

# POUR SOME SUGAR ON ME

— DEF LEPPARD

PEAK  
VOLUME

TURN IT UP THIS WINTER WITH  
POW DAYS & WOW NIGHTS

BOOK NOW!  
ENJOY 15% OFF  
OUR BEST AVAILABLE RATE

USE CODE **SKITAHOE15**

2 Night Minimum Stay.  
Standard blackout  
dates & holidays are excluded.



LAKE TAHOE

BOOK AT [HARDROCKCASINOLAKETAHOE.COM](http://HARDROCKCASINOLAKETAHOE.COM)



@HRHCLAKETAHOE

#PEAKVOLUME

## ART OF THE STATE

BY KRIS VAGNER



In *Heavy: An American Memoir*, author Kiese Laymon of Mississippi tells his story of growing up in a violent household and eventually becoming a college professor.  
COURTESY/NEVADA HUMANITIES

## Book it

Nevada Reads

### One of the hardest-hitting books I read

last year was a coming-of-age novel called *Marlena*, by Julie Buntin. The protagonist, 15-year-old Cat, used to be a high-achieving prep school student. Now that her parents have separated, Cat's mother moves her to a small, depressing town in Michigan, where her new friends cut school and cook meth. The girl next door, Marlena, who's based on the author's own former teenage neighbor, becomes Cat's closest friend. Marlena depends heavily on opioids to cope with her own dysfunctional family. The world Buntin creates is so real and honest that, despite its freezing wind and low, gray sky, I loved spending time there.

*Marlena* was one of two books that were part of Nevada Reads, a statewide "book club," that Nevada Humanities began running in 2018. The other was *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic* by Sam Quinones. Nevadans are invited to read books along with the rest of the community, and attend events such as author talks and book salons.

If you're surprised that a state-funded agency with a name that's perhaps redolent of ivory-tower exclusivity is asking you to read books that involve opioids and meth and teenage sex scenes, the humanities council wants you to know that it's trying to shed any reputation it may have as being out of touch with Nevadans' real-life experiences.

"People call our office thinking we're the Humane Society," said Stephanie Gibson, the agency's program manager.

"Over the last couple years, we've undergone a strategic plan," she added.

Gibson and her colleagues hope to become better known for acknowledging the cultures and real-life experiences that people are already a part of—whether that means celebrating Nevada's various foods and languages—or wandering around near freezing cold lakes under low, gray skies in Michigan with Buntin's fictional teenagers.

Last year, Buntin talked with students at Elko High School and Reno's Innovations High School.

"Most students were thrilled to hear from her," Gibson said. "She came from this pretty poor upbringing. To see her standing before them working in New York, working in the editing world, writing about her best friend who she lost, it showed them that their story was important, too."

Quinones Skyped into a book club meeting at the Douglas County Library, did a workshop with 20 students in Las Vegas, and spoke with another estimated 1,500 Southern Nevada high schoolers. His website lists some comments from his young audience members, including one from a student named Catherine: "This showed me that there are people that do care not just about famous people but rather about the lower society and their struggles."

Typically, organizers choose a single book. Gibson said, of her group's approach to selecting books, "We're just playing fast and loose with the whole concept." In 2018, the group decided that Nevada author Ellen Hawkins would bring a relevant voice to the conversations about opioids and added her to the event schedule.

"She writes eloquently and passionately about her daughter's drug abuse," said Gibson.

For 2019, Nevada Reads is starting out with three books. In *Heavy: An American Memoir* Mississippi author Kiese Laymon tells his story of growing up in a violent household and eventually becoming a college professor. *Educated* is Idaho native Tara Westover's memoir about growing up in a family of survivalists so isolated she didn't set foot in a classroom until age 17. And *Don't Skip Out On Me* is a novel by former Renoite Willie Vlautin.

Events will begin in April and continue through fall or later, but you can start reading any time. □

To follow Nevada Reads events, which are slated to begin in April, follow Nevada Humanities on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.