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Wordplay: Chapter 3; National, Local and Emerging Authors to Convene Virtually for Third Annual Festival, May 2 – 8, 2021

National names like Chelsea Clinton, Dean Koontz, Cheryl Strayed, and Kazuo Ishiguro; plus local authors Kao Kalia Yang, Megan Maynor and Douglas Kearney among the nearly 50 authors to join the third annual festival

MINNEAPOLIS (March 24, 2021) –[The Loft Literary Center](#) in Minneapolis is excited to announce the full line up for the third annual [Wordplay book festival](#), presented by St. Catherine University and the Star Tribune, which will once again be held virtually May 2 – 8, 2021.

From nationally recognized authors like Chelsea Clinton, Dean Koontz, Cheryl Strayed, Kazuo Ishiguro and Marjorie Liu to local authors like Kao Kalia Yang, Douglas Kearney, Heid E. Erdrich and Bao Phi to emerging talents like Gabriela Garcia and Mateo Askaripour, the authors represent a wide range of genres, backgrounds and perspectives. Wordplay attendees will have the chance to hear from and ask questions of these authors during their conversation sessions. (For the schedule and full list of authors scheduled to appear, see page two of this release.)

Slightly updated from last year’s virtual format thanks to many lessons learned after quickly pivoting the in-person festival online, Wordplay 2021 will fill one week, with three to four scheduled virtual events each day beginning Monday, May 3, through Saturday, May 8. The morning sessions will focus on children’s books and authors, the afternoon sessions will highlight international authors and the evening sessions will be cross-genre conversations with a poet, non-fiction author and a fiction author about specific topics. A few happy hours are also scheduled. All featured authors have released a book within a year of the festival.

“Since its founding in 2019, Wordplay has looked a little different each year,” said Steph Opitz, founding director of Wordplay. “We’re excited to bring back the virtual format to allow book lovers from around the world to join us for a week of fun, informative and thought-provoking discussions with such incredible authors.”

Wordplay will once again be free of charge, with enhanced ticket options (and experiences) available for \$35. Tickets are on sale now at loftwordplay.org.

The Loft's Wordplay is made possible by presenting partners St. Catherine University and Star Tribune.

"We are excited to be part of Wordplay again this year and to celebrate readers, writers, and great books. At St. Catherine University, we celebrate these everyday as a liberal arts university. Reading and literacy are the foundations of education," said Anita Thomas, PhD, provost and executive Vice President at St. Catherine University. "Books open up the mind to vast worlds of knowledge and understanding, and look forward to this year's conversations."

WHAT: The Loft's third-annual Wordplay festival

WHEN: Sunday, May 2 through Saturday, May 8

WHERE: Sessions will be streamed on Crowdcast, YouTube and Facebook Live.

TICKETS: General admission tickets free of charge, with enhanced ticket options (and experiences) available for \$35. Visit loftwordplay.org to find links to stream and also purchase enhanced tickets.

AUTHORS TO APPEAR/SCHEDULE:

**SUNDAY,
MAY 2**

- **4 p.m. (HAPPY HOUR):** Love and Illusion: Kazuo Ishiguro on Klara and the Sun in conversation with Yaa Gyasi
AUTHORS Kazuo Ishiguro (*Klara and the Sun*)

When bestselling novelist Kazuo Ishiguro won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017, the Nobel committee described him as having "uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection in the world." Now here's your chance to ask this "poet of the unspoken" (New York Times) your questions about his vision, writing life, and his first novel since winning the Nobel.

SPECIAL NOTE: Wordplay tickets for this event are sold out. But tickets are still available through Bay Area Book Festival [via this link](#).

- **7 p.m. (CROSS-GENRE):** Wordplay Kickoff with Dean Koontz and James Lee Burke in conversation
AUTHORS: Dean Koontz (*The Other Emily*), James Lee Burke (*A Private Cathedral*)

Two of the most prolific, best-selling, well-known writers in the country will be in conversation for the first time ever. Help us kick off Wordplay with this historic event.

**MONDAY,
MAY 3**

- **9 a.m. (YOUTH):** You Can Do It!
AUTHORS: Christian Trimmer (*The Little Things: A Story About Acts of Kindness*), Atinuke (*Too Small Tola*), Megan Maynor (*Helga Makes a Name for Herself*), Kao Kalia Yang (*Yang Warriors*)

No matter how small, or young, or weak you might feel, these inspiring tales remind you that the little things add up! Grab your kiddos and join these authors in a discussion about actions and words.

- **12 p.m. (INTERNATIONAL):** Intercontinental Series featuring Elisa Shua Dusapin
AUTHORS: Elisa Shua Dusapin (*Winter in Sokcho*)

In *Winter in Sokcho*, Elisa Shua Dusapin explores shared identity and divided selves through the relationship of a French Korean receptionist and a guest in a North Korean tourist town.

- **7 p.m. (CROSS-GENRE):** Talking Back, Looking Forward: Native Women's Resistance & Reimagination
AUTHORS: Heid E. Erdrich (*Little Big Bully*), Elissa Washuta (*White Magic*), Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (*Noopiming: The Cure for White Ladies*)

These Native writers offer us stories of resistance to colonialism through reclaiming cultural inheritance, calling out their oppressors and honoring Native worldviews.

**TUESDAY,
MAY 4**

- **9 a.m. (YOUTH):** More than Words
AUTHORS Trung Le Nguyen (*The Magic Fish*), Ted Anderson (*The Spy Who Raised Me*)

From page to page, panel to panel, graphic novels create a world for the reading in more than one way. Join these authors as they discuss their latest books and the ways in which graphics can enhance a story.

- **12 p.m. (INTERNATIONAL):** Intercontinental Series featuring Sofia Segovia
AUTHORS: Sofia Segovia (*Tears of Amber*)

In *Tears of Amber*, Sofia Segovia depicts two families displaced by war and caught up in extraordinary pilgrimages towards uncertain futures.

- **7 p.m. (CROSS-GENRE):** Mother, Daughter, Witch, Savior
AUTHORS: Carrie Fountain (*The Life*), Kathryn Nuernberger (*The Witch of Eye*), Gabriela Garcia (*Of Women and Salt*)

Women in caretaking roles are often burdened with unrealistic expectations and forced into sexist dichotomies. These authors examine the role of caretaker from new angles to expose the nuances beneath.

**WEDNESDAY,
MAY 5**

- **9 a.m. (YOUTH):** Illustrator Draw-off, co-presented with Brooklyn Book Fest
AUTHORS: Charnelle Pinkney Barlow (*Born Ready: The True Story of a Boy Named Penelope*), Linda Bondestam (*Good Night, Earth*), Mike Wohnoutka (*How to Apologize*), Jon Klassen (*Pax: Journey Home*)

Join four amazing and celebrated children's illustrators as they compete for votes with a live illustration draw-off.

- **12 p.m. (INTERNATIONAL):** Intercontinental Series featuring Connie Palmen
AUTHORS: Connie Palmen (*Your Story, My Story: A Novel*)

Connie Palmen constructs the untold story of Ted Hughes, former romantic partner of poet Sylvia Plath—revealing hidden demons of both star-crossed lovers.

- **7 p.m. (CROSS-GENRE):** Sense of Adventure
AUTHORS: Maggie Shipstead (*Great Circle*), Randa Jarrar (*Love is an Ex-Country*), Hoa Nguyen (*A Thousand Times You Lose Your Treasure*)

What does it cost to be the boldest, most daring, joyfully liberated person you can be? These writers explore what it means to be true to oneself in order to obtain both personal and political freedom.

**THURSDAY,
MAY 6**

- **9 a.m. (YOUTH):** She Persisted
AUTHORS (and books) Meg Medina (*She Persisted: Sonia Sotomayor*), Sayantani DasGupta (*She Persisted: Virginia Apgar*), Michelle Knudsen (*She Persisted: Nellie Bly*), Chelsea Clinton (*She Persisted: Harriet Tubman*)

Join beloved children's authors and heroes in their own right as they tell true stories about women who have persisted. These stories will help cultivate and inspire the young people in your life to persist.

- **12 p.m. (INTERNATIONAL)** Intercontinental Series featuring Rivers Solomon
AUTHORS (and books) Rivers Solomon (*Sorrowland: A Novel*)

Rivers Solomon presents *Sorrowland: A Novel* as a genre-bending work of Gothic fiction in which family, identity and brutality are all put to the test.

- **4 p.m. (HAPPY HOUR):** West x Midwest present Alison Bechdel in conversation with Cheryl Strayed
AUTHORS Alison Bechdel (*The Secret to Superhuman Strength*)

The long and complicated history of workout crazes in the U.S.—from the Thighmaster to Nordictrack; Peloton to Soul Cycle—have created a culture that chases fads over facts. And Alison Bechdel, iconic, award-winning graphic memoirist, has not been immune to the promises. But in her quest for superhuman strength, Bechdel's journey leads her to another muscle: the heart. Join her and fellow soul-seeker Cheryl Strayed as they discuss Bechdel's latest graphic memoir.

Special notes: Co-presented by Literary Arts (Portland, Ore.), The Loft (Minneapolis, Minn.), Black Mountain Institute (Las Vegas, Nev.), and Wisconsin Book Festival

(Madison, Wis.)

- **7 p.m. (CROSS-GENRE):** Fetch the Bolt Cutters

AUTHORS Melissa Febos (*Girlhood*), Kaitlyn Greenidge (*Libertie: A Novel*), Donika Kelly (*The Renunciations*)

Girls grow up hearing stories about what a woman “should” be. These authors are done hearing stories told about themselves — they’re writing their own, and questioning who’s been narrating up until now.

**FRIDAY,
MAY 7**

- **9 a.m. (YOUTH):** Animals!

AUTHORS: Bao Phi (*Hello, Mandarin Duck!*), Jason Tharp (*It’s Ok to Smell Good!*), Shannon Hale and LeUyen (*Itty-Bitty Kitty Corn*)

Kitties, ducks and skunks – oh, my! This virtual zoo features all of your favorite animals tackling some of life’s most important topics: personal hygiene, meeting and welcoming new neighbors, and finding your identity.

- **12 p.m. (INTERNATIONAL)** Intercontinental Series featuring Helen Oyeyemi

AUTHORS: Helen Oyeyemi (*Peaces: A Novel*)

Helen Oyeyemi, bestselling author of *What Is Not Yours Is Not Yours*, crafts a mesmerizing portrayal of two lovers forever changed by an unusual train journey in her new novel *Peaces*.

- **4 p.m. (HAPPY HOUR)** Genre-benders: Literary Writers on Comics

AUTHORS Benjamin Percy (*Dawn of X, vol. 14*), Brittney Morris (*The Cost of Knowing*), Marjorie Liu (*Monstress: Talk Stories #2*)

Three writers who have built audiences in both the novel world and the comic book world talk about how they wear different creative hats and discuss their latest projects.

- **7 p.m. (CROSS-GENRE):** Who's Watching?: The White Gaze & the Reclamation of Black Performance

AUTHORS: Douglas Kearney (*Sho*), Mateo Askaripour (*Black Buck*), Hanif Abdurraqib (*A Little Devil in America: Notes in Praise of Black Performance*)

With a keen eye for performances both grandiose and subtle, these authors demonstrate how inextricably Black performance is woven into the fabric of American culture.

**SATURDAY,
MAY 8**

- **9 a.m. (YOUTH)** Out of this World

AUTHORS: Dhonielle Clayton (*A Universe of Wishes: A We Need Diverse Books Anthology*), Namina Forna (*The Gilded Ones*), Joan He (*The Ones We're Meant to Find*) and Charlie Jane Anders (*Victories Greater Than Death*)

Dhonielle Clayton has brought together a groundbreaking collection of fantasy short stories from 15 authors with *We Need Diverse Books*, Namina Forna introduces a world in which the color of blood determines fate, and Joan He asks if a STEM prodigy should even bother saving the earth.

- **12 p.m. (INTERNATIONAL)** Intercontinental Series featuring Federico Falco and Jennifer Croft

AUTHORS: Federico Falco (*A Perfect Cemetery*)

First published in Spanish in 2016, Charco Press is releasing *A Perfect Cemetery*—finalist of the Gabriel Garcia Marquez Award for the Short Story and translated by Booker Prize Winning writer Jennifer Croft—for the first time in English. A collection of funny, dark and interrogative interconnected stories set in the Córdoba mountains of Argentina.

- **7 p.m. (CROSS-GENRE)** Tending the Earth
AUTHORS (and books) Kazim Ali (*Northern Light: Power, Land, and the Memory of Water*), Diane Wilson (*The Seed Keeper*), Moheb Soliman (*HOMES*)

As the environmental crisis grows increasingly urgent, these writers remind us that the “natural world” at stake is not simply land and resources; it’s also our deeply held relationships with the places we call home.

For more information, visit loftwordplay.com. For author headshots or book covers, please contact Megan Anderson at Belmont Partners at megan@bellmontpartner.com or 612-423-0335.

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About The Loft

Incorporated in 1975, The Loft Literary Center is one of the nation’s leading independent literary centers. The Loft advances the artistic development of writers, fosters a thriving literary community, and inspires a passion for literature. Learn more at loft.org.