

A Reading and Discussion Guide

Minnesota Winner – 20th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

CATEGORY SPONSORED BY MARQUETTE FINANCIAL COMPANIES

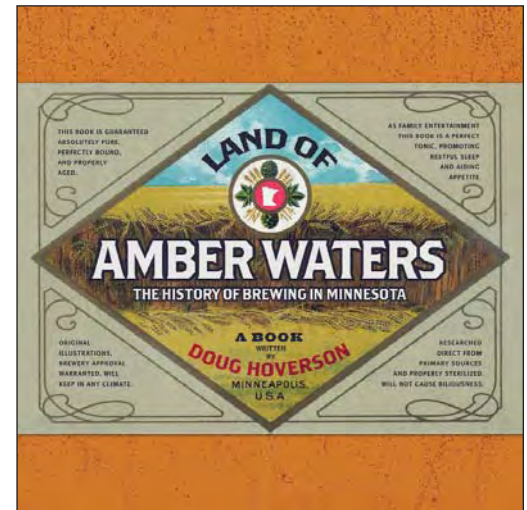
Land of Amber Waters: The History of Brewing in Minnesota **by Doug Hoverson**

University of Minnesota Press

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library.

SUMMARY:

Starting with Minnesota's first brewery in 1849, *Land of Amber Waters* tells the story of the state's beer industry, from small town breweries to larger companies with regional and national prominence. The book brings to life a colorful beer history including nearly 300 breweries which have opened at one time or another in 125 cities and towns around the state, beginning with the first illegal brewer at Fort Snelling and including today's beer culture led by a new wave of breweries and brewpubs. Photos, beer labels, and advertisements help capture Minnesota's interesting and rich beer history.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What was most interesting and surprising in reading about the state's brewing history?
2. In what ways did learning more about the history of beer and brewing industry help you gain a better understanding of how Minnesotans lived and what they valued during various periods of the state's history?
3. Should consumers support local businesses such as breweries or brewpubs? Would beer drinkers be better served by a wider selection of national or international brands, or by the proliferation of local specialties?
4. In what ways has the brewing industry had a positive or negative impact on our state's history?
5. If you could travel back in time to visit one brewery and sample its beers, which would it be, and in what year would you go?
6. What is your favorite beer? Is this choice based simply on flavor, or are there cultural factors such as advertising or a memorable experience influencing this choice?
7. Has the brewing industry done enough to combat the dangers of over-consumption and underage drinking? What more could or should be done?
8. In what ways did the book increase your interest in the beer industry? Have you tried any new brewpubs and/or beers as a result?
9. What is your fondest beer memory?
10. Looking into your crystal ball, what predictions do you have for what the state and national brewing culture will be like 10, 25, and 100 years from now?

A CONVERSATION WITH DOUG HOVERSON:

Q. What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I wrote this book to satisfy my curiosity. When doing research on the Northern Pacific Railroad for my M.A., I discovered old newspaper advertisements for breweries I had never heard of. When I looked for a book on Minnesota breweries to find out more about them, I discovered there wasn't one. Once the project was underway, it took on elements of a quest as I sought out long lost breweries and tried to finish a project many people assured me was impossible.

Q. What research did you undertake in writing this book?

While most people assume that the bulk of my research took place a pint at a time, by far the greatest amount of time was spent with obscure primary sources. I looked at hundreds of years' worth of old newspapers, thousands of pages of census records, excise tax records, and manuscripts of various sorts, as well as more beer cans, bottles and other artifacts than I could ever count. In order to be able to converse intelligently with master brewers, I became a home brewer and certified beer judge to learn about brewing science. Of course, I had to sample the beers themselves to be able to describe the differences between styles.

Q. How long did it take you to write *Land of Amber Waters*?

The first time I introduced myself to anyone as an aspiring brewing history writer was almost exactly ten years before *Land of Amber Waters* came out. For the first six years, I worked casually during summers and school vacations. I was granted a sabbatical during the 2004-05 school year, and began researching seriously and drafting the manuscript. Unfortunately, this process created more questions than answers, so the research and writing continued after my sabbatical ended. I gave up keeping track of the hours spent on the book early on, though the index alone took well over 100 hours.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

Of the 290 breweries that existed throughout Minnesota's history, very few still exist, and the records of the defunct breweries are mostly lost. While newspaper articles were often useful, some of the breweries predated the local paper, and the newspaper collections are not complete.

Q. What do you hope readers take away from this book?

My major goal was to encourage readers to appreciate the variety in the world of beer, both in the styles of beer itself and in the way that beer was presented, or advertised, to the public. In addition, I hope readers will see the brewing industry as an organic part of Minnesota's economy and culture - one that ties together rural and urban, rich and poor, across history.

Q. How do you most enjoy spending your time when you're not working or engaged in beer activities?

Apart from time spent with my family, I spend most of my free time in some sort of musical performance. I am a member of the Bass II section of VocalEssence and the Plymouth Congregational Church (Minneapolis) choirs. My brain still wants to play lots of basketball, but my body doesn't always consent.

ABOUT DOUG HOVERSON:

Doug Hoverson teaches social studies and coaches the debate team at St. Thomas Academy in Mendota Heights. He is associate editor of *American Breweriana Journal*, an award-winning homebrewer, and a certified beer judge. *Land of Amber Waters* is Hoverson's first book.

For more information about the author and his award-winning book, as well as links to Minnesota breweries and brewpubs, visit www.landofamberwaters.com/.



The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Office of the Mayor of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library. Visit us online at www.thefriends.org.

Reading guide production supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).



A Reading and Discussion Guide

General Nonfiction Winner – 20th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

CATEGORY SPONSORED BY MEYER, SCHERER & ROCKCASTLE, LTD.

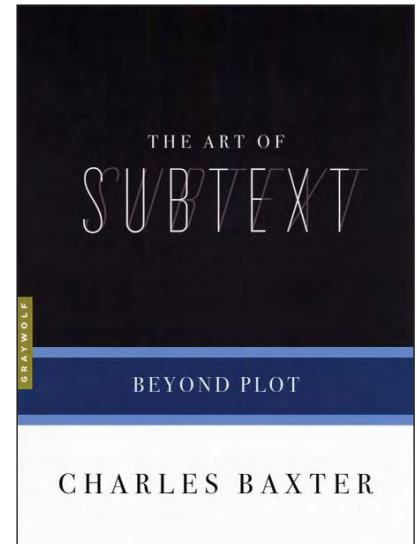
The Art of Subtext: Beyond Plot by Charles Baxter

Graywolf Press

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library.

SUMMARY:

Fiction writer and essayist Charles Baxter discusses and illustrates the hidden subtextual overtones and undertones in fictional works which are haunted by the unspoken, the suppressed, and the secreted. In one essay the author explains, “A novel is not a summary of its plot, but a collection of instances, of luminous specific details that take us in the direction of the unsaid and unseen.” Baxter’s book explores how fiction writers create those visible and invisible details, how what is displayed evokes what is not displayed.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What was your understanding of subtext before reading the book? How did your understanding change or shift in reading it?
2. Who is the author’s target audience?
3. Can you get a sense of a person’s character or personality from his or her face? Under what circumstances is this more challenging?
4. Is it good or bad for a character in a story to avoid conflict?
5. How is it possible for a person to say what he or she means by saying the opposite of what is meant?
6. Many people harbor what the book calls “unthinkable thoughts.” What is the nature of an unthinkable thought? What happens when you think such a thought?
7. In what ways do our gestures betray our inmost thoughts?
8. Is it important for a fictional character to be likeable?
9. What topics in our current society are Americans expert at avoiding? What makes a topic “too dangerous” to talk about?
10. Has this book changed the way you approach your reading of fiction? Can you identify uses of subtext in a recent book you’ve read?

A CONVERSATION WITH CHARLES BAXTER:

Q. What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

These days, literature is usually discussed in a weirdly esoteric manner, as if it had nothing to do with the way people actually gossip and tell stories and anecdotes. My book is about the way the unstated, the things you can't talk about directly, are described and dramatized in life and in writing. It's an important topic; anything you can't talk about has meaning, because it has acquired some destructive power. Americans, especially Midwesterners, are expert at avoiding topics of conversation that they consider dangerous. Notice how the war in Iraq is rarely discussed anymore.

Q. What research did you undertake in writing *The Art of Subtext*?

My book is not esoteric. It is about commonly-read books and ordinary experiences, so research didn't play a major part in its writing.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing this book?

I had to think through several problems that no one else ever seemed to have been bothered about: why, for example, are faces almost never described in writing anymore? What's gone wrong in the way that we think about faces? Why are young writers so reluctant to create scenes in their fiction? Why do they wish to avoid conflict? How is it possible to present in a dramatic medium a character who doesn't listen to anyone else? How do you talk about the unspoken? For that matter, why have great numbers of people stopped listening carefully to others? I wanted to present these complex matters as clearly and as straightforwardly as I could.

Q. What do you hope readers take away from your book?

An appreciation for the power of what people cannot or will not say, and for the ways they avoid saying it.

Q. How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

Like most writers, I always liked to read, especially from middle school on. By the time I was in ninth or tenth grade, I liked books so much that I wanted to write them myself. In becoming a writer, I made all the usual mistakes and was more than unusually ignorant, but I was also unusually stubborn and pig-headed, which is what saved me and got me through the dark

times. My first book of stories was published in 1984, when I was already 37 years old.

Q. What other authors do you recommend to readers who enjoy your work?

I always recommend the work of William Maxwell, an uncommonly gifted writer whose beautiful work is simply not well enough known. You should start with his short novel, *So Long, See You Tomorrow*.

Q. How do you most enjoy spending your time when you're not writing?

We have a cabin on the north shore of Lake Superior. I enjoy hiking up there on the Superior Hiking Trail.

ABOUT CHARLES BAXTER:

In addition to his nonfiction work, Charles Baxter is the author of several novels, collections of short stories, and poetry collections. He was born in Minneapolis and graduated from Macalester College. After completing graduate work in English at the State University of New York at Buffalo, Baxter taught for several years in the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor's MFA program. He now teaches at the University of Minnesota. Baxter's recent published work includes these novels:

The Soul Thief, 2008

Saul and Patsy, 2003

The Feast of Love, 2000 (nominated for a National Book Award)



For additional information about the author and his work, visit www.charlesbaxter.com/.



The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Office of the Mayor of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library. Visit us online at www.thefriends.org.

Reading guide production supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).



A Reading and Discussion Guide

Young Adult Literature Winner – 20th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

Defect by Will Weaver

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library.

SUMMARY:

Fifteen-year-old David was born defective. His bug eyes, pinched face, and “hearing aids” are obvious, but there is a secret David keeps from everyone, even his foster parents. Terrified of doctors, wary of letting his guard down, David is determined to hide his secret at any cost. But then he meets Cheetah, a girl with a defect of her own, and suddenly his life in a small southern Minnesota community begins to change dramatically.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. The author has identified religious themes as an important part of the book. What is your understanding of the book's religious themes?
3. Is David's defect plausible? Could it be real?
4. What is meant by “normal?” Is David a normal boy?
5. Do you believe David should have the operation? Why or why not? If you had David's defect, would you choose to have the operation?
6. What will David's life be like after the book's conclusion?
7. In what ways does Cheetah facilitate change in David's life? What is the significance of her name?
8. As a teen, what was your experience of “defects” among your circle of peers? Did you feel defective?
9. Do you believe in angels? In what ways, if any, do you believe David is an angel? Who have been the angels in your life?
10. In what ways does the book make the case that some blessings can be a curse, and some curses a blessing? How has this been true in your own life?

A CONVERSATION WITH WILL WEAVER:

Q. What inspired you to write *Defect*?

A facial injury which took me to the Mayo Clinic at age 11 and the urban legend of batboy inspired my writing of *Defect*. What resulted in my writing of this book is an edgy mix of realism that tilts toward sci-fi, myth and fantasy.

Q. What research did you undertake in writing this book?

My research for *Defect* involved going back to Rochester, Minnesota, and the Mayo medical complex. I am a “method” researcher, which means I need to be immersed in my subject. I also spent time researching birth abnormalities at the University of Minnesota Medical Library.

Q. How long did it take you to write *Defect*?

I spent three months on the rough draft, then most of the remaining year back and forth on the revisions. It was a problematic novel for me to write, and I needed serious editorial help. Luckily I have a great editor at my publisher Farrar, Straus and Giroux in New York.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing this book?

My biggest challenge was balancing realism and fantasy elements. I wanted David’s “miraculous” defect to be extreme yet plausible.

Q. What do you hope readers take away from your book?

In *Defect* there are strong themes of self-image and courage, along with philosophical and religious questions. I want my reader to encounter something very different in terms of plot, and very stimulating in terms of ideas. Above all, I want my readers to think beyond the ending. A good ending is never the end.

Q. How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

I grew up on a small dairy farm, and had no inclination that I would be a writer. However, a good high school English teacher encouraged me, and I became an English major at the University of Minnesota.

Q. What are you currently writing and/or what’s an inspiration you have for a future book?

I am currently focused on literature for young adults. In particular, I want to keep boys reading, and I have a new series based on stock car racing. I also have a race

car that is driven by a teenage driver. You can read more about this at <http://www.motornovels.com/>.

Q. How do you most enjoy spending your time when you’re not writing?

I love being outdoors hunting, fishing, birding, canoeing, and hiking. I also enjoy playing the piano.

ABOUT WILL WEAVER:

Will Weaver, writer for adults and young adults, lives in Bemidji, Minnesota. He grew up on a small dairy farm in Minnesota where he enjoyed history and English classes



in high school, along with lots of outdoor and team sports. After graduating from the University of Minnesota with a BA in English at the height of the Vietnam period in 1972, Weaver went to California to

clear his head and figure out what to do about the draft. He was grateful to land in the Stanford University writing program where he focused on writing short stories. Weaver taught writing and literature at Bemidji State University for 24 years, and is now a full-time writer. His work has won many awards, and he is the author of *A Gravestone Made of Wheat* – the short story on which the acclaimed movie *Sweet Land* was based. Weaver’s recent young adult books include:

Saturday Night Dirt, 2008

Full Service, 2005

Claws, 2003

For additional information about the author and his work, visit www.willweaverbooks.com/.



The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Office of the Mayor of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library. Visit us online at www.thefriends.org.

Reading guide production supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).



A Reading and Discussion Guide

Children's Literature Winner - 20th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

CATEGORY SPONSORED BY XCEL ENERGY

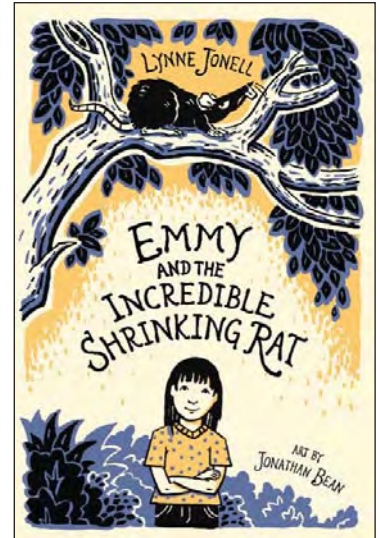
***Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat* by Lynne Jonell**

Henry Holt and Company

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library.

SUMMARY:

Emmy tries hard to be good, but no one seems to notice – except for the rather sarcastic classroom Rat. In fact, Emmy's parents stop caring about her, and the kids at school seem to hardly know she exists. As Emmy's relationship with the Rat develops, several things become clear – including why her nanny Miss Barmy is forcing her to eat and drink the strangest things.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's themes?
2. Do you relate more to Emmy or the Rat, and why?
3. Have you had experiences where you felt unacknowledged by the people around you? Have you ever had the sensation of shrinking?
4. What is the story saying about good versus bad? Discuss the ways in which the following characters are good and/or bad: Emmy, the Rat, Joe, Miss Barmy, Professor Vole, and Emmy's parents. Is it possible to be "too good?"
5. Does the development of Emmy and the Rat's relationship remind you of any of your own relationships?
6. What did you find most intriguing about the Antique Rat and Rodent City? Do these locations remind you of other real or imaginary places?
7. Which of Emmy's relationships is most alarming? Who are her true friends?
8. What are the biggest surprises in the plot?
9. Do you think writing dialogue for animals such as rodents is more difficult than writing dialogue for humans, and if so, why?
10. Why did the author choose to call the rat "the Rat" rather than name him something else?
11. The author has written the sequel to *Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat*. What are your predictions for developments and resolutions in the sequel?

A CONVERSATION WITH LYNNE JONELL:

Q. What inspired you to write *Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat*?

Strangely enough, this book began when I woke up one morning with a dream of a piece of green paper with a curved line. Curious about this, I drew the line on green paper, and it turned into the stem of a plant. The drawing seemed to need more, so I added a miniature girl beneath the bottom leaves. She was looking behind her so I drew a red wagon for her to pull. The wagon was empty, and suddenly I knew I had to fill it with a Rat. And then this caption came to my mind: "I might die," said the Rat, "and then they'll be sorry." "They're sorry now," said Emmy. "Not sorry enough," said the Rat. I knew there had to be a story there, so I wrote both backwards and forwards from that point!

Q. What research did you undertake in writing this book?

I did long and painstaking research into the far reaches of my subterranean mind - an unnerving task.

Q. How long did it take you to write *Emmy*?

From the initial dream, to holding the published book in my hands, took about nine years.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing this book?

While the image of the girl pulling the Rat in the wagon was strong enough to propel me into writing the book, I knew it was not the beginning of the story. Something had happened before. My challenge was to figure out what, and go on from there. Another big challenge was that the first draft was about twice as long as it needed to be. I cut 60,000 words from my first draft to make the book the right length; and that's why there's a sequel!

Q. What do you hope readers take away from your book?

I think every child will take something different away from the story, depending on who they are and what grabs them the most. For my part, I just want to sweep them along into another world where they can battle injustice, enlist the help of unlikely friends, and win out in the end.

Q. What do you like most about this book?

I like that I finally managed to write a character-driven novel! Oh, and I also like that it's funny on several levels. I had a LOT of fun coming up with certain names, acronyms, songs, and bits of dialogue that still crack me up.

Q. How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

It was in sixth grade, when my sister handed me a copy of *A Wrinkle in Time*, that the desire to write really solidified. When I finished the book, I read the last chapter again, because I couldn't bear for it to be over. And when I finished it a second time, I looked for the name of the author. It was Madeleine L'Engle. As I gazed at her name on the cover, I realized that what I wanted to do most of all was to write books just like that for kids just like me.

Q. How do you most enjoy spending your time when you're not writing?

I love to sail, I love to wander and have adventures (and get lost!), and lately I've been playing the piano a lot.

ABOUT LYNNE JONELL:

Lynne Jonell is a picture and middle-grade book author who was born in Little Falls, Minnesota and grew up in a suburb of Minneapolis. She teaches writing at the Loft Literary Center and lives in Plymouth. Lynne has a husband, two grown sons, and a slightly battered sailboat. While she does not particularly care for rodents and hasn't managed to shrink for a good ten years, Lynne still holds out hope for future change.



For additional information about the author, the sequel to her award-winning book (*Emmy and the Home for Troubled Girls*, published by Henry Holt and Company, September 2008), and her other work, visit www.lynnjonell.com/.



The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Office of the Mayor of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library. Visit us online at www.thefriends.org.

Reading guide production supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).



A Reading and Discussion Guide

Winner of the Readers' Choice Award and a Children's Literature Finalist –
20th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

READERS' CHOICE AWARD SPONSORED BY PIONEER PRESS AND TWINCITIES.COM

***Farmer Cap* by Jill Kalz, illustrated by Sahin Erkocak**

Picture Window Books

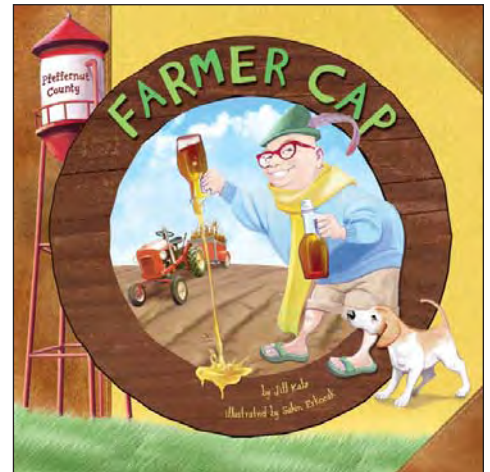
Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library.

SUMMARY:

Farmer Cap, short for “Casper,” plants unusual crops like spaghetti and popsicles. The other farmers laugh at him, but a spectacular harvest causes them to rethink their traditional views. *Farmer Cap* is the fourth book in the Pfeffernut County series.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. The word “strange” is used to describe Farmer Cap. Do you think this is an accurate description of the farmer? How do you define what makes a person strange?
3. What words do you think best describe Farmer Cap?
4. Does Pfeffernut County remind you of a community that you have lived in or visited?
5. Have you ever felt like a Farmer Cap in terms of doing something that others view as strange or nontraditional?
6. Why do the other farmers feel so strongly that Farmer Cap should plant traditional crops?
7. Throughout the story, the other farmers ask, “What do you think he's trying to grow?” Did you figure out what Farmer Cap was trying to grow, and if not, what did you think he was growing?
8. How do the views of the other farmers about Farmer Cap change?
9. If you could grow any crop in the world, what would it be?
10. How do the illustrations complement the text and help to bring Farmer Cap's story and Pfeffernut County to life?



A CONVERSATION WITH JILL KALZ:

Q. What inspired you to write *Farmer Cap*?

The inspiration for *Farmer Cap* came from a single image: a field full of hay bales wrapped in white plastic that I saw on my way home from supper one night on County Road 27, between Essig and New Ulm. I thought the bales looked like giant marshmallows, and then I wondered, "What kind of farmer would grow marshmallows? He'd have to be an odd one, for sure." And that's when the story of *Farmer Cap* began.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing this book?

One challenge was to present Farmer Cap as a rounded character. I didn't want readers to see him as a one-dimensional nut. So I needed to show other sides of him, including his imagination and intelligence. I also wanted to show that Farmer Cap is open to sharing his talents and vision with others. OK, he's probably a little crazy, too, but there's much more to him than that.

Q. What do you hope your readers take away from *Farmer Cap*?

I hope readers take away a newfound or enhanced spirit of imagination, a feeling of boundless possibility. I hope they smile and laugh. I hope they feel as if Pfeffernut County is a warm and friendly place they'll want to revisit over and over again. I hope they feel that despite the bombardment of electronic media today, books are true treasures.

Q. What do you like most about your award winning book?

I love the way the text, the illustrations and the design work together to tell the story. I think I'll always be in awe of the fact that an artist half a world away (the illustrator lives in Turkey), could so precisely capture the story that unfolded in my head. There was some magic at work there. I also love the mystery surrounding the story, "What IS that strange old man trying to grow?"

Q. How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

I've always been a writer, ever since I could first hold a pencil and form letters and words. I've always expressed myself best on paper. As a kid I wrote stories and mini soap operas, made my own books and magazines, wrote poetry for the school newspaper and entered poems in competitions.

In my second year of college I made the switch from a theater major to an English major, and immersed

myself in poetry and short fiction. I published my first work-for-hire nonfiction book for children (*Beehives*) a few years after finishing my MFA in creative writing. This book led me to a full-time editing job for a children's book publisher, which led to more writing opportunities, and eventually to beginning readers and picture books - and after nearly 50 titles, all the way to the Minnesota Book Awards!

Q. How do you enjoy spending your time when you're not writing?

I love to read (mostly adult fiction), watch movies, travel (especially to places on the ocean), play with my Nikon P80, and share lunches and afternoon white-chocolate mochas with friends.

ABOUT JILL KALZ:

Jill Kalz is the author of nearly 50 children's books and works as a children's book editor in Mankato. As a resident of New Ulm, the small German town where she was born and raised, Kalz has a fondness for sauerkraut and an unusually high tolerance for polka. She lives with her dog Rum Tum Tuckerbean, a handsome bichon who shows up as a character in some of her books. Kalz received her MFA in creative writing from the University of Minnesota, Mankato. Her recent books include:



Henry Shortbull Swallows the Sun (part of the Pfeffernut County series), 2007
The Boy Who Loved Trains, 2007
Tuckerbean in the Kitchen, 2007

For additional information about the author and her work, visit www.jillkalz.com.



The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Office of the Mayor of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library. Visit us online at www.thefriends.org.

Reading guide production supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).



A Reading and Discussion Guide

Memoir & Creative Nonfiction Winner – 20th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

CATEGORY SPONSORED BY WELLINGTON MANAGEMENT, INC.

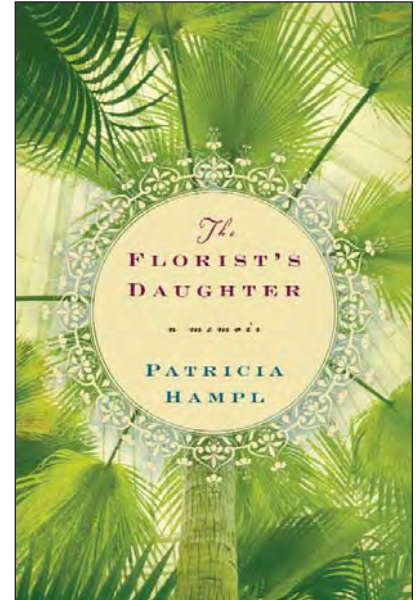
***The Florist's Daughter* by Patricia Hampl**

Harcourt, Inc.

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library.

SUMMARY:

In her most personal book to date, Patricia Hampl revisits her childhood during the long farewell of her dying mother. Daughter of a Czech father whose floral work gave him entrée to Saint Paul's high society, and a distrustful Irishwoman with an uncanny ability to tell a tale, Hampl paints a picture of herself as someone who remained a devoted daughter well into adulthood.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's main themes?
 2. What is the significance of the author's choice of title? If the book had another title, what might it be?
 3. Whose story is the author telling? For whom is she writing the book?
 4. What emotions did you experience while reading the book?
 5. What role does humor play? What parts of the book made you laugh or smile?
 6. How has the author's relationships with her parents shaped the adult she has become? In what ways are you a product of who your parents are/were?
 7. What are the qualities of the narrator's voice and the overall tone of the book? What is the picture the author paints of herself and her deceased parents?
 8. What did you learn about Saint Paul culture and landmarks? If you were living in Saint Paul during some or all of the years covered in the book, how well does the author's portrayal of city life fit with your memories?
 9. What risks, if any, did the author take in writing such a personal book?
 10. If you were to write a memoir of your childhood, what would you choose as its title? What emotions might surface in writing the book?
-

A CONVERSATION WITH PATRICIA HAMPL:

Q. What inspired you to write *The Florist's Daughter*?

For years I had a vague notion that I would write something I thought of as my “daughter book.” I’m not sure where the idea came from - maybe partly because I was close to my parents, geographically and otherwise. At first I thought no one else would be interested, but then I realized the very modesty of my parents’ lives and their deep attachment to Saint Paul, which is a pretty mysterious little city, made them emblems of a kind of middle class, mid-century life that is largely lost.

Q. What research did you undertake in writing this book?

All my other prose books have required a lot of research – in archives, reading, travel, and sometimes interviews. But this one was straight from the heart. I consulted my memory. I didn’t even ask my brother for his version or for any stories. I dedicated it to him, but I wondered what he’d make of it. It was a big relief when he said he loved it.

Q. How long did it take you to write *The Florist's Daughter*?

That’s tough to answer accurately. A book rolls around for a long while in my head in a lot of jagged pieces and a lot of empty spaces. That can go on for years. But I suppose I wrote the book, putting together bits and pulling it all together, in less than a year. I wrote one chapter as a stand-alone piece maybe a year before I began working on the rest of the project.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

It’s always, for me, the same challenge: writing the sentences. My ear has to hear the music of the prose. I always wish it were easier. *The Florist's Daughter* had an added structural problem. All my previous memoirs involved travel, some kind of journey or even pilgrimage, that provided a narrative line. But my parents just stayed in Saint Paul. So it was a happy day, a lot of relief, when I came on the idea of pulling the entire book into the tight circuit of a single night, the night of my mother’s death.

Q. What do you hope readers take away from this book?

My favorite moment is when a reader comes up to me and says something like, “Oh, I loved the part where you wrote about your grandmother’s Sunday dinners,” or something like that. I’ve come to know that’s the last I’ll hear about my grandmother, as the reader begins telling me about his/her grandmother’s Sunday dinners. That’s what I love – the feeling of having

transported the reader into his or her own life.

Q. How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

I was one of those kids who loved to read and always wrote poems and stories. I can remember sitting at the kitchen table, asking my mother how to spell the hard words. I think most children, given the chance (and the TV turned off), love words and stories, and are natural writers. The real question is why some people stop and others keep at it. To that I have no answer.

Q. How do you most enjoy spending your time when you’re not writing?

Reading, of course! I like the domestic arts too - gardening, cooking, and hanging out with my husband.

ABOUT PATRICIA HAMPL:

Patricia Hampl and her husband live in Saint Paul. She is the author of four memoirs and two collections of poetry, and teaches at the University of Minnesota in the English Department’s MFA program. Hampl’s work has won many awards, and her fiction, poems, reviews, essays, and travel pieces have appeared in many publications including *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *Best American Short Stories*. Her books include:



Blue Arabesque: A Search for the Sublime, 2006
I Could Tell You Stories: Sojourns in the Land of Memory, 1999
Virgin Time: In Search of the Contemplative Life, 1992

For more information about the author and her work, visit www.patriciamhampl.com/.



The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Office of the Mayor of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library. Visit us online at www.thefriends.org.

Reading guide production supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).



A Reading and Discussion Guide

Novel & Short Story Winner – 20th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

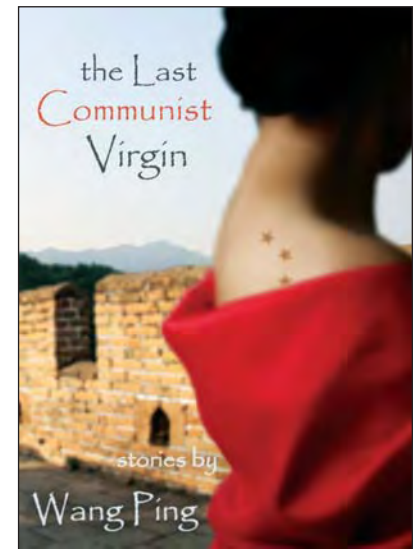
***The Last Communist Virgin* by Wang Ping**

Coffee House Press

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library.

SUMMARY:

From the restaurants of New York's Chinatown to the retail emporium of Bergdorf Goodman, and from remote Chinese military outposts to the streets of Beijing, Wang Ping's stories open a window into the rapid transformations of an ancient culture. This is a book about love in a fast-changing world: love for the people and the land from the west and the east, love for the new and the old, the real and the imaginative, and the prevalent technology and the soul within each person.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's main themes?
 2. Did the book change your views about China and the Chinese people?
 3. How has the author tied the seven stories together? Do all of the stories work well as part of a collection?
 4. Who is your favorite character, and why? What characters did you find hard to like, and are there any for whom your feelings changed as an individual story or stories developed?
 5. The author is also a writer of poetry. In what ways is her poetic voice present in the stories?
 6. What role does humor play in the stories? What parts of the collection made you laugh or smile?
 7. What struck you as most sad or disturbing when reading the book?
 8. What surprises did you experience in reading the stories?
 9. The collection was edited and set to go to press when the author received the inspiration for the final story, "Maverick." What is the significance of the final story, and why do you think the author felt compelled to end her collection with it?
 10. How are the challenges of writing a collection of short stories different from those of writing a novel? Which would you find easier to write?
-

A CONVERSATION WITH WANG PING:

Q. What inspired you to write your award-winning book?

I wrote this book because of the rapid changes in China and the world that are causing the extinction of so many things, including cultures. My love for my old home, China, and my new home, America, were also inspirations for *The Last Communist Virgin*.

Q. What research did you undertake in writing *The Last Communist Virgin*?

I made many trips to China where I had the opportunity to do interviews with the workers and peasants. Macalester College, where I teach, has made it possible for me to take six trips to China. These opportunities have inspired and informed my writing, and I am grateful for them.

Q. How long did it take you to write this book?

A third of it was written ten years ago, another third three years ago, and the last third very recently.

Q. What do you like most about *The Last Communist Virgin*?

I love the voices and forms. I was adventurous in writing this book.

Q. What do you hope readers take away from this book?

I want to remind my readers that things come and go, but love goes on.

Q. How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

I got into a writing class at Long Island University in New York by mistake – a great and fortunate mistake, I might add. I sat down in the class and wrote my first story, and I haven't stopped since.

Q. What do you most enjoy about teaching?

I love the human interactions I have with my Macalester College students, and it is rewarding to experience my students getting better and better. My teaching also pushes me to grow as a writer, because the things I preach to my students are often the hardest things for me to do well.

Teaching also gives me a break from my own writing, which I have found to be a good thing. I used to complain that teaching didn't allow me enough time to write, but I've discovered that my stories and poems are percolating, even when I'm not sitting at the computer. For me, it is a good thing to not be actively

writing all the time; to have spaces between poems and stories.

Q. How do you most enjoy spending your time when you are not writing?

I love physical activities, which are good for my mind. Flamenco dancing, yoga, martial arts, figure skating, hiking, and cross country skiing are some of my favorites. Tennis is a new hobby of mine, and I've been focusing a lot of time on my photography.

ABOUT WANG PING:

Wang Ping was born in Shanghai and grew up on a small island in the East China Sea. After working in the fields of a mountain village commune, she attended Beijing University. Wang left China in 1985 to study in the United States where she earned her PhD from New York University. She is a frequent visitor to



China, and teaches at Macalester College. Wang is a versatile writer who has written poetry, short stories, a novel, and non-fiction. Her recent published work includes:

The Dragon Emperor: A Chinese Folktale (children's), 2008

The Magic Whip (poetry), 2003

Of Flesh and Spirit (poetry), 1998

For additional information about the author and her work, visit www.wangping.com/.



The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Office of the Mayor of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library. Visit us online at www.thefriends.org.

Reading guide production supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).



A Reading and Discussion Guide

Genre Fiction Winner - 20th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

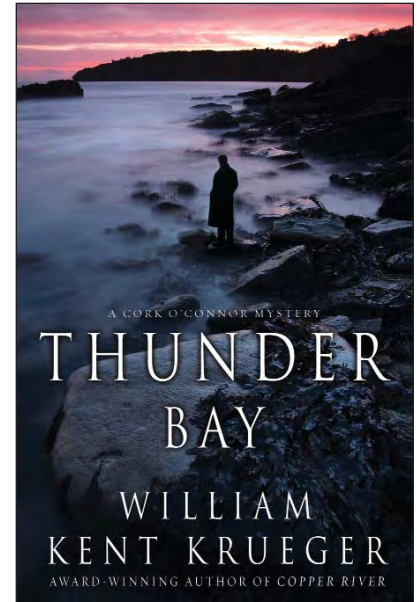
***Thunder Bay* by William Kent Krueger**

Atria Books

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library.

SUMMARY:

Thunder Bay opens with the protagonist Cork O'Connor happy and content in his hometown of Aurora, Minnesota, after giving up his sheriff's badge to set up shop as a private investigator. However, his newfound state of calm is soon interrupted when Henry Meloux, his spiritual advisor and Ojibwe medicine man, asks Cork to help find the son that Henry fathered years ago. This quest takes Cork to the rocky shores of Thunder Bay where the past and present collide, a father's unconditional love is tested by a son's deeply felt resentment, and Cork finds his life in danger. *Thunder Bay* is the seventh suspense novel in the award-winning Cork O'Connor mystery series.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. What were the biggest unexpected twists in the story?
3. If you have read other Cork O'Connor novels, talk about how the character has developed throughout the series. What do you find most interesting or different about Cork in *Thunder Bay*?
4. Identify the book's various love stories. What similarities exist among these stories?
5. This is the first time the author has written a Cork O'Connor novel in first-person voice. How does this contribute to the telling of the story, and why do you think the author chose first-person voice for this particular novel?
6. What conflicts does Cork experience? Which are resolved by the end of *Thunder Bay*?
7. Describe Cork and Henry's relationship. How have Henry's relationships with non-natives shaped who he is?
8. What are the story's messages about parent-child relationships?
9. What are the elements that make a really good mystery, and to what extent are they used in *Thunder Bay*?
10. Why do you think the author chose Thunder Bay as the main setting for the book? If you've been to Thunder Bay, how well do you relate to the author's portrayal of this part of Canada?
11. If you were to write a mystery, what setting or location would you choose?

A CONVERSATION WITH WILLIAM KENT KRUEGER

Q. What inspired you to write *Thunder Bay*?

Four things inspired me to write the book. First of all, I love the title. *Thunder Bay* is so suggestive and evocative. I also knew that my character Henry Meloux, the old Ojibwe medicine man, had a great story in his background that I wanted to tell. With *Thunder Bay* I decided to do something new: write a book using the first-person voice. I also have a recurring mortgage to consider – another reason for writing this book.

Q. What research did you undertake in writing this book?

I spent a good deal of time researching the Ojibwe experience with government schools in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The city of Thunder Bay also got a lot of my research time.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing *Thunder Bay*?

The most difficult challenge was to capture the voice of my protagonist, Cork O'Connor, as he tells the story. It eluded me for a long time. Then, in a rather Pentecostal experience, it seemed to descend naturally into the prose, and I loved what I heard.

Q. What do you hope your readers take away from this book?

This story is, at heart, a tragic tale of star-crossed lovers. It's also about all the sacrifices we make in the name of love. I hope those themes are understood and appreciated by my readers.

Q. How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

I always wanted to be a writer, probably because I was always a reader and a kid with an overactive imagination. For years I wrote in coffee shops (primarily the St. Clair Broiler), discovering who I am as a writer and honing my skills. It's a discipline I still follow. The magic happens when I sit down, pour myself a cup of coffee, open my notebook, and bend to the work I love.

Q. How do you most enjoy spending your time when you're not writing?

I walk with my wife, play tennis, enjoy my grandchildren, and I'm always touring with two of my favorite authors and fellow members of The Minnesota Crime Wave: Carl Brookins and Ellen Hart.

Q. Has being a 2008 Minnesota Book Award winner opened any interesting doors for you?

The Book Awards furthers recognition of an author's work in a state that cares about literature, and that's always valuable. My publisher likes this honor, too.

ABOUT WILLIAM KENT KRUEGER:

William Kent Krueger was born in Torrington, Wyoming, the third of four children whose parents convinced them that they had gypsy blood flowing through their veins.

Before he graduated from high school, Krueger had lived in eleven different houses, in eight different cities, in six different states. For more than 20 years Krueger has made his home in Saint Paul with his wife and two children. At age 19 he wanted to be Ernest Hemingway, and read everything both by and about him.

Krueger spends his mornings writing at a neighborhood coffee shop. He has won several awards for his writing, including three previous Minnesota Book Awards. Krueger's other recent books include:

Red Knife, 2009
Copper River, 2007
Mercy Falls, 2005
Blood Hollow, 2004

For additional information about the author and his work, visit www.williamkentkrueger.com.



The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Office of the Mayor of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library. Visit us online at www.thefriends.org.

Reading guide production supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).



A Reading and Discussion Guide

Poetry Winner – 20th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

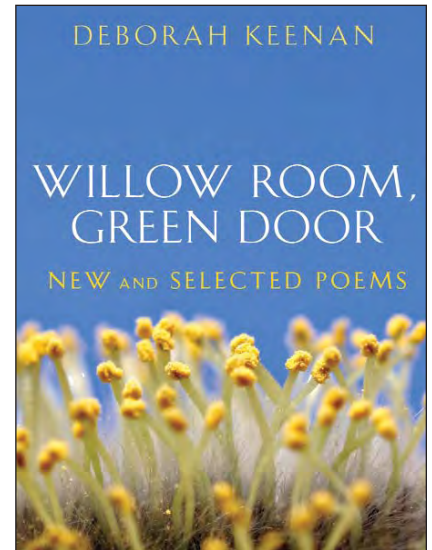
***Willow Room, Green Door* by Deborah Keenan**

Milkweed Editions

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library.

SUMMARY:

Written over the course of three decades, *Willow Room, Green Door* addresses themes of love and rage, vulnerability and authority, and distraction and focus. This collection invites the reader to inhabit the world with the poet, walking through time, both historical and personal. The poems address the struggles to keep feeling, remain loyal, and live with integrity through times of trial and bliss alike.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the collection's strongest theme? To what extent do themes and connections tie the eight books together?
 2. To what extent does this poet seek connection with others, including her readers?
 3. What images does the poet use to locate herself in landscape, in kinship, and as a citizen?
 4. What signals does the poet send about the spiritual life, about religion, God, and a sacred path?
 5. How does the figure of the father shift and alter over the eight books?
 6. Which character is the poet most protective of with her language?
 7. What value and meaning do you see in the structures the poet chose for her poems?
 8. Has Deborah Keenan purposefully left anything out of her poems over the past 30+ years?
 9. What emotions, images, and memories does the collection conjure up for you?
 10. Which poem speaks most directly to you, and why?
 11. If you wrote a collection of poetry during 30+ years of your life, how would the tone, images, and presentation of themes change over the years?
-

A CONVERSATION WITH DEBORAH KEENAN:

Q. What inspired you to write *Willow Room, Green Door*?

In the summer of 2005 I had less assigned work, and a bit more freedom to do my artistic work. I decided to create a book-length poem in which I reflected on years of art and writing notebooks I've kept, on memories of a personal life, and on whatever politics, culture, the war, and the weather dealt me from June 1 to September 1 that summer. I wrote sections of that new long poem each day, after early morning sessions of reading the paper, looking through my notebooks, and considering what each day was handing me as material for my poem.

Fortunately Milkweed Editions responded positively when I sent them my new long poem and asked if they would consider using it as a launching place for a "New and Selected" collection covering the past 30 years of my writing life.

Q. What challenges did you encounter with this collection?

I wanted a new structure for the long poem. I had written long poems before, "Grace" and "Happiness," but I wanted to find a new way to get at memory and culture. One challenge was to truly trust my instincts as a poet, to let the sections of the long poem arrive, in whatever length, with whatever vision unfolded. A primary challenge for me always is to put aside daily obligations enough to just make my art.

Q. What do you hope readers take away from *Willow Room, Green Door*?

I hope my readers will see a human being in late middle age pondering the meaning and value of her life as a citizen, wife, mother, friend and teacher. I hope they will experience how all of these roles present their own challenges and joys. I hope they will see a writer trying to stay on the path of art-making, and on the path of speaking out about what matters in this world. More than anything, I want my readers to find poems that they really care about, and that they share those with friends and kin.

Q. What do you like most about this award-winning collection?

I love the stunning cover and design created by Christian Fünfhausen, an amazing designer who also designed my book, *Good Heart*. I appreciate the acknowledgement that I never abandoned poetry over the years; that I kept writing and seeking publication. I love the way that the new long poem leads the way into the collection, and that we then drop back to my first books, written when I was in my twenties. This structure lays down a good path for my readers to follow.

Q. How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

I started writing when I was 19. I was newly married, living in Scotland, and sick in a daily way living through my first pregnancy. I began painting, drawing, writing small poems for my first child, and keeping my first artist notebooks. When I came back to the United States, I was committed to a vision of myself as a public writer, and I have rarely stopped writing since.

Q. How do you most enjoy spending your time when you're not writing?

I spend time with my friends and family, including my sweet granddaughter Aisling. I walk each day, garden, knit, work on collages (some I sell, others I save for family and friends), listen to music, and watch plenty of good and bad TV. I enjoy staring out windows, and absolutely love teaching.

ABOUT DEBORAH KEENAN:

Among other awards, Deborah Keenan has received two Bush Foundation Fellowships, an NEA Fellowship, and the Loft-McKnight Poet of Distinction Award. *Willow Room, Green Door* is the author's seventh poetry collection, and she also co-authored the collection, *How We Missed Belgium*, with Jim Moore. Keenan is a professor and faculty advisor in the Graduate Liberal Studies School at Hamline University. She has four children and lives in Saint Paul. Her poetry collections include:

Kingdoms, 2006

Good Heart, 2003

Happiness, 1995



The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Office of the Mayor of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library. Visit us online at www.thefriends.org.

Reading guide production supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).

