

The OLLI Salon: Reading Like a Writer, Writing Like a Reader

Dates: October 20, October 27, November 3, November 10

Time: 1:00-3:00 pm

Not a writing workshop. Not a book club. A four-week literary salon where readers and writers gather to explore great writing, create new work, and meet published authors who share how stories are made.

Guided by author, editor, and teacher of creative writing [Mina Witteman](#)

Course Description

Great writers are great readers. In this four-week salon, participants explore how writers transform memory, observation, and imagination into compelling stories. Each session combines a conversation with a guest author about their creative process and reading life, a discussion of their published work, and a creative exercise for readers *and* for writers. We will discuss memory and emotional significance in memoir and fiction with memoirist [Dorothy Lazard](#) (*Behind the Desk at the Main: A Librarian's Memoir*), graphic novelist [Maria van Lieshout](#) (*Song of a Blackbird*) will delight us with a conversation about visual storytelling (and not just in a graphic novel) and history, and we will discuss perspective and place with novelist, journalist and teacher of creative writing [Amy Wilentz](#) (*Martyr's Crossing*). The OLLI Salon series ends with a roundtable titled 'Why Stories Matter' with Heyday publisher and memoirist [Steve Wasserman](#) (*Tell Me Something, Tell Me Anything, Even If It's a Lie*).

This salon is for readers, writers, and anyone who is curious about how stories are made. Get to the heart of **storytelling, memory, history, and perspective** with activities that allow participation through conversation, observation, and interpretation. Writing and reading opportunities are available but never mandatory and you can always switch from reader to writer and back. No writing experience required. Before each class, a 5–10-page excerpt of the guest author's work will be posted in the OLLI portal, though participants are encouraged to read their books in full.

Class Structure

- 20 min: The Story Spark--a short discussion of assigned reading
- 45 min: Guest author conversation (Dorothy Lazard, Maria van Lieshout, Amy Wilentz)
- 25 min: The Craft Studio
 - Writers explore the week's theme through a brief creative exercise.
 - Readers explore the week's theme through close reading and discussion.
- 30 min: Sharing and discussion

Week 1: The Story Hidden in a Moment with Memoirist Dorothy Lazard

Join memoirist and librarian Dorothy Lazard for a conversation about finding extraordinary stories in ordinary lives. Together, we'll explore what makes a deeply personal story resonate with strangers, the books that reveal the power of emotional significance, and how memory shapes both memoir and fiction. Drawing on her experience as a writer, reader, and librarian, Dorothy will reflect on the ways our hidden moments become stories that connect us all. An engaging evening for readers and writers alike, celebrating the art of transforming memory into meaningful narrative.

Dorothy Lazard is a writer, librarian, and historian whose memoir, *What You Don't Know Will Make a Whole New World*, was shortlisted for the Northern California Book Awards. A longtime librarian and former head of

the Oakland Public Library's Oakland History Center, she is widely admired for bringing Oakland's history to life through lectures, exhibitions, and writing. Her next book, *Behind the Desk at the Main*, an affectionate and insightful account of her two decades as a public librarian, will be published by Heyday in August 2026.

Week 2: Visual Storytelling and History with Graphic Novelist Maria van Lieshout

Join award-winning novelist Maria van Lieshout for a conversation on the art of storytelling through words and images, and the ways stories help us see both the past and the present anew. Together, we'll explore how observation and eavesdropping become creative fuel, the ethics and craft of borrowing from real people, the unforgettable literary characters who shape our imaginations, and the dynamic relationship between history, fact, and fiction.

Maria van Lieshout is a Dutch American award-winning graphic novelist and illustrator. She was born and raised in the Netherlands and studied graphic design at George Washington University in DC. Her award-winning graphic novel *Song of a Blackbird* is inspired by historic events, including those that affected her own family, during the Nazi occupation of Amsterdam. Maria lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband and their son.

Week 3: Perspective and Place with Novelist and Journalist Amy Wilentz

Join novelist and journalist Amy Wilentz for a conversation on the evolution of a writer's craft, and the lifelong relationship between perspective, place, and the written word. Together, we'll explore how voice develops over time, the books and authors that shape our writing, what it means to begin or deepen a writing practice later in life, and why revision is often where the real work, and discovery, happens.

Amy Wilentz is an award-winning author, journalist, and literary journalist whose books include *Farewell, Fred Voodoo*, *The Rainy Season*, *Martyrs' Crossing*, and *I Feel Earthquakes More Often Than They Happen*. A recipient of the National Book Critics Circle Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Whiting Writers' Award, and numerous other honors, she has reported for *The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, *The New York Times*, and many leading publications. Wilentz taught literary journalism at the University of California, Irvine, and currently working on her next novel. She lives in Los Angeles.

Week 4: Why Stories Matter with Heyday Publisher and Memoirist Steve Wasserman

Join Heyday publisher, editor, critic, and memoirist Steve Wasserman for the concluding conversation in this OLLI Salon, where we will celebrate the lasting power of storytelling. Together, we'll explore why stories matter, how they find readers and endure across generations, and what role publishers, writers, and readers each play in the literary ecosystem. We'll also consider the voices, places, and histories that remain underrepresented in literature, and the stories that still need to be told.

Steve Wasserman is the publisher of Heyday and one of the country's most distinguished editors and literary publishers. Over a career spanning five decades, he has held senior editorial positions at Yale University Press, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, and Random House, and served as editor of the *Los Angeles Times* Book Review, where he helped create the *Los Angeles Times* Festival of Books. Steve has worked with many of the most influential writers of our time and continues to shape the literary landscape through his work at Heyday. He continues to write for different literary magazines. Steve lives in Berkeley.