

Local book club reviews social issues through literature

By CHARLIE WRIGHT cwright@somdnews.com Apr 27, 2018

The eloquent musings of Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Maya Angelou echoed through P.D. Brown Memorial Branch library on Tuesday as the Writers of Color Book Club gathered to celebrate National Poetry Month.

Persistent rain throughout the day limited attendance, though a handful of loyal members made it out to share their favorite poetry. The club meets on the fourth Tuesday of every month to talk about works by minority authors, often pertaining to a relevant news topic of the time. The group began a few years ago and was recently resurrected by a former library employee in June of last year, now under the leadership of reference supervisor DauVeen Walker.

“We try to incorporate what’s going on in society and try to bring it through with books that we read,” Walker said. “We just have good discussion.”

Members of the club, more than a dozen strong, send literary suggestions to Walker who then decides the selection for the month. Occasions such as National Poetry Month in April or last month’s women’s history celebration typically influence the subject of the meetings, as do recurring concerns in the media. The group recently tackled mental health in conjunction with a community conversation through the library about awareness of the problem and ways to find assistance.

“Unfortunately in African-American culture [mental health] is still kind of taboo,” Walker said. “We focused on a book called ‘A Quiet Storm.’ It was the first novel I had ever read that even touched on that subject.”

On Tuesday, those in attendance read selections from several works of poetry, taking turns reading aloud and then sharing their reasons for choosing the particular work. Branch manager Mariana Sprouse settled on a poem from Gwendolyn Brooks’ collection “A Street in Bronzeville.” The brief verse, titled “Kitchenette Building,” examines home life in the mid-20th century for a hardworking wife.

“I thought it painted a really nice picture of that time,” Sprouse said. “It really struck me ... she’s good at writing what life was like.”

Though literature is the starting point, discussions during club meetings often digress into broader banter about various subject matter, and the poetry edition was no different. The members, which on this evening included both caucasians and African-Americans, debated everything from celebrity obsession to the delusion of the public through social media. When the idea of physical appearance in relation to wealth came up, the group expounded on the female figure and pretended not to notice the young reporter’s reddening cheeks.



“[The discussion] morphs into a bigger topic,” Walker said with a smile.

Meetings are typically live-streamed via Facebook and are also available on the library’s YouTube page. All residents are encouraged to participate, either in person or online. Next month’s book will be James Baldwin’s “Nobody Knows My Name,” a collection of personal essays by the acclaimed novelist and playwright.

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