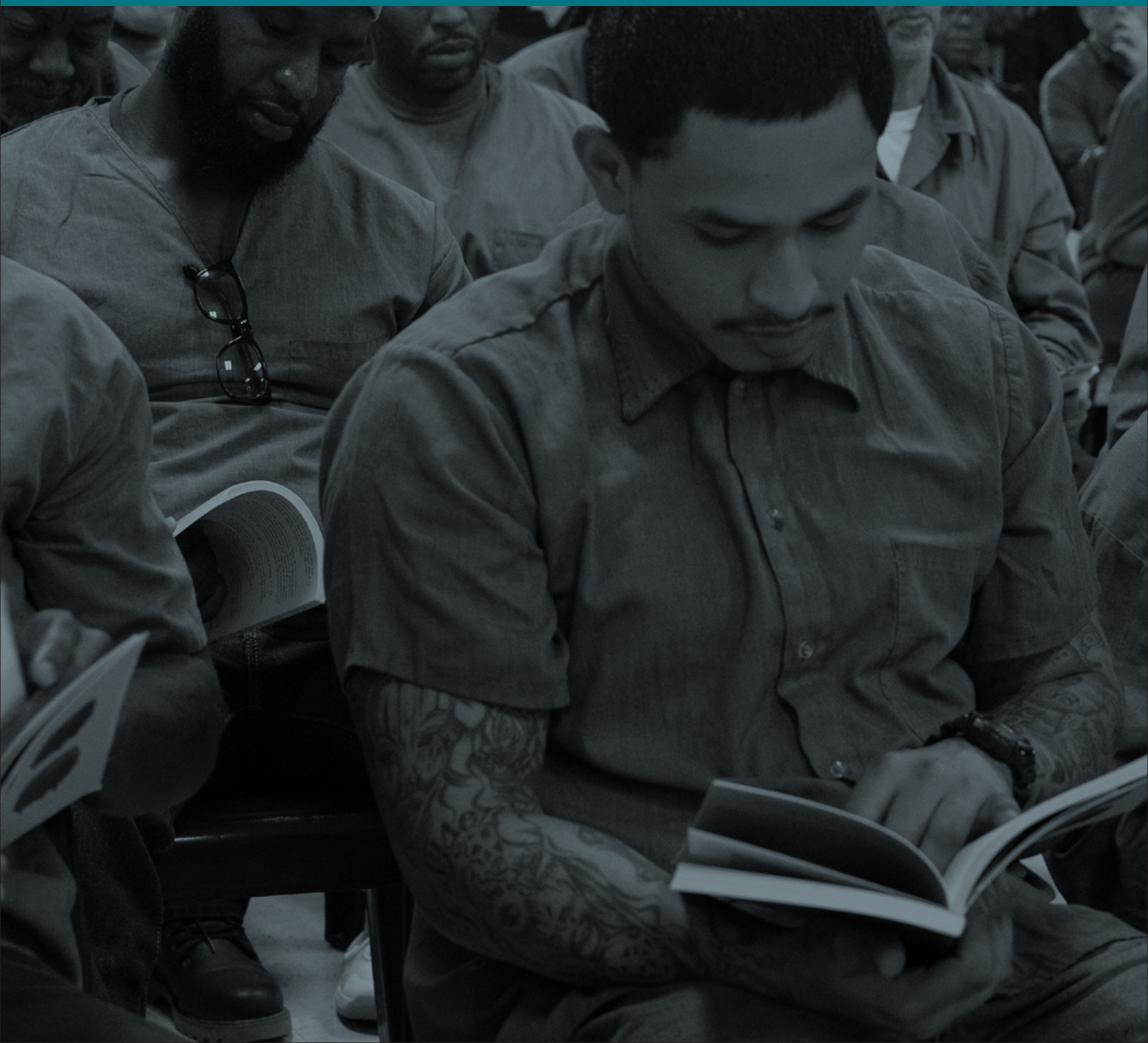


2023/24



INSIDE
LITERARY PRIZE



Inside Literary Prize

Do you believe in the power of books?

The Inside Literary Prize is a national honor that will be bestowed on one exceptional book by a jury of 300 incarcerated individuals voting at a dozen prisons across the country.

Originating from discussions between Freedom Reads Founder & CEO Reginald Dwayne Betts; bookstore owner and podcaster Lori Feathers; the Center for Justice Innovation; and the National Book Foundation, the Inside Literary Prize provides a national platform to honor the insights of incarcerated people who, by reading literature that is shaping our current era, participate in America's shared cultural conversation.



National Book Foundation



Center for Justice Innovation

"I survived solitary, and rediscovered a sense of freedom, because someone slid *The Black Poets* edited by Dudley Randall into my cell one day. I realized that a poem can give somebody a whole world of hope. And after reading that book, I dedicated myself to helping other prisoners, and people outside of prison, discover the freedom blueprint that poetry, literature, and other arts can provide."

Reginald Dwayne Betts,
Founder & CEO of Freedom Reads

The Inside Literary Prize aims to:

Inspire hope and joy by connecting people to books in new and meaningful ways.

Provide opportunities to engage in profound and sustained discourse about books representing the best of contemporary literature published in the United States.

Raise national public awareness about the experience of incarceration by bringing people who are incarcerated to the forefront of cultural conversations.

Embark on a Literary Adventure

Freedom Reads is seeking judges for the inaugural Inside Literary Prize.

The Inside Literary Prize will foster meaningful connections and thought-provoking discussions through reading and opportunities for interaction and engagement. Freedom Reads will visit every participating prison in the Inside Literary Prize, bringing acclaimed authors to host readings and live discussions.

Whether you are picking up a book for the first time or you are a lifelong reader, we invite you to join us in this collective endeavor.

Judges will read, discuss, and vote on the winning book. It's a chance to come together, share insights, and celebrate the transformative power of literature.

"Reading is such an integral part of my life and when I come across bright minds who share a love of literature I light up with enthusiasm. Novels and writing have led me to many impromptu book clubs with the most interesting people filled with suggestions, reviews, and unlikely friendships."

Ramelle Kamack, Correctional Training Facility, Soledad, California

By the Numbers

1

Winner

4

Books

300

Judges

24

Live events

2,530

Books shipped

6

States

AZ, CO, MN, MO, NC, ND

12

Prisons

How to Get Involved

1

Read

Read four books.

25 judges at each prison will be selected to participate. Each judge will receive four brand new, paperback books to read in February and March.

2

Discuss

Discuss and vote.

Between April and May, the Freedom Reads team will visit every participating prison to host live discussions and voting. We look forward to seeing you there!

3

Discover

Discover and read the winning book.

Freedom Reads will provide 15 additional copies of the winning title to each prison.

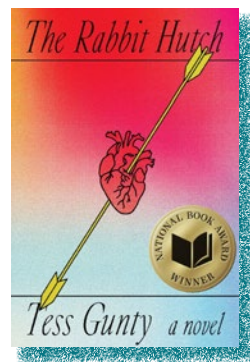
Not selected to be a judge?

Don't worry. Freedom Reads will provide an additional five copies of each book to your facility's library so that everyone can take part in the journey.

Shortlist

Tess Gunty *The Rabbit Hutch*

Alfred A. Knopf /
Penguin Random House



Winner,
2022 National
Book Award for
Fiction

Tess Gunty earned an MFA in creative writing from NYU, where she was a Lillian Vernon Fellow. Her work has appeared in the *Iowa Review*, *Joyland*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *No Tokens*, *Flash*, and elsewhere. She was raised in South Bend, Indiana, and lives in Los Angeles.

2022 National Book Awards Judges Citations

"A bold and prismatic debut novel, *The Rabbit Hutch* by Tess Gunty is about the daily lives of the residents in a depressed Midwestern complex. Told over the course of one hot summer week and through a kaleidoscope of voices, *The Rabbit Hutch* is beautiful, biting, darkly comic, and provocative. This novel is a snapshot of America and the many ways we struggle with loneliness, yearning, and the painful pursuit of freedom."

Jamil Jan Kochai *The Haunting of Hajji Hotak and Other Stories*

Viking Books /
Penguin Random House



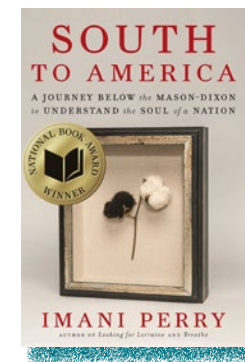
Finalist, 2022
National Book Award
for Fiction

Jamil Jan Kochai is the author of the short story collection, *The Haunting of Hajji Hotak and Other Stories*, a Finalist for the National Book Award, and *99 Nights in Logar*, a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award for Debut Novel.

"The stories in *The Haunting of Hajji Hotak* are dazzling. With inventive and moving prose, Jamil Jan Kochai challenges notions of place and identity through his beautiful portrayals of contemporary Afghan characters. The power of Kochai's writing is his insistence that readers witness the lives of people who too often have been defined through the eyes of others. These stories, filled with ferocity, humor and tenderness, will crack your heart wide open."

Imani Perry *South to America: A Journey Below the Mason-Dixon to Understand the Soul of a Nation*

Ecco / HarperCollins Publishers



Winner, 2022
National Book Award
for Nonfiction

Imani Perry is the Hughes-Rogers Professor of African American Studies at Princeton University. Perry is the *New York Times* best-selling author of *South to America: A Journey Below the Mason-Dixon to Understand the Soul of a Nation*.

"Imani Perry guides us gently below the Mason-Dixon line, drawn legally and geographically, and into the American South's cities, towns, forests, mountains, and coast lines to understand the region's history. Perry breathes fresh air into examinations of long-held policies and current cultural practices nuanced by place and time. *South to America* is elegantly personal and archival, predictive and bold, sweet and soulful, and, most of all, true."

Roger Reeves *Best Barbarian*

W. W. Norton & Company



Finalist, 2022
National Book Award
for Poetry

Roger Reeves is the author of *King Me*, *Best Barbarian*, and *Dark Days: Fugitive Essays*. A 2021–2022 Harvard Radcliffe Institute Fellow, Reeves is also the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, a Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Fellowship from the Poetry Foundation, and a 2015 Whiting Award, among other honors.

"In his sweeping collection *Best Barbarian*, Roger Reeves boldly explores the fissures among generations, where lore and language intersect. These poems are meditations that confront the cruelty of the human condition with complex insight and dogged tenacity. Reeves does not shy away from what startles and disrupts. With rich, vivid language that lifts off the page, he reminds us that 'All lions must lean into something other than a roar...'"

Inside Prize Timeline 2023/24

Feb–Mar

Read the four shortlisted books.

Apr–May

Attend an author reading.

The Inside Literary Prize tour will visit all 12 participating prisons.

Each stop on the tour will include:

- A reading, Q&A, and book signing with an acclaimed writer (General attendance)
- A live discussion and ballot voting (Attendance open to prize judges only)

June

Stay informed to discover the winning book.



About Freedom Reads



Freedom Reads
Founder &
CEO Reginald
Dwayne Betts
(Photo: Keenan
Hochschild)

Amidst the chaos and control that characterizes prison, it is difficult to bring into focus the intellectual, cultural, and emotional loss that incarcerated people experience. While there are many organizations dedicated to decreasing the number of people in prison, few focus on the burdens of prison for those imprisoned.

Founded in 2020 with a \$5.25 million grant from the Mellon Foundation, Freedom Reads is the only organization in the nation transforming the experience of incarceration for people in prison to meaningfully elevate the dignity of the millions of people in this country touched by the criminal legal system.

Vision

A Freedom Library in every cellblock in every prison in America. Freedom Reads envisions a society that acknowledges and nurtures the basic dignity and humanity of people in prison.

Mission

Freedom Reads' mission is to inspire and confront what prison does to the spirit. We bring beautiful, handcrafted bookcases into prisons, transforming cellblocks into Freedom Libraries. The Freedom Library is a physical intervention into the landscape of plastic and steel and loneliness that characterizes prison. In an environment where the freedom to think, to contribute to a community, and even to dream about what is possible is too often curtailed, Freedom Reads reminds those inside that they have not been forgotten.

Freedom Library

A three-shelf Freedom Library in American Black Walnut reflecting the curved design filled with the 500-book collection. (Photo: Karen Pearson)



The Freedom Library is a physical intervention into the chaos of prison, introducing beauty and possibility to a troubling space. To bring nature into the lives of people who may not have touched a tree in years or decades, we carve the Freedom Library from solid wood: maple, cherry, walnut, or oak. Instead of leaning against a wall, our bookcases curve and are positioned in the middle of an open space because, as Alberto Manguel argues in *The Library at Night*, "a circular library more generously allows the reader to imagine that every last page is also the first."

The Freedom Library is an idea that unites people through conversation, art, and literature: Each month, through our Book Circles, we expand the Freedom Library thousands of books at a time, placing the same acclaimed book in the hands of hundreds of readers across the nation. We bring our Freedom Ambassadors into prisons to bring art to life and provide those incarcerated with opportunities to interact with writers and artists.

Becoming a Library Patron is an intervention that changes the experience of everyone who enters a prison. The libraries include a range of materials and experiences designed to comfort and challenge, to meet readers where they are and where they're going. Freedom Libraries turn cellblocks into communities.

Stay Connected

Be a part of Freedom Reads.
There are many ways to get involved.

Write to us, we'll write back.
Share your thoughts on the Inside Literary Prize books. We are committed to responding to every letter we receive.

Freedom Reads
2666 State Street, Suite 5A
Hamden, CT 06517

Share with your family and friends.
We encourage families and friends to visit our website (freedomreads.org). Learn about our mission, discover how we collaborate with organizations for positive change, and more.

Sign up for our monthly newsletter.
Join our monthly newsletter. Write to us if you would like to receive our monthly newsletter to stay informed about all of our work and initiatives—from the Inside Literary Prize to the Freedom Library.

At Freedom Reads, we encourage connections with your loved ones. We have included two bookmarks designed for you to keep and share. One bookmark represents your literary journey with the Inside Literary Prize. One bookmark is to share with a friend or loved one.



Shortlist 2023/24

Tess Gundy
The Rabbit Hutch

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The Haunting of Hajji Hotak and Other Stories

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freedomreads.org

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