



Rye Free
Reading
Room

2025

RYE FREE READING ROOM
**Annual Report
Supplement**



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The 2025 Rye Free Reading Room Mayor's Award: Nathaniel Philbrick

The Rye Free Reading Room Mayoral Award honors an individual with a strong connection to Rye for significant contribution to literature and the literary community.

Nathaniel Philbrick is a New York Times bestselling author and sailor. His historical research into one of Rye's most famous visitors has led him on a journey up and down the Post Road, tracing Washington's defeats and victories. As the 250th Anniversary of the Revolutionary War approaches, Philbrick brings to life the stories of Westchester and the Sound Shore in 1776.

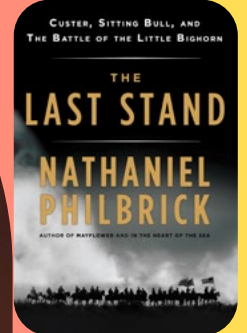
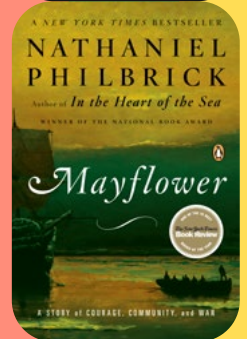
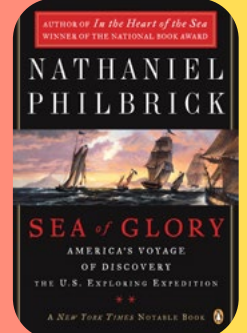
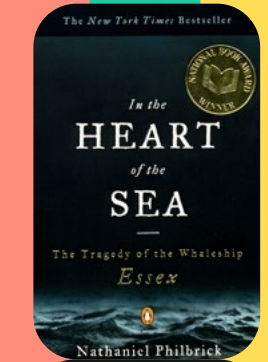
A regular visitor to Rye, Philbrick share a lifelong love of sailing with his daughter, Jennifer Philbrick McArdle, a former Harvard sailing captain, Rye resident, and Rye Free Reading Room trustee.

Nathaniel Philbrick is the author of 13 books, including "Travels with George: In Search of Washington and His Legacy," "Valiant Ambition: George Washington, Benedict Arnold, and the Fate of the American Revolution," "The Mayflower and the Pilgrim's New World," and "Second Wind: A Sunfish Sailor,

an Island, and the Voyage That Brought a Family Together."

Nathaniel's work has been featured in The New York Times Book Review, the Los Angeles Times, Vanity Fair, The Wall Street Journal, and The Boston Globe. His media appearances include PBS's "American Experience," the "Today" Show, "The Morning Show," "Dateline," NPR, and C-SPAN. He and his wife Melissa live on Nantucket.

The Mayor's Award will be presented at the Rye Free Reading Room's Annual Meeting on Thursday, February 5th.



Portrait by Kim

“The Bias Inside Us”: Smithsonian Exhibition Comes to the Library

Last summer, the Rye Free Reading Room proudly hosted “The Bias Inside Us,” a thought-provoking exhibition and community engagement project from the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. On view from June 28 through July 27, 2025, this dynamic exhibit explored the social science, psychology, and consequences of implicit bias, and how these biases impact our behaviors and worldview.

Visitors were invited to challenge bias in the world through awareness of their own biases. The exhibit was made possible with generous support from The Otto Bremer Trust.

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Library presented a series of community events and programs designed to foster conversation and self-reflection. The program kicked off with an opportunity to meet artist Angélica Daas and experience her photographic project *Humanæ: A Portrait of Humanity* – which celebrates the similarity of humans regardless of skintones and backgrounds. This programming was funded by the Westchester County Board of Legislatures.

Rye High School sophomore Hayden Souza and Greenwich Country Day School sophomore Lily Breitfelder—friends who approached the Library with the idea of hosting the Smithsonian exhibit—said, “As students and citizens, we are thrilled to have the opportunity to help bring this important exhibit on bias to our communities...” They encouraged everyone to visit for an experience that challenges how we see ourselves – and one another.

View the exhibit online at <https://biasinsideus.si.edu/homepage>



“The Power of Friendship”

Sarah Prosser Teen Librarian

Those familiar with the current landscape of media and storytelling are probably already familiar with the title of this year’s article. Some might even be rolling their eyes or chuckling, because as cliché as it has become, “the power of friendship” really is something incredibly special and unique. Often in media, especially those aimed for younger audiences, the adversity characters face can lead to feelings of isolation and desperation, and yet time and again, when those challenges are shared and faced head on with companions, those bonds of friendship are what end up saving the day. It is a powerful reminder that no one is capable of existing as an island, we all depend on others.

For those more academically inclined, you may have heard of, or even read, “The Evolution of Societal Cooperation” published by UPenn’s School of Arts & Sciences’ Joshua Plotkin and Taylor Kessinger in 2023. In it, the authors outlined how humans have so many reasons to cooperate with one another, and figuring out that communication leads to the establishment of friendships and community, which creates better outcomes.

The concepts of friendship and societal cooperation are in conversation with each other, and the Teen Room at the library offers a glimpse into that dialogue.

On any given day there is a microcosm of different groups of teens interacting in the space who represent a diversity in backgrounds, maturity levels, grades, and so many other facets of their identities. Some are playing board games or on the Switch, others are working on a group project or tutoring someone, and more are simply existing in a space meant for them. The vast majority of the time they are collaborating and bouncing ideas off of each other, building stronger relationships and relying on each other to help them find success.

It’s probably not a surprise to hear that the teen developmental experience involves self-discovery. Through introspection, teens are identifying new identities, beliefs, and values of themselves and then tentatively sharing with friends in a test of trust on the search for validation and belonging. The time spent in their own heads is as important as the time spent with their peers, and the library offers an opportunity and space for both to happen through books and experiences.

The power of friendship, community, and cooperation are typified in teen years and have massive impacts on how well teens make the jump into managing the responsibilities of adulthood. It’s my privilege to be the observer who overhears and occasionally facilitates that developmental growth through programming like lock-ins, events, and book displays themed around pop culture, where strangers become acquaintances over shared interests, acquaintances become friends over shared experiences, and even friends become closer with shared time.



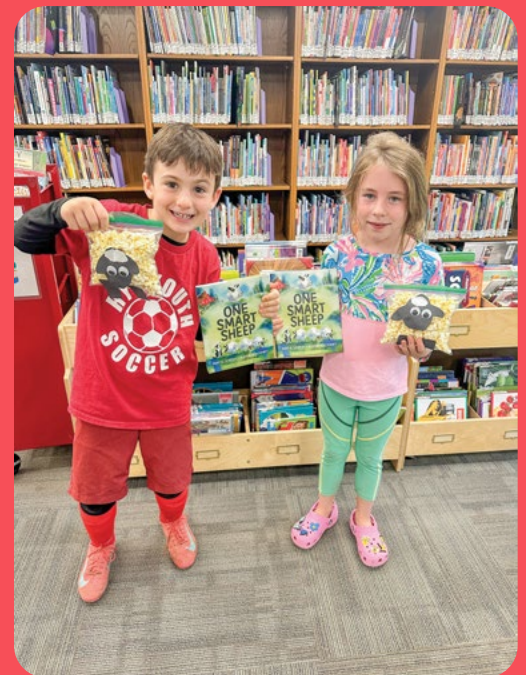
“My First Book Club”: Sparking a Lifelong Love of Reading

The Rye Free Reading Room is planting the seeds of a lifelong love of books with its newest program for young readers and their families, “My First Book Club.” Designed especially for Kindergarteners, First Graders, and their caregivers, this two-part seasonal series introduces children to the joy of reading together in a fun, supportive, and hands-on environment.

The club meets twice each season. At the first session, families gather to listen to part of the selected book read aloud, followed by a creative activity that brings the story to life. Children then take home their very own free copy of the book—encouraging them to continue reading at home with their families. When everyone returns for the second session, the group dives into a lively discussion about the story, shares a snack, and enjoys another activity inspired by the book’s themes and characters.

By combining reading with play, art, and conversation, “My First Book Club” helps children experience books as more than words on a page. It builds excitement around stories, sparks imagination, and nurtures critical-thinking skills. For caregivers, it also offers simple ways to make reading together an enjoyable daily habit.

Children’s Librarian Elizabeth Ng, who coordinates the program, explains: “The program introduces kids to the model we use for older children and exposes them to books beyond picture books. Chapter books can be intimidating, but are a little more accessible when you are reading together and having a good time!” She adds, “Getting kids hooked on stories early can set the stage for a lifelong love of reading, and that’s what this program is really all about.”



2026 Save-The-Dates Calendar

Annual Meeting
February 5th

National Library Week
April 19–25th

Vehicle Fair
Sunday, May 31st

Summer Reading Program Kickoff
June

Library Card Sign-Up Month
September

Booksale Donations Accepted
Early September

Friends of the Library Booksale Preview
September 18th

Book Sale
September 19th & 20th
For details visit: www.ryelibrary.org/booksale

Annual Campaign Kickoff
September

Novel Night
Saturday, October 17th

Ninth Annual Spelling Bee
Veterans Day, Wednesday, November 11th

Friends of the Library Holiday Open House
Saturday, December 19th

Staff Picks

Check out what the Library's staff recommends you put on your reading list:

Susan Aufrichtig – Adult Services Librarian

***Sipsworth* by Simon Van Booy**

"*Sipsworth*" is an uplifting, slender, gem of a novel, featuring characters who become their best selves, through their interactions with an elderly woman and her pet mouse, Sipsworth. This book is the warm embrace you didn't know you needed.

Lisa Fitzmaurice – Senior Children's Librarian

***Don't Trust Fish* by Neil Sharpson**

This picture book is hilarious, especially for older preschoolers and young elementary students. I had a great time reading it with my son and will hopefully be able to share it with him many more times.

Stacy Lavelle – Business Manager

***Briar Club* by Kate Quinn**

Great historical fiction about friendship and secrets in an all-women boarding house in 1950's Washington DC, focusing on the paranoia of the McCarthy era and the changing roles of women in post-war America.

Doreen Munsie – Communications Officer

***Buckeye* by Patrick Ryan**

This is an enthralling story of two families in a small town in Ohio whose lives become inextricably linked by a fateful secret, one that shadows them across decades. Ryan's characters are beautiful yet flawed, yearning for love and searching for belonging and forgiveness.



Staff Picks (Continued)

Sarah Prosser – *Teen Librarian*

***A Study in Drowning* by Ava Reid**

A beautiful and effusive dread threads every page of this dark academia gothic romantasy novel following a young woman seizing her chance to leave a mark on a world that has already left some marks on her.

Catherine Riedel – *Assistant Director*

***Culpability* by Bruce Holsinger**

An engaging novel that explores family, healing and moral responsibility in the age of artificial intelligence.

Arlo Sanchez – *Library Assistant*

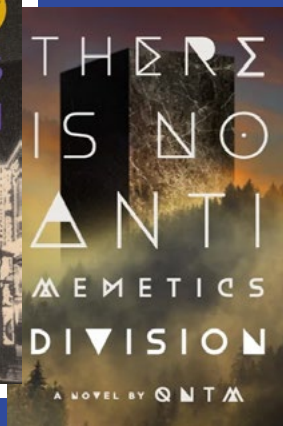
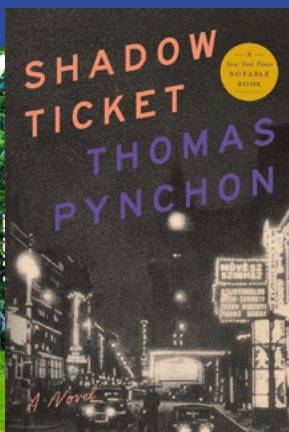
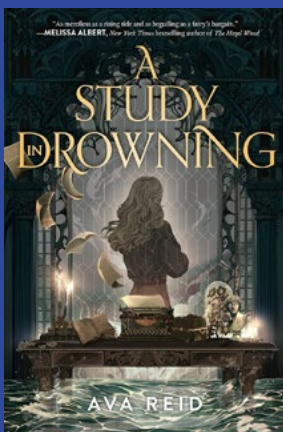
***Shadow Ticket* by Thomas Pynchon**

Pynchon's latest novel is a satire about a private eye sent to find a runaway heiress.

Chris Shoemaker – *Director*

***There Is No Antimemetics Division* by qntm**

What if your missing memories were the only sign of an invasion beyond understanding? A fascinating tale of deduction, adventure, and literally all-consuming threats.



Thank You to the Rye Free Reading Room 2025 Auxiliary Board Diamond Sponsor: Rye Professional Firefighters Local 2029

The Rye Professional Firefighters aren't just heroes in a crisis—they are also deeply committed to supporting the community year-round. One of the ways they do this is through their nonprofit, 2029 Fundraising, which supports local causes and organizations such as the Rye Free Reading Room, the Rye Nature Center, Rye schools, and more. In addition, 2029 Fundraising provides critical assistance to local first responders' families during times of unthinkable crisis.

The organization is led by a dedicated board of firefighters and Rye residents who review grant applications, respond to emergency requests, and plan its signature annual event, the **St. Patrick's Day Ball**. Rye resident and Board Vice President Victoria McMahon shares, *"As residents of Rye we are so lucky to have these dedicated Firefighters protecting our community from disaster. It is incredible that even after they have clocked out, they still find ways to support local organizations and families through fundraising and charitable giving."*

Board President and professional firefighter Sal Inguanti echoes this commitment, adding, *"Our work supports people during their most challenging moments, and it is incredibly rewarding to provide help when it is needed most."*

The 2026 St. Patrick's Day Ball will take place on Friday, March 13, 2026. This incredibly fun evening includes a seated dinner, open bar, live auction, a lively band, and more Irish games and entertainment. Early bird tickets go on sale on January 12th visit www.2029fundraising.com to sign up to get notified. For more information about sponsorship packages or how you can help email, info@2029fundraising.com.

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RYE FREE READING ROOM
FEBRUARY 2026 Designed by Jack Kong



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