

69th Annual Great Books at Colby College
Waterville, Maine
Existential Perspectives, July 20 – July 26, 2025

Sarah Bakewell, *At the Existential Cafe*
Albert Camus, *The Stranger*
Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*
Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*
Kazuo Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*
Clarice Lispector, *Love* & John Updike, *Pigeon Feathers*

Join us this July for our annual week of discussing Great Books on the picturesque campus of Colby College. Connect with fellow book lovers and make lifelong friends, as you enjoy the beauty and splendor of summertime Maine. You may find yourself gaining insights rarely achieved while reading alone. Explore the complexities of Existential Perspectives that accompany people as they proceed through the vicissitudes of life. Our week at Colby is now enhanced with the option of staying in air-conditioned dorms at the Alford Main Street Commons, in downtown Waterville. Attendees have appreciated its new modern accommodations featuring elevators, suites with separate bedrooms, full kitchens, a lounge, and two restrooms with showers, as well as free laundry rooms in the hallways. The college also provides a free parking lot adjacent to the new dorm and frequent, round-the-clock shuttle service from the dorm to a central location on campus. Downtown Waterville itself has become nicely gentrified with fine restaurants across the street from the dorm.

Nota Bene: This year we have the opportunity to revive Junior Great Books. Lulah Fort and Donna Crane have graciously offered to do so, if there is sufficient interest. They write, “For a dozen or more years before Covid, Great Books at Colby offered a program for young people (ages 5-16) alongside the one for adults. Parents and grandparents were able to bring along children and grandchildren who enjoyed supervised structured activities in the morning, while their adults were having book discussions, and then afternoon book groups of their own, similarly discussing books with their peers. To restart the program, we need to gauge interest of participants and their age to determine appropriate books.” If you have *any interest* in bringing one or more young people to a revived Junior Great Books program, please contact Lulah Fort (803-292-4912, fortlulah@gmail.com) or John Dalton (610-608-7711, jd5258875@aol.com) before February 15th. Based on interest, we will decide the viability of restarting for the coming year.

This unforgettable vacation brings together readers who love great literary works and provides an opportunity to socialize with those sharing that enthusiasm. We eat all our meals together on campus and participate in formal discussion groups that meet for two hours each morning, Monday through Saturday, in campus classrooms. Books are mailed once registration deposits are received, and people are expected to have read them before arriving. Readers develop insights through the Great Books Foundation’s *Shared Inquiry Method*. Not quoting outside sources facilitates an egalitarian discussion wherein the emphasis is truly on readers and the text. Discussion leaders are assigned, moving from group to group, during the week.

People attending Colby Great Books vary in age, background, education and interests, but all share a love of reading. Some have come to Colby for decades, but many newcomers arrive each year. Everyone is welcome and embraced as full and equal participants. The goal is shared inquiry, shared ideas, shared laughter, and shared experience. Results are often friendship, fun and sometimes even glimpses of truth.

After discussions, participants are invited to use the many recreational, athletic and cultural opportunities available on campus for free. In addition to an informative opening night orientation and the ever popular Thursday evening Talent Show (strictly voluntary and always a lot of fun), there are a wide variety of activities. Colby’s beautiful campus features an impressive, classic library with a fascinating Rare Books Collection, a highly

rated Art Museum, excellent athletic facilities with an Olympic- sized swimming pool, tennis courts, and an arboretum with hiking trails. In addition, our week of Great Books at Colby is scheduled in conjunction with the Atlantic Music Festival (www.atlanticmusicfestival.org), also held on campus, which provides a series of excellent free classical concerts and recitals, some of which take place in Colby’s stunning, new Performing Arts Center.

Registration covers books and discussions, as well as lectures, films, group social activities, use of athletic facilities and tennis courts, and a real Maine Lobster/Steak/Halibut/Veg Bake. On campus registration includes a single or double dormitory room (six nights: Sunday through Friday night) and all meals. For a nominal additional fee, you may stay over Saturday night either before (July 19th) and/or at the end of the week (July 26th). Those opting to reside in the air-conditioned dorms at Alford Main Street Commons stay in the four or six bedroom suites mentioned above. Dining is at Dana Dining Hall, newly renovated with air conditioning, which offers a variety of distinctive locally grown and organic foods in an all-you-can-eat buffet and provides many options for vegetarians. Commuters participate in all activities, but live on their own, off-campus, and receive lunch each day at the Dana Dining Hall and attend the Lobster Bake. Breakfast and dinner for commuters are optional for additional fees.

Colby food is delicious and plentiful. Living arrangements are in comfortable dorm rooms. Fans and reading lights are available. On campus there are no air-conditioned dorms, but Colby has made their air-conditioned dorms, Alford Main Street Commons, in downtown Waterville available. There are private bedrooms in suites for four or six with shared bath facilities. All buildings are smoke-free. The school provides towels and bed linen, although some prefer to bring their own towels. You might also want to bring a mirror. Arrangements can usually be made for people with special needs. If you have special medical or other needs, please include that on your application. That information is forwarded to John Dalton (jd5258875@aol.com) who assigns rooms and oversees accommodations.

Participants make their own travel arrangements. Many arrive by car, but there is air service to Portland, Bangor, and Augusta ME; Manchester, NH; and Boston, MA. Rental cars, buses and limousine service are available from these key locations. There is also a Greyhound bus terminal in Waterville right outside the campus. For those without cars, rides with other participants can sometimes be arranged. Coordination of carpooling can be made by emailing participants.

See all details and history at GreatBooks-atColby.org and check out the photos of our participants in action.

Registration and Refunds: A deposit per person is required with registration. Cancellations before June 30, 2025 cost (\$100). Cancellations from July 1 to July 19, 2025 incur a half-deposit loss. After that, you lose the standard deposit. The balance of registration is due at Colby on **Sunday, July 20, 2025, and must be either Cash or Check.** A previous attendee registering individuals new to Colby, is eligible for a \$25 discount, unless already receiving a scholarship. You must register by mail. Previous rollover of any deposits due to Covid still apply.

Registration Details: Checks are payable to: **Great Books at Colby.** Mail registration and deposit to: **Great Books at Colby, PO Box 424, Newtown Square, PA 19073.**

Fees	On Campus		Air-Conditioned Dorms Waterville		Commuters*	
	Fee	Deposit	Fee	Deposit	Fee	Deposit
Adult Age 16+	\$820	\$400	\$900	\$450	\$550	\$300
Non Participant	\$700	\$350	\$750	\$400		

* Includes Lunch and Lobster Bake: Breakfast & Dinner can be purchased.

Optional Saturday Nights to Attend the Atlantic Music Festival's Concert: Extra nights, **On Campus:** Saturday, July 19th (\$130, lodging, Saturday dinner and Sunday breakfast and lunch) and/or Saturday July 26th (\$125, lodging, Saturday dinner and Sunday breakfast). Extra nights, **Waterville Dorms:** Saturday, July 19th (\$145, lodging, Saturday dinner and Sunday breakfast and lunch) and/or Saturday July 26th (\$140, lodging, Saturday dinner and Sunday breakfast). Concerts are free. Please prepay for additional nights with your registration deposit.

As mentioned, we are looking to revive Junior Great Books. We need to know of interest before February 15, 2025. Contact Lulah Fort { 1-803-292-4912, fortlulah@gmail.com } or John Dalton (below) with any questions.

For more information or additional flyers visit our website at www.GreatBooks-atColby.org. You can also direct questions to John Dalton at 610-608-7711, or email him at jd5258875@aol.com

REGISTRATION APPLICATION

PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY

----- (Detach Here) -----

Mail to: Great Books at Colby, PO Box 424, Newtown Square, PA 19073

<p>APPLICATION (Make checks payable to Great Books at Colby)</p> <p>Name(s) _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>City _____</p> <p>State _____ Zip code _____</p> <p>Phone () _____</p> <p>Cell Phone () _____</p> <p>Email _____</p> <p>Rooming with _____</p> <p>Rooming near (if possible) _____</p> <p>We are commuting (names) _____</p> <p>*Nota Bene: We hope to have an adult group dedicated to maximizing conditions for hearing others while they speak.</p>	<p>Please circle your choices.</p> <p>Residing: On Campus, Waterville Dorm, or Commuter</p> <p>Lobster Bake: Lobster Steak Halibut Vegetarian</p> <p>Previous Colby Great Books Attendee: Yes or No</p> <p>Prefer Leaderless Group: Yes or No</p> <p>Prefer Better Hearing Group*: Yes or No</p> <p>Need Handicapped Access: Yes or No</p> <p>Extra night choice, On Campus: July 19 for \$130; July 26 for \$125.</p> <p>Extra night choice, Waterville Dorms: July 19 for \$145; July 26 for \$140.</p>
<p>Emergency Contact (NOT at Colby) Name _____ Phone _____ Relationship _____</p>	

Readings (delivered by mail)

Sarah Blakewell's engaging social history, *At the Existentialist Café* (2016), serves as our foundation. As Blakewell explains, "existentialists concern themselves with *individual, concrete human existence*," and individual existence is "whatever I choose to make of myself at every moment." She highlights biographical data and ideas of the most prominent existential theorists. Her focus in France are Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, while from Germany she highlights Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt. She insightfully describes how their works complemented their fascinating personalities. Essentially, *At the Existentialist Café* engages the reader with fundamental questions as to how people think about themselves and their relations with others.

The novella, *The Stranger* (1946), by Albert Camus, is considered one of the most compelling, disquieting and haunting texts involving personal alienation of the twentieth century. Camus' compact style presents a stark and startling insight into the modern world. Jean Paul Sartre famously noted that every one of Camus' sentences in *The Stranger* is self-contained, with the world being "destroyed and reborn from sentence to sentence." *The Stranger* is essentially a novel of ideas which offers a concrete case where the claim that ideas have consequences can be succinctly scrutinized and studied. Camus boldly portrays the existential concept of absurdity, an experience Sartre described as "discrepancy, divorce, and disorientation."

The dazzling tragicomic anti-war novel, *Catch-22* (1961), by Joseph Heller, himself a bombardier pilot in WW II, is a biting, satirical denunciation of war and those in charge of the military. Heller infuses absurdity into the characters at an air base, as well as in their conversations with one another, thereby creating buffoonery amidst the omnipresent horrors of combat. In this novel, the reader encounters not only the grim reality of war, but a whole other universe of fabulous fabrications, fantasy, farce and folly, where the fact-checking of falsehoods constantly falls short. Lurking behind Heller's tour-de-force absurdist comedy is the view of existentialists that at the heart of the universe there is only a stark, indifferent emptiness.

The philosophical postmodern novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984), by Milan Kundera is framed by the demoralizing Prague Spring of 1968 in Czechoslovakia. The psychology of the characters and their relationships with one another become weighed down by secretive surveillance of the Soviet's spy setup. Kundera addresses the question of whether happiness and love can coexist without political freedom and under a pall of disillusionment. His thoughtful meditation on these matters comes in the form of an unconventional love story that pushes the boundaries of free will, desire, and commitment, and in the process puts to the test the existentialists' claim that we always have free will and should always strive to act upon it.

The novel, *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), by Kazuo Ishiguro is "a sensitive examination of the turmoil in postwar Japan, a time when certainties were overturned, gender politics shifted, the hierarchy of the generations seemed to topple, and even the geography of cities changed. All this is made more poignant when seen through the eyes of a man who is rejected by the future, and who chooses to reject his own past." Part of the immense pleasure of this novel is Ishiguro's beautiful writing which veraciously reflects Japanese culture. Ishiguro's artistic protagonist is forced to face his former passionately held beliefs and their consequences and thereby struggles with the tenet of existentialism that we must always take full responsibility for all our actions. In doing so, Ishiguro deeply and deftly depicts his character's wavering perceptions and deception of himself.

The imaginatively penetrating short story, *Love* (1952), by the highly acclaimed Ukrainian-born, Brazilian writer, Clarice Lispector, is suffused with profound, yet sublime, existential insights experienced by an everyday woman. A moment of compassionate empathy, vivid and unsettling, leads to a moment of psychological mal de mar and a peek behind the complacency of domestic life, thereby offering the possibility of coming face-to-face with one's inner depth. Clarice, as Brazilians lovingly refer to her, offers through *Love* what may be the most convincing and realistic depiction of how existential issues and life's epiphanies often inform and reverberate with one another. Our other dramatic coming-of-age short story, *Pigeon Feathers* (1956), by John Updike, poignantly portrays a youth struggling with faith and doubt, religion and science, who plummets into a panicky personal existential crisis. Updike craftily creates a situation that elegantly evinces how everyday reality, if approached and perceived with curiosity, an open mind, and reverence, may sometimes lead to enlightenment and a radical private revelation. *Pigeon Feathers* is an inspired attempt at showing how an epiphany may overcome a personal plight and light a way forward.