Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 64: Yeehaw!

(Brief intro music)

Mary: Hello, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a readers' advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. I'm Mary.

Rachel: And I'm Rachel.

Mary: I hope you're ready to saddle up and move on out for this month's theme: westerns and cowboys! This is in honor of the upcoming lecture, "Cowboys: An American Symbol" presented by Dr. Diana Ahmad on June third. We hope you'll giddy up and meet us at the library to hear all about the American West and the origins of the cowboy as we know it today. To get you all excited, Rachel and I are going to give you our recommendations centered around the American West.

Rachel and Mary: Yeehaw!

Mary: Let's quit cow-pokin' around and get started!

Rachel: First up is "Bad Country" by C.B. McKenzie, a modern western murder mystery. This isn't your average cozy whodunit, though—things get gruesome. "Rodeo Grace Garnet lives alone, save for his old dog, in a remote corner of Arizona known to locals as the Hole. He doesn't get many visitors, but a body found near his home has drawn police attention to his front door. The victim is not one of the many illegal immigrants who risk their lives to cross the border just south of the Hole, but is instead a member of one of the local Indian tribes. Retired from the rodeo circuit and scraping by on piece-work as a private investigator, Rodeo doesn't have much choice but to say yes when offered an unusual case. An elderly Indian woman has hired him to help discover who murdered her grandson, but she seems strangely uninterested in the results. Her indifference seems heartless, but as Rodeo pursues his case he learns that it's nothing compared to true hatred. And he's about to realize just how far hate can go. C.B. McKenzie's 'Bad Country' captures the rough-and-tumble corners of the Southwest in

accomplished, confident prose, with a hardnosed plot that will keep readers riveted.” I first read this as part of a readers’ advisory course, and it’s an example of just how varied a single genre can get. If you love the gristle and grit of this story, then a good watchalike is the movie “Sicario” directed by Denis Villeneuve. It boasts an all-star cast including Emily Blunt, Benicio Del Toro, Jon Bernthal, Josh Brolin, Daniel Kaluuya, and others, but beyond that it is an intense slow-burn just like “Bad Country.” The leads go through a similar arc even if Blunt’s character is more optimistic than Rodeo. I would rate both the book and the movie ‘R’ for violence and graphic depictions of death, so proceed with caution. Also, I know that “Sicario” has a sequel but haven’t watched that one yet. I have seen some poor reviews when compared to the original, unfortunately.

Mary: My first pick is “Inland” by Téa Obreht. Set in the Arizona Territory in 1893, Nora finds herself more or less alone and abandoned by all the men in her life. Her husband has gone to find water after their supply dries up and their family is at risk of dying of thirst. Her two older sons have gone out in search of him after he failed to return. But she’s holding out, waiting with her youngest son—a boy who has a bad eye and is convinced there is a monster lying in wait just outside their door—and her husband’s young cousin Josie who can talk to ghosts. Nora’s story intertwines with Lurie’s, a former outlaw who is haunted by ghosts who all want something from him. This novel has a touch of the supernatural while still representing a classic example of this genre. There are outlaws, pioneers trying to best the elements, and beasts in the wilderness. A good readalike is “The Woman Who Built a Bridge” by C.K. Crigger. "Shay Billings was pleasantly surprised at discovering a new bridge over the river, as it cut several miles from his trip into town. After being ambushed and left for dead, he has even more cause to be grateful when the bridge-builder saves his life. Shay's savior turns out to be a mysterious young woman with extraordinary skills. More importantly, she's a strong ally when he and a few other men are forced to defend themselves and their ranches against a power-hungry rich man. Marvin Hammel seems determined to own everything in their small valley, his intention to gobble up not only their homes and their livelihoods but the water that flows through the land. January Schutt just wants to be left alone to hide her scars. She's rebuilt the bridge that crosses the river onto her property and lives like a hermit in a rundown old barn. All that

changes when she takes in a wounded Shay Billings. Now she's placed in the middle of a war over water rights. But has she picked the winning side?" Both of these books feature a woman who has the odds stacked against her in the middle of a hostile landscape. You'll have to read them both to see how they fare.

Rachel: My other two picks were very intense, so now I'm going for something lighthearted yet moving. "City Slickers," directed by Ron Underwood and released in 1991—it's older than me, ha—is a film about an unhappy Manhattan yuppie going through a midlife crisis. He eventually gets roped into joining his two friends on a cattle drive in the southwest. This was, and still is, a thing that people can just do for fun. Look up 'dude ranch vacations' to get an idea of what it entails. States like Colorado, California, Montana, Arizona, and Wyoming offer these working resorts where you can get a taste of the wilderness with an experienced guide who will help you into your stirrups, so to speak. The thing is, I haven't watched "City Slickers" in a long, long time, but to this day I remember it fondly. It's clear that a lot of people want to break free from the everyday monotony a nine to five job with a pension has to offer, and these escapes are an unforgettable way to put your normal life on pause…presuming you can afford to do so. Our leading man, played by Billy Crystal, is witty as always yet very much relatable, especially when it comes to his growing attachment to the ideal of the American West and the cattle he and his buddies are charged to oversee. This may be a comedy, but there are some truly moving moments. Daniel Stern, who plays on of Crystal's amigos, gives a show-stopping performance in a pivotal scene that sticks in my mind to this day. Also, there's a cute little calf that I was willing to die for at the drop of a ten-gallon hat. Please note that no cattle were injured during the making of this movie, even if there were some safety concerns during the river rescue. I won't spoil the plot, just trust me and pop some popcorn to fully enjoy this gem. During my research into a watchalike, I discovered that there is a sequel! "The Legend of Curly's Gold" features mostly the same cast, only this time, there's treasure! It didn't perform as well at the box office, but that's the miserable burden of being a sequel.

Mary: I would be remiss if I didn't mention this next recommendation. It's the 2004 movie "Home on the Range" directed by John Sanford. It has the vocal talents of Dame Judy Dench, Cuba Gooding Jr., Steve Buscemi, and many others. While it is an animated film, please don't let

that discourage you. The songs, the characters, the plot—all fantastic for audiences of all ages. An award-winning fair cow, Maggie, is forced to be rehomed after her farm is hit by the infamous Cattle Rustler Alemeda Slim. She finds herself at a small hobby farm called 'Little Patch of Heaven' and meets two other cows who couldn't be more different from her. But when her new owner is threatened with losing the farm due to unpaid taxes, the three cows are forced to band together to come up with a plan. What do they decide? They're gonna go after Alemeda Slim themselves! You can't call yourself a true western lover without adding this to your list. There are saloon brawls, long cattle drives through the desert, gangs of cattle rustlers, a sheriff's horse that seems to cause more trouble than he actually helps. A good watchalike is "Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron" which came out in 2002. This movie is gonna make you feel something. A bit more serious and dealing with more serious themes, it still is a great watch for the whole family. Set in the west just after the Civil War, a young stallion is separated from his family and stuck in an army camp, forced to have his mane shaved, horse shoes nailed on, as well as enduring mental and physical abuse at the hands of the soldiers. This movie is rated 'G', so you don't see anything too intense on the screen. Eventually, he finds himself in a local Native American settlement where he bonds with a man there and is treated much better but still cannot truly be himself. This movie is a commentary on what it means to be truly free and shows you the inherent restrictions even the best-intentioned people place on animals. In addition to this, Bryan Adams does a fantastic job making the viewers cry, laugh, and yell at the television through his music. Do yourself a favor and have a family movie night with both of these classics.

Rachel: I hemmed. I hawed. I didn't know what my final recommendation should be! I considered going where no one should go and almost rewatched "Back to the Future Part III." But no! I remembered "Westward the Women" by Nancy Wilson Ross, "a book about women of every kind and sort, from nuns to prostitutes, who participated in the greatest American adventure—pioneering across the continent. Not only does the material represent half-forgotten history—which the author garnered from attics, libraries, state historical museums, and the reminiscences of Far Western Old-timers—but it is unique in presenting the woman's side of the story in this major American experience. With dramatic clarity the author…has

written the intimate and human stories of certain outstanding personalities among these pioneer women; the Maine blue-stocking pursuing her studies of botany and taxidermy in frontier solitude; the gentle nuns from Belgium teaching needlework and litanies to 'children of the forest'; the little ex-milliner who performed the first autopsy by a woman; the suffragette who established a newspaper for Western women and rode plushy river boats and the dusty roads preaching her gospel of Equal Rights; hurdy-gurdy girls from Idaho boomtowns; and many another martyr, heroine, diarist, gun moll, missionary, feminist, and mother in this turbulent era of pioneering." Before you ask—yes, there is a movie! In a strange turn of events not often witnessed on this podcast, though, it actually came out a couple decades before the book. This 1951 film focuses less on the many different roles women played in history and more on the one role that was seen as all-important at the time of its release—that of wife and mother. "A trail guide escorts a group of women from Chicago to California to marry men that have recently begun settling there." Which, you know, is historically what happened, too. Think about it: The west was wild, not exactly a safe place for the ladies of the 1800s. Anyway, the menfolk would go first and, once they were settled, send for the women to join them and start their families. It took a lot of bravery and fortitude to make the trek across the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains, especially when you consider that there weren't exactly any established pitstops along the way. The journey would take months, and many died. There's a key scene in this film with a dog at a gravesite that will rend your heart. So, go read the book for historical context and then watch the movie to see a brutal portrayal of what so many other Hollywood westerns at the time painted as a sentimental or even romantic ideal.

Mary: Speaking of romantic, I'm finishing off my recommendations with a couple of Western romances. "Wyoming Winter" by Diana Palmer is a 'lovers to enemies to lovers' situation and is filled with drama. When J.C. Calhoun's fiancé ends up pregnant with another man's baby, all he trusts in now is his land. But a lost little girl leads him back to his ex-fiancé, Colie Jackson. Colie left J.C. for his own good all those years ago… But now, for the sake of her daughter, she has to depend on this hard-hearted man who hasn't forgiven her. A band of criminals are tracking their every move, forcing the pair to work together and confront the lies and problems that drove them apart. A great readalike is "Where Coyotes Howl" by Sandra Dallas. "1916. The two-

street town of Wallace is not exactly what Ellen Webster had in mind when she accepted a teaching position in Wyoming, but within a year's time she's fallen in love—both with the High Plains and with a handsome cowboy named Charlie Bacon. Life is not easy in the flat, brown corner of the state where winter blizzards are unforgiving and the summer heat relentless. But Ellen and Charlie face it all together, their relationship growing stronger with each shared success and each deeply felt tragedy. Ellen finds purpose in her work as a rancher's wife and in her bonds with [the] other women settled on the prairie. Not all of them are so lucky as to have loving husbands, not all came to Wallace willingly, and not all of them can survive the cruel seasons. But they look out for each other, share their secrets, and help one another in times of need. And the needs are great and constant. The only city to speak of, Cheyenne, is miles away, making it akin to the Wild West in rural Wallace. In the end, it is not the trials Ellen and Charlie face together that make them remarkable but their love for one another that endures through it all." I mean, what is more classically Western than a community coming together and supporting each other through the harsh weather and other tragedies?

Rachel: I'm closin' up the ranch. We will return next month with even more reading recommendations. Remember to check the show notes for a list of all the stuff we just discussed. You can subscribe to Not Your Mother's Library and write a review if you're feelin' it. Until next time, happy reading.

Mary and Rachel: Bye!

(Brief outro music)