



Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024

## LOUISIANA BOOK FESTIVAL SELECTS EUDORA WELTY'S *THE OPTIMIST'S DAUGHTER* FOR POPULAR ONE BOOK, ONE FESTIVAL DISCUSSION GROUP

**BATON ROUGE, La.** — *The Optimist's Daughter*, a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Eudora Welty, is the selection for the 2024 *One Book, One Festival* discussion group, the 15th anniversary of the program.

Dr. Gary Richards, who has facilitated 11 previous sessions since *One Book, One Festival* began in 2008, returns to moderate the talk. Participants read the same book in advance and then join the scholar-led discussion with others at the festival.

The 20th Louisiana Book Festival will be held **Saturday, November 2, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.** in downtown Baton Rouge at the Louisiana State Capitol, the State Library of Louisiana, Capitol Park Museum, and the surrounding Capitol Park area. The [\*One Book, One Festival\*](#) discussion will happen from **1:45 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. in Senate Committee Room E of the State Capitol.**

"We hear from people who attend the festival that this is one of their favorite programs every year," said Lieutenant Governor Billy Nungesser. "That's due in no small part to the expertise of Gary Richards. We're thrilled that he's back to lead this year's talk."

"Gary literally has literary discussion groupies, so we are so grateful he continues to return and guide these annual gatherings – and that we don't have to face his fans if he didn't," said Jim Davis, the festival's executive director. "We encourage others to join the discussion – and the fan club!"



Gary Richards leads the *One Book One Festival* discussion of Truman Capote's *A Christmas Memory* during the 2019 Louisiana Book Festival. Richards returns in 2024 to moderate a talk on Eudora Welty's *The Optimist's Daughter*.

Richards is a professor of English and former chairman of the Department of English and Linguistics at the University of Mary Washington. He is an expert on southern literature and culture who previously taught at the University of New Orleans.

"The beloved writer Eudora Welty was a master of the short story, with scholars considering *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* one of the crowning achievements in the genre. But she also wrote a range of novels, and none has proven as poignant as *The Optimist's Daughter*," Richards said.

What first appeared as a story in *The New Yorker* in 1969 was named the winner of the 1973 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. "This novel stands to speak to any reader who has puzzled through the conflicting emotions surrounding the death of a family member," Richards said.

*The Optimist's Daughter* follows Laurel McKelva Hand as she journeys to New Orleans to care for her ailing father, Judge McKelva, during Carnival season. After his death, Laurel grapples with her father's second wife, Fay, and confronts the complexities of their family history, ultimately trying to understand her father's legacy and her own place in the world. The story unfolds against the backdrop of the South, weaving in themes of memory, inheritance, and the challenge of moving forward, something Welty knew firsthand.

"Biographically inflected by Welty's negotiations of the losses of her own mother and brothers, this slender novel meticulously represents the death of the protagonist's father and her subsequent negotiations of the fraught terrain of grief, familial drama, communal rituals, and misremembering," Richards said.

Last year, Richards led the *One Book, One Festival* discussion on Truman Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. He's also conducted prior *One Book, One Festival* sessions on Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*, John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*, Harper Lee's *Go Set a Watchman*, Capote's "A Christmas Memory," and Ernest Gaines's *A Gathering of Old Men*, among others.

*One Book, One Festival* is free and open to the public.

For complete details on the 2024 Louisiana Book Festival, visit [LouisianaBookFestival.org](https://LouisianaBookFestival.org) and follow us on the [Louisiana Book Festival Facebook page](#).

The [Louisiana Center for the Book](#) was established in the State Library of Louisiana in 1994. Its mission is to stimulate public interest in reading, books, literacy, and libraries and to celebrate Louisiana's rich literary heritage. It is the official state affiliate of the Library of Congress Center for the Book.



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