

# FIRST YEAR READING EXPERIENCE

Figure 1: Salem State University logo with the words First Year Reading Experience

The Class of 2030 will be able to select from the following books as part of the First Year Reading Experience. Students will select which book they want to read and discuss in small groups throughout the fall beginning Tuesday June 30 at noon. The sign-up link will be provided via email and in the official Class of 2030 Facebook Group.

## **The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas**

Sixteen-year-old Starr Carter lives in a poor neighborhood but attends a fancy suburban prep school. Her world is shaken when she witnesses her unarmed friend Khalil shot by a police officer. As his death makes national news and tensions rise, Starr faces pressure from all sides to speak the truth—knowing it could change everything, or put her in danger. ***The 2018 selection read by the Class of 2022.***

## **Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Asperger's by John Elder Robison**

John Robison spent much of his life feeling different, struggling to connect with others due to his odd habits—an inclination to blurt out non sequiturs, avoid eye contact, dismantle radios, and dig five-foot holes, later explained by his Asperger's diagnosis at age 40. In this darkly funny memoir, he shares his unique journey—from quirky childhood to designing guitars for KISS to building a family—offering a deeply human look at life on the autism spectrum. ***The 2020 selection read by the Class of 2024.***

## **Ties that Bind: Stories of Love & Gratitude from the First Ten Years of StoryCorps by Dave Isay**

StoryCorps founder Dave Isay shares powerful, real-life stories that explore what it means to connect with others. Drawn from a decade of interviews, these conversations show how people—from siblings and spouses to coworkers and strangers—build deep relationships in surprising ways. You'll meet two brothers rebuilding their bond after being cast out by their parents, a grandmother who found unexpected joy in family, and a war veteran whose friendships helped him heal. For students stepping into a new chapter of life, these stories are a reminder of how connection, empathy, and listening can shape who we become. ***The 2023 selection read by the Class of 2027.***

## **The Pretty One by Keah Brown**

The Pretty One is a memoir by Keah Brown that explores what it means to be black and disabled in a mostly able-bodied white America. The book shatters the conventions of what it means to be beautiful and takes the reader on a transformative journey through Brown's life as a disabled black

woman. The book is a thoughtful, inspiring, and charming collection of essays. ***A never before selected book which made the semi-finalist list several years in a row.***

### **Orange is the New Black by Piper Kerman**

Piper Kerman, once a carefree young woman, is now a well-established career woman with a boyfriend and loving family. However, her past catches up with her when she's convicted and sentenced to 15 months in Danbury Federal Prison for a drug-related crime. Inmate #11187-424, Kerman learns to navigate the harsh realities of prison life, meeting women from diverse backgrounds who show her unexpected kindness, wisdom, and acceptance. Her memoir offers an eye-opening glimpse into the lives of incarcerated women and the flaws of the American penal system. ***The 2013 selection read by the Class of 2017.***

### **Spare Parts by Joshua Davis**

In 2004, four undocumented Mexican American teens from Phoenix, Arizona, entered the Marine Advanced Technology Education Robotics Competition at UC Santa Barbara. Despite attending an underfunded school and facing limited opportunities, two dedicated teachers inspired them to build an underwater robot. With less than \$1,000 and parts they scavenged, the teens faced elite teams, including one from MIT with a \$10,000 budget. Their story, which became a symbol for the DREAMers movement, continues with first-generation college graduations, deportation, farm work in Mexico, and military service. ***The 2015 selection read by the Class of 2019.***

### **The Book of Unknown Americans by Christina Henríquez**

When 15-year-old Maribel Rivera suffers a devastating injury, her family leaves their comfortable life in Mexico and risk everything to seek medical care in the U.S. There, Maribel captures the attention of Mayor Toro, the son of a new neighbor, and the two form a deep connection. Their love story sets off a chain of events that impact both their families. Henríquez weaves together their tale with the voices of other Latin American immigrants, exploring the complexities of love, family, and the immigrant experience. ***The 2019 selection read by the Class of 2023.***

### **1,001 Voices on Climate Change: Everyday Stories of Flood, Fire, Drought, and Displacement from Around the World By Devi Lockwood**

Journalist Devi Lockwood travels the world—often by bicycle—gathering personal stories from people affected by climate change. She frequently carried with her a simple cardboard sign reading, “Tell me a story about climate change.” From rising seas in Fiji to wildfires in Australia and glacial melt in the Arctic, she records voices often left out of the conversation. Spanning 20 countries over five years, her global journey shows how storytelling can inspire empathy and action more powerfully than statistics alone. ***A never before selected book which made the semi-finalist list in 2023.***