

Dr Susan McLaine

Bibliotherapist

Dr Susan McLaine is the creative director of Bibliotherapy Australia and a leading advocate and practitioner of bibliotherapy—using literature to help people deal with psychological, social and emotional challenges.

Recently Susan created the popular and unique Bibliotherapy with State Library Victoria podcast series, offering bibliotherapy in a facilitated self-reflective format for both adults and children.



Find out more.
Visit bibliotherapyaustralia.com.au

Dr McLaine answered some questions for us on bibliotherapy, and passed on some of her favourite bibliotherapy reads.

HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN BIBLIOTHERAPY TO PEOPLE WHO DON'T KNOW IT?

Broadly, bibliotherapy uses books to help people deal with psychological, social and emotional challenges. My way of describing bibliotherapy is the practice of 'using literature and storytelling as an effective wellbeing approach that positively affects people as individuals and within their communities'.

HOW OLD IS BIBLIOTHERAPY?

Bibliotherapy is an ancient practice of reading for therapeutic effect. The existence of ancient inscriptions over the entrance to libraries in Thebes and Alexandria – translated as 'healing place of the soul' – suggests that the idea of bibliotherapy goes back to ancient times. 'Bibliotherapy' originates from the Greek words for book, 'biblion', and healing, 'therapeia.' An American, Samuel Crothers, combined the Greek words in 1916 to describe bibliotherapy as a process in which literature was prescribed as medicine for various ailments.

ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF BIBLIOTHERAPY?

Books are used in all forms of bibliotherapy, a practice that offers carefully selected and evaluated texts, including non-fiction offering physical and mental health information, or fiction and poetry to provide a more creative form of therapy. Three strands of bibliotherapeutic practice can be identified internationally: self-help bibliotherapy, Books on Prescription schemes, and creative bibliotherapy. Although the types of books and genres differ, the 'biblio' – or book – component can be considered a constant factor.

HOW IS BIBLIOTHERAPY DIFFERENT FROM A BOOK GROUP?

Similarly to educational learning, a book club usually holds the expectation of reading the book before it is discussed. Bibliotherapy goes beyond the analysis and general discussion in academic and book club settings, offering a more reflective and singular experience. In bibliotherapy, the participants are encouraged and given the space to respond emotionally to a text.

WHERE YOU WILL FIND BIBLIOTHERAPY

Bibliotherapy has evolved in a variety of professions and is interdisciplinary in nature. And within the various disciplines, across both clinical and non-clinical areas, literature is used with different therapeutic applications depending on the field of practice. Clinical disciplines include general medical practice, psychology, nursing, social work and counselling. Non-clinical areas include librarianship, education, aged care and criminal justice.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WELLBEING BENEFITS OF GROUP BIBLIOTHERAPY?

Some participants describe bibliotherapy as meditation and mindfulness for readers, saying it allows literature lovers to seek solace, comfort and answers by exposing thoughts, feelings and behaviours to closer examination. It opens access to the works of authors, poets and philosophers that give us essential information about the world and our relationship to it and to ourselves. Wellbeing outcomes include enhanced engagement, meaningful conversations, deep connection, and a sense of self-awareness, which allows for growth.

The way I work with bibliotherapy is to choose a story, poem or poetic non-fiction and some questions and curate them together, then read them aloud, often to a group. When bibliotherapy is delivered through reading aloud, it can awaken the delight of literature in the spoken word, in the aural tradition of storytelling and sharing this in a group allows a sense of belonging to emerge.



TALES AND TEA AT PENRITH CITY LIBRARY

Wednesdays 1-2.30pm

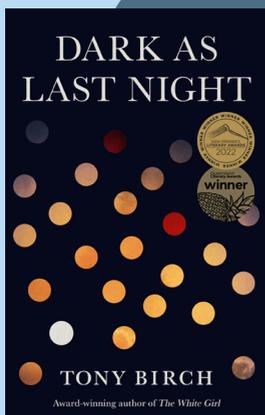
Penrith City Library holds weekly creative bibliotherapy sessions called Tales and Tea!

We read you a short story and reflect in a relaxed, social setting. Come along, feel free to chat, or just sit back and listen.

Join us today!

Recommended Reads

Dr McLaine recommends these titles to lift your spirits, gain understanding and strengthen your resilience when times are tough. There's something for everyone in this fantastic list!

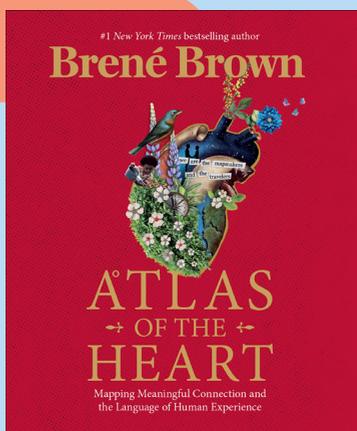


Dark as last night by Tony Birch

A potent compilation of 16 short stories about relationships – between children, siblings, teenagers, parents and children, the young and old, and even strangers. The stories capture these characters' humanity, courage, and good spirits amid life.

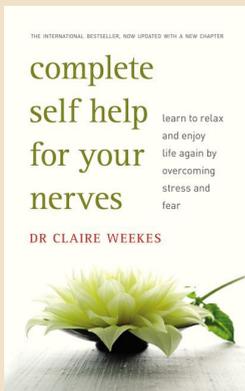
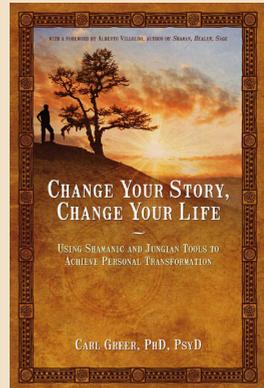
Atlas of the Heart by Dr Brené Brown

Dr. Brené Brown's latest book is developing our understanding of the riches found in emotions. I suggest listening to Brené's first TED talk: *The power of vulnerability*, which is one of the most viewed TED talks in the world and then give *Atlas of the heart* a go.



Change your story, change your life by Carl Greer

This book offers a practical self-help guide to personal transformation using traditional shamanic techniques similar to self-meditation.

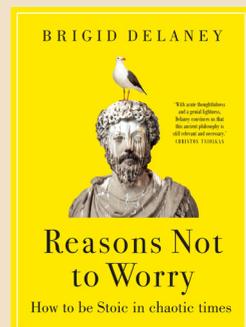


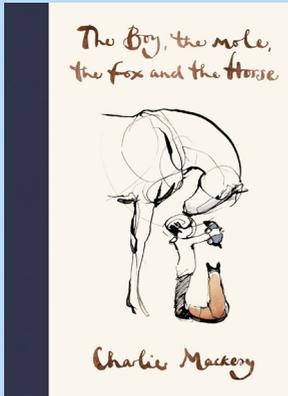
Complete self-help for your nerves by Dr Claire Weekes

Offers the results of years of experience treating real patients, including some who thought they'd never recover. With simple, step-by-step guidance, you will learn how to understand and analyse your own symptoms of anxiety and find the power to conquer your fear.

Reasons not to worry: how to be stoic in chaotic times by Brigid Delaney

There are quite a few books out at the moment on Stoicism. Brigid tells us that the wisest minds in history asked the same questions that we still struggle with today – and they found answers. Brigid shows us how we can apply the teachings of three ancient guides to our modern lives in a way that allows us to regain a sense of tranquillity.



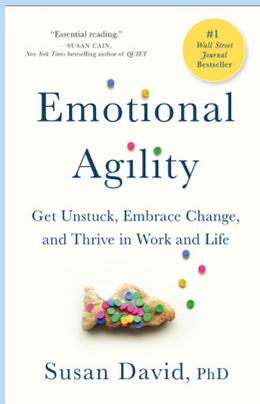


The Boy, the mole, the fox and the horse by Charlie Mackesy

Messages of friendship, companionship, kindness, encouragement, love and believing in yourself. A meaningful book beautifully illustrated. There is something special on every page that can be reread many times. Suitable for any age and especially good for sharing.

Sounds wild & broken by David George Haskell

Nature's beauty can elicit profound responses that deeply move and affect us. This book helps us to consider the many manifestations of aesthetic experience in our lives and to reflect on the ways aesthetic judgement mediates and impacts upon our important decisions and relationships.



Emotional Agility by Susan David

This brilliant, clear and practical book teaches us that negative emotions aren't bad, they're signals. Learn how to work with them and your core values to drive change.

How you tap into the benefits of bibliotherapy

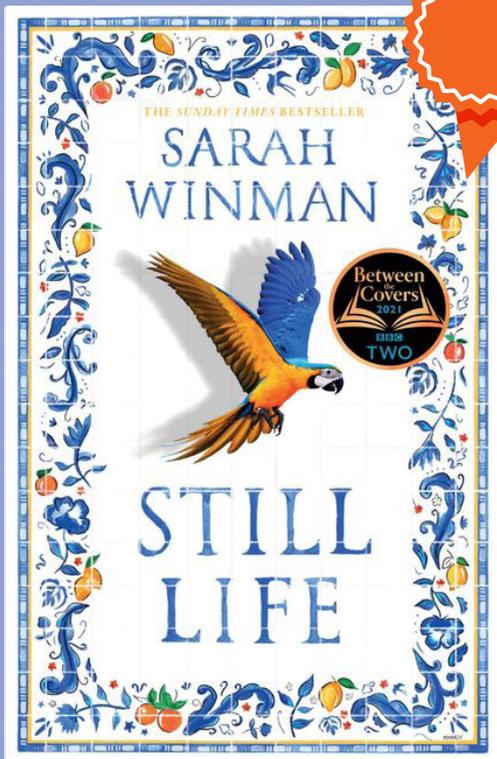
To tap into the benefits of bibliotherapy, I encourage readers to prepare for the reading by quietening their mind before starting to read. Try the following:

- Breathing more deeply
- Relaxing your bodies, muscle by muscle, joint by joint, bone by bone, letting tension pour away from them
- Settling back comfortably against your chair, bed, or wherever you have chosen. Letting what you are sitting or lying on fully support you to feel physically grounded and anchored.
- Try to read a little more slowly to relax into the words, images, and messages within the words. Try stopping for a moment at the end of a page and checking in with yourself to see if you took in what you read.
- Don't worry if your awareness drifts off; relax, and when you notice, gently invite your awareness back.
- After the end of the story, poem, or piece of text that resonated, stop for a little while to allow yourself to dwell quietly in the space the words and images create. You may like to spend some quiet time in self-reflection.



Recommended

Reads



Still Life
by Sarah Winman

Through a story that takes place in the shadow of that common trauma of missing someone, we see individuals who come together to make a soul family rather than a blood family.

Through an unusually thoughtful, kind, and compassionate man, we see that beauty is truth, truth is beauty, and one doesn't exist without the other. Becoming an admirer of poetry and art helps us reposition our sight and judgement, opening our eyes to the world's beauty and helping us figure this life out.