



# LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA

**Dennis T. Clark**  
*Librarian of Virginia*

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## **Elizabeth Varon, Angie Kim, Janine Joseph and Kwame Alexander receive Virginia Literary Awards Library of Virginia Recognizes 2024 Recipients and Patron of Letters Degree Recipients Reginald Dwayne Betts and Adriana Trigiani**

**RICHMOND, VIRGINIA** – The Library of Virginia is pleased to announce the winners of the 27th Annual Virginia Literary Awards, the Commonwealth’s premier event honoring Virginia writers and their contributions to literature.

Presented by Dominion Energy and supported by Carole and Marcus Weinstein, this year’s celebration, held Sept. 21, also included the presentation of an honorary Patron of Letters degree to poet, lawyer and Freedom Reads founder Reginald Dwayne Betts and to bestselling author and award-winning filmmaker Adriana Trigiani, a longtime host of the event. The Library’s highest honor, the degree is awarded by the Library Board to individuals who have made significant contributions to the fields of history, library science or archival science.

“The Library is thrilled to be able to shine a spotlight on stories from these amazing authors who contribute great works to the Virginia literary landscape,” said Librarian of Virginia Dennis T. Clark. “We’re pleased that this event not only recognizes literary excellence, but also supports the work we do each day in providing invaluable resources and programs for citizens of the Commonwealth.”

The literary award winners, who each received an award and monetary prize, are as follows:

- **NONFICTION AWARD: Elizabeth R. Varon** | Longstreet: The Confederate General Who Defied the South
- **FICTION AWARD: Angie Kim** | Happiness Falls
- **POETRY AWARD: Janine Joseph** | Decade of the Brain: Poems
- **CHILDREN’S LITERATURE: Kwame Alexander** | An American Story
- **PEOPLE’S CHOICE AWARD FOR NONFICTION: Sheila Johnson** | Walk Through Fire: A Memoir of Love, Loss, and Triumph
- **PEOPLE’S CHOICE AWARD FOR FICTION: Martin Clark** | The Plinko Bounce
- **ART IN LITERATURE: THE MARY LYNN KOTZ AWARD: Katy Hessel** | The Story of Art Without Men

The Library presented the awards in front of 250 attendees at its annual dinner and gala. Additional award and event sponsors included the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and William and Mary Libraries. The annual gala also raised significant funds for the Library's conservation, education and community outreach initiatives.

"This event brings together the best in Virginia literature and gathers Library friends and supporters to raise critical funds for the Library's mission," said Scott Dodson, Executive Director of the Library of Virginia Foundation. "Support from the event and silent auction help ensure that the Library continues to be a vital institution for those seeking to connect with their history at a trusted source."

Information on each winner and honoree is as follows:

**Elizabeth R. Varon** – 2024 nonfiction award winner for "Longstreet: The Confederate General Who Defied the South" – is the Langbourne M. Williams Professor of American History at the University of Virginia and a member of the executive council of UVA's John L. Nau III Center for Civil War History. Varon is the author of six books, including "Armies of Deliverance: A New History of the Civil War," which won the 2020 Gilder Lehrman Lincoln Prize. Her most recent book, "Longstreet: The Confederate General Who Defied the South," was reviewed in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, The Atlantic and The Guardian. Her current project is a biography of humanitarian Clara Barton.

**Angie Kim** – 2024 fiction award winner for "Happiness Falls" – won the Edgar Award and the International Thriller Writers' Thriller Award for her debut novel, "Miracle Creek," which was named one of the 100 best mysteries and thrillers of all time by Time, and one of the best books of the year by Time, the Washington Post, Kirkus Reviews and the "Today" show. "Happiness Falls," her second novel, was an instant New York Times bestseller and a book club pick for "Good Morning America," Barnes & Noble, Belletrist and the Book of the Month Club.

**Janine Joseph** – 2024 poetry award winner for "Decade of the Brain: Poems" – is a poet and librettist from the Philippines and is an associate professor of creative writing at Virginia Tech. She is also author of "Driving Without a License," winner of the Kundiman Poetry Prize, and is co-editor of "Here to Stay: Poetry and Prose from the Undocumented Diaspora." Her poetry, essays and critical writings have appeared in numerous publications, including Newsweek, The Nation, The Atlantic, Orion, Poets & Writers, Poem-a-Day and the Smithsonian's "What It Means to Be American" project.

**Kwame Alexander** – 2024 children's literature award winner for "An American Story" – is a poet, educator, Emmy award-winning producer and number one New York Times bestselling author of 40 books. These include "This Is the Honey: An Anthology of Contemporary Black Poets," "Why Fathers Cry at Night," "An American Story," "The Door of No Return," and "Becoming Muhammad Ali," coauthored with James Patterson. Alexander is also the producer, showrunner and writer of "The Crossover" TV series, based on his Newbery Medal-winning novel of the same name, and the creator and host of the "Why Fathers Cry" podcast. Most recently he was appointed the Rudell Artistic Director of Literary Arts and writer-in-residence at the Chautauqua Institution.

**Sheila Johnson** – 2024 People's Choice nonfiction award winner for "Walk Through Fire: A Memoir of Love, Loss, and Triumph" – is the founder and CEO of the Salamander Collection, which operates luxury properties in the United States and the Caribbean. As a partner of Monumental Sports & Entertainment, Johnson is the only African American woman to have ownership in three professional sports teams: the Washington Wizards, the Washington Capitals and the Washington Mystics. She spearheaded the formation of WE Capital, a venture capital consortium to support and invest in female-led enterprises. She is the founder and chair of the Middleburg Film Festival and was the cofounder of Black Entertainment Television. Johnson serves on the Education Committee of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; as a committee member of NeuroArts

Blueprint: Advancing the Science of Arts, Health and Well-Being; and as chairman of the College of Performing Arts at The New School.

**Martin Clark** – 2024 People’s Choice fiction award winner for “The Plinko Bounce” – is a retired circuit court judge from Patrick County, Virginia. His novels have appeared on numerous bestseller lists, and the audio version of his book “The Substitution Order” was a number one national bestseller. Additionally, his novels have been chosen as a New York Times Notable Book, Editors’ Choice and Best Thriller of the Year; a Best Book of the Year by the Washington Post Book World, Bookmarks magazine and the Boston Globe; a Book-of-the-Month Club selection; a finalist for the Stephen Crane First Fiction Award; and the winner of the Library of Virginia’s People’s Choice Award for Fiction in 2009, 2016 and 2020.

**Katy Hessel** – 2024 Art in Literature: The Mary Lynn Kotz Award winner for “The Story of Art Without Men” – is an art historian, author, curator and broadcaster. Through her podcast “The Great Women Artists” and her Instagram account, which foreground women artists of the past and present, Hessel has become one of the most exciting voices in the art world today. Her debut book, “The Story of Art Without Men,” is a Sunday Times and New York Times bestseller and was named Waterstones Book of the Year. Hessel has been a columnist for The Guardian since 2022 and has presented art documentaries for the BBC. She is a Visiting Fellow at the University of Cambridge and a trustee of the Charleston Trust U.K.

Presented by the Library and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Art in Literature award recognizes an outstanding book published in the previous year that is written primarily in response to a work (or works) of art while also showing the highest literary quality as a creative or scholarly work. Established in 2013, the award is named in honor of Mary Lynn Kotz, author of the award-winning biography “Rauschenberg: Art and Life.”

**Reginald Dwayne Betts** – 2024 Patron of Letters degree recipient – was sentenced as an adult in Virginia to nine years in prison at age 16. A Yale Law School graduate and 2021 MacArthur Fellow, he founded the nonprofit Freedom Reads to empower people in prison through literature to imagine new possibilities for their lives. Freedom Reads has transformed prisoners’ access to literature by opening more than 300 Freedom Libraries in prisons nationwide, including 56 in Virginia prisons. Betts has also authored numerous works exploring the world of prison and the effects of violence and incarceration on American society. His books include his latest work, “Redaction,” a collaboration with Titus Kaphar; three works of poetry; and his memoir, “A Question of Freedom.” In 2019, Betts won the National Magazine Award in the Essays and Criticism category for “Getting Out,” his New York Times Magazine essay that chronicles his journey from prison to becoming a licensed attorney.

**Adriana Trigiani** – 2024 Patron of Letters degree recipient – is the New York Times bestselling author of 20 books of fiction and nonfiction published in 38 languages. Her novels include “The Shoemaker’s Wife,” “The Good Left Undone,” “Don’t Sing at the Table” and “Lucia, Lucia.” She is host of the hit podcast “You Are What You Read.” She is an award-winning playwright, television writer/producer and filmmaker. Trigiani wrote and directed the major motion picture adaptation of her debut novel, “Big Stone Gap,” adapted her novel “Very Valentine” for television, and directed “Then Came You.” She wrote and directed the documentary film “Queens of the Big Time,” winner of the Audience Awards at the Hamptons International Film Festival and the Palm Springs International Film Festival. Trigiani grew up in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia where she co-founded The Origin Project, an in-school writing program serving over 2,700 students in Appalachia.

Photos of the winners and honorees can be found at this link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/wn3rypu5p0r2mymtiuosa/ALp3AC3u0Gv29PzqhC6dsGk?rlkey=4eirhfpmdb9o3lwcsmc3f2i4g&dl=0>

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#### **ABOUT THE VIRGINIA LITERARY AWARDS**

In 1997, the Library of Virginia established its annual Virginia Literary Awards program to honor Virginia writers and celebrate their contributions to the literary landscape of our state and nation. Given to Virginia authors in the categories of fiction and poetry — and to nonfiction authors for works about a Virginia subject as well — the awards are presented at an annual celebration that has become the Library’s signature event and an eagerly anticipated cultural tradition in Richmond. While the main award recipients are selected by independent panels of judges, the Library also invites book lovers and readers to vote for their favorite works for the People’s Choice Awards for Fiction and Nonfiction. New this year is the Children’s Virginia Literary Award. A partnership between the Library of Virginia and William and Mary Libraries, the award honors excellence in the field of children’s literature with a focus on Virginia. In the past, the Library has also bestowed a Literary Lifetime Achievement Award to recognize the enduring influence of an outstanding Virginia writer, with past winners including Earl Hamner, Lee Smith, Jan Karon, Tom Robbins, Charles Wright, Barbara Kingsolver, Rita Dove, John Grisham, Tom Wolfe and David Baldacci.

#### **ABOUT THE LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA AND FOUNDATION**

The Library of Virginia is the state’s oldest institution dedicated to the preservation of Virginia’s history and culture. Our online offerings attract nearly 4 million website visits per year, and our resources, exhibitions and events bring in nearly 100,000 visitors each year. The Library’s collections, containing more than 130 million items, document and illustrate the lives of both famous Virginians and ordinary citizens. The Library is located in downtown Richmond near Capitol Square at 800 East Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23219. Learn more at [www.lva.virginia.gov](http://www.lva.virginia.gov).

The Library of Virginia Foundation supports the Library of Virginia and its mission by raising private financial support, managing its endowment, and helping to bring Virginia’s history and culture to life. Learn more at [lvafoundation.org](http://lvafoundation.org).