-16); and “X: A Novel,” by Ilyasah Shabazz and Kekla Magoon (2017-18).