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BOOKS

8 Short Nonfiction Books Your Book Club Will Love

Consider these relatively fast reads, including fascinating histories, essays and a bite-size biography

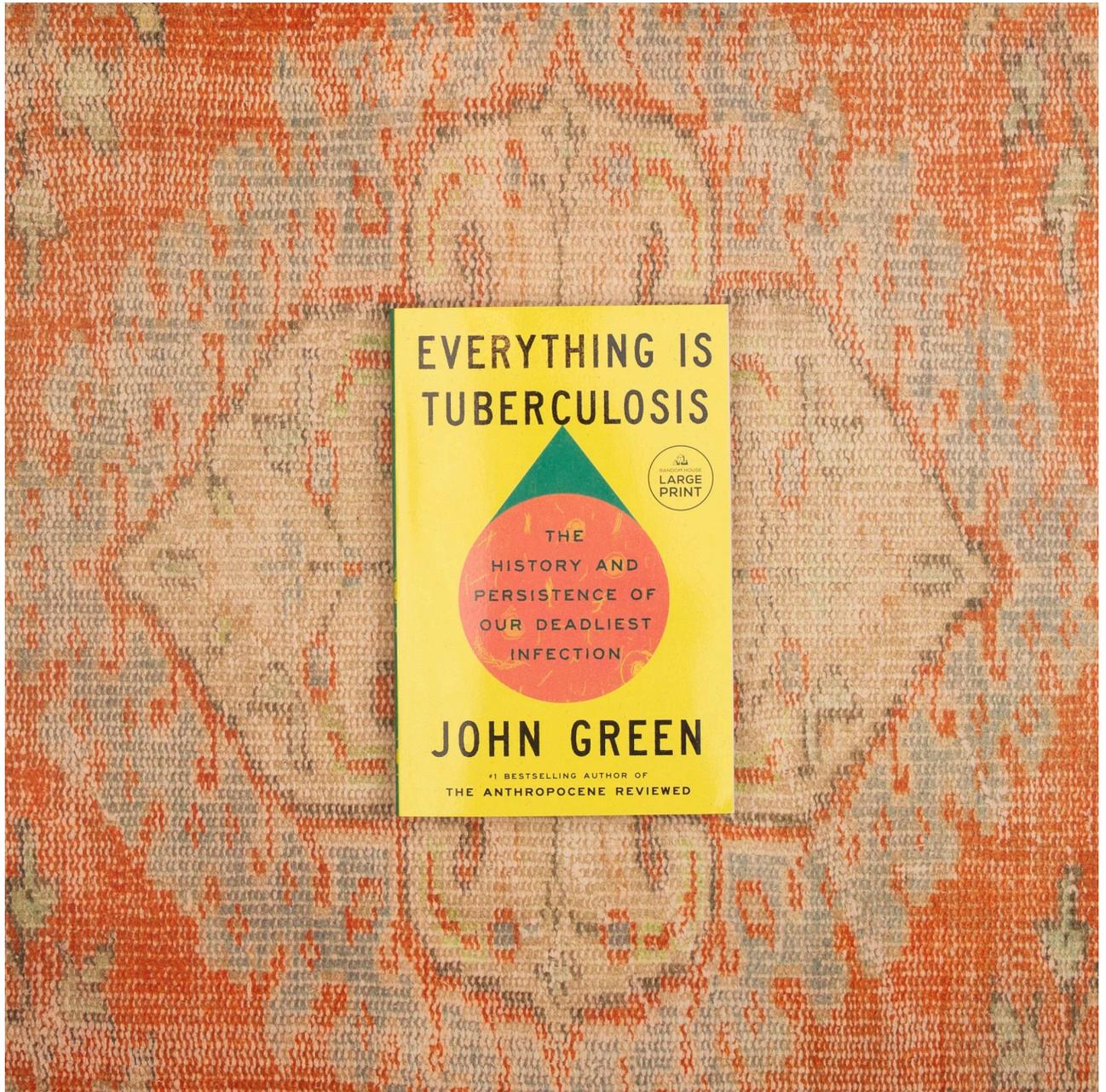
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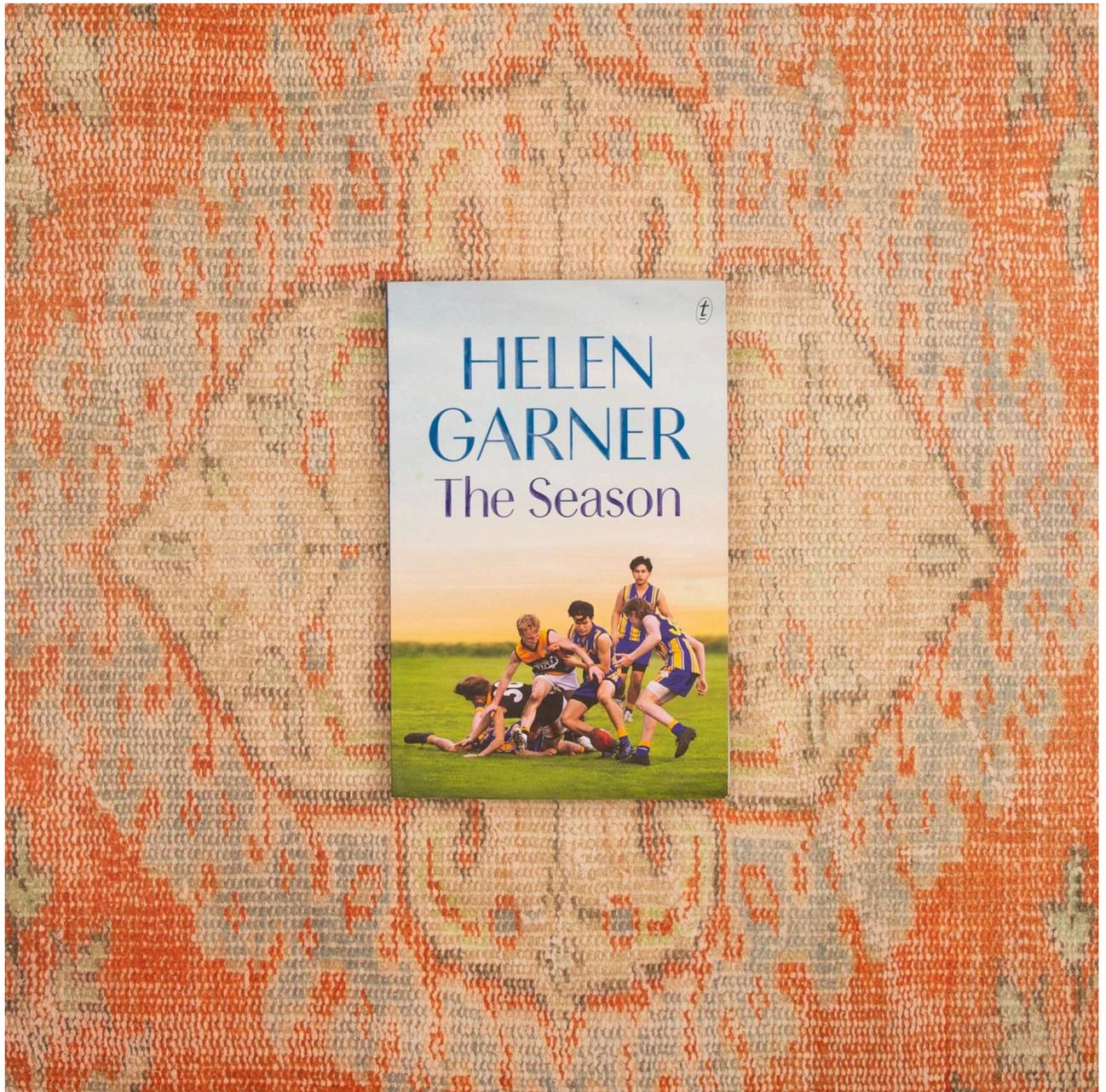
If you or members of your book club can't seem to get through long, heavy reads, we have some options for you: short biographies, essays, histories and other unique works of nonfiction that everyone should have the time (and motivation) to finish. Each of these eight very different books has fewer than 230 pages. (Fiction lovers, meanwhile, can check out our list of [short novels your book club will love](#) and [wonderful short story collections](#).)



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***Everything Is Tuberculosis* by John Green (2025), 208 pages**

You may be familiar with John Green, the YouTube star, podcaster and wildly popular author of young-adult novels, including 2012's *The Fault in Our Stars*. In this bestseller, he tackles a personal obsession and a public health crisis: tuberculosis, a curable disease that kills 1.25 million people every year. Eleanor Roosevelt and the Brontë sisters were sufferers. Green notes that Bosnian Serb tuberculosis patients were handpicked to assassinate Austria's Archduke Franz Ferdinand because they had already been handed death sentences with their tuberculosis diagnoses. This recounting of the disease's history and cultural impact is enlivened by the story of Henry Reider, a teenage patient in modern-day Sierra Leone. As we confront today's health crises and conflicts — measles outbreaks, vaccination battles, dramatically revised nutrition guidelines — Green offers the timely and succinct view of one fascinating disease with a long and deadly reach.



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***The Season* by Helen Garner (2024), 208 pages**

Past 80, the Australian writer Helen Garner feels her world shrinking and her memory ebbing, but she's buoyed by Amby, her 15-year-old grandson, a star on the football field (Australian Rules football, also called "footy," a sort of rugby-soccer hybrid). Known for her novels (1984's *The Children's Bach*) and nonfiction (*The First Stone*, 1995), Garner needed a new writing project. So, while admitting to a lack of understanding of men in general and this fast-paced contact sport in particular, she begins spending long afternoons watching Amby's practices and matches — an unlikely project that leads to this entertaining account of a season with his team. She ends up developing a fierce comradeship with her grandson and his world of drills, tackles, brawls and spectacularly odd haircuts. At one point, Garner finds herself manically screaming her grandson's name during a key match. "Watch out, Helen — you'll have a heart attack," another bystander warns. "I can think of worse ways to die," she quips. You don't have to be a sports fan to enjoy this heartwarming story about intergenerational bonding.

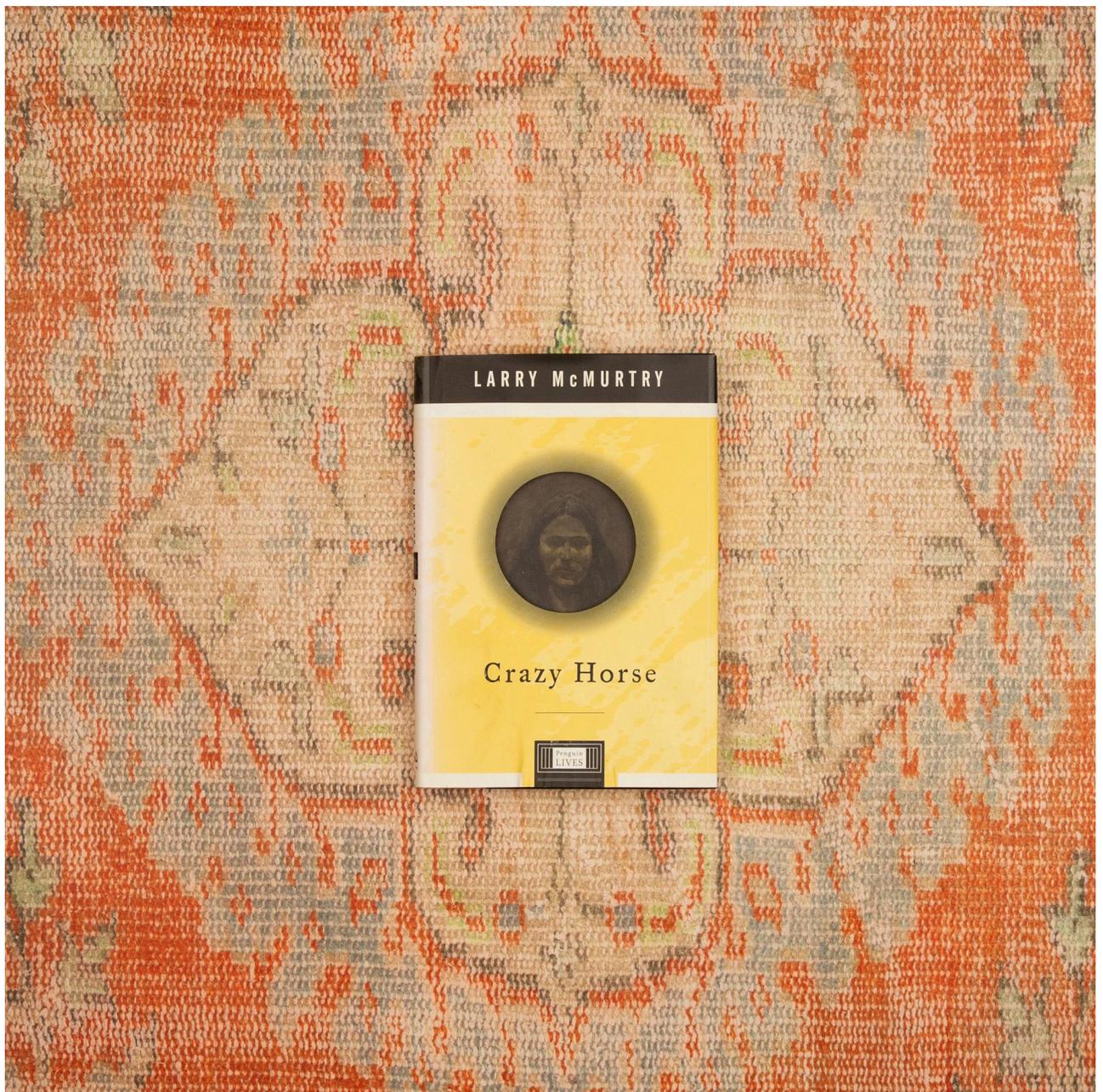


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***Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015), 176 pages**

Ta-Nehisi Coates's unapologetic meditation on what it is like to live in the body of a Black man in the United States, to never be entirely at ease at home, was a blockbuster when it was released 10 years ago. He wrote this National Book Award winner as a letter to his then-15-year-old son, an only child, in the aftermath of the 2014 homicide of Eric Garner by a police officer. Coates chronicles his childhood, dodging trouble in Baltimore, and his college years, when he joyfully soaked up Black culture at Howard University. He also discusses life in New York and the attendant struggles he's faced — including the killing of a college buddy by a police officer and an incident where a white woman pushed his small son in a racist confrontation. "Never forget that we were enslaved in this country longer than we have been free," he writes.

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***Crazy Horse* by Larry McMurtry (1999), 160 pages**

Larry McMurtry — the esteemed novelist (1985's *Lonesome Dove*), screenwriter (*Brokeback Mountain*, 2005) and chronicler of the West — penned this short biography of the Oglala Lakota Sioux warrior who helped defeat Lt. Colonel George Armstrong Custer at the 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn. His story takes us into an ignoble chapter of American history, when the nomadic buffalo-hunting way of life for Plains Native Americans was being demolished by the United States government. This is one of the fascinating books in the Penguin Lives series, which features well-known authors writing mini-bios; Edna O'Brien profiled James Joyce, for example, while Jane Smiley tackled Charles Dickens. They're slim but illuminating stories of fascinating lives.

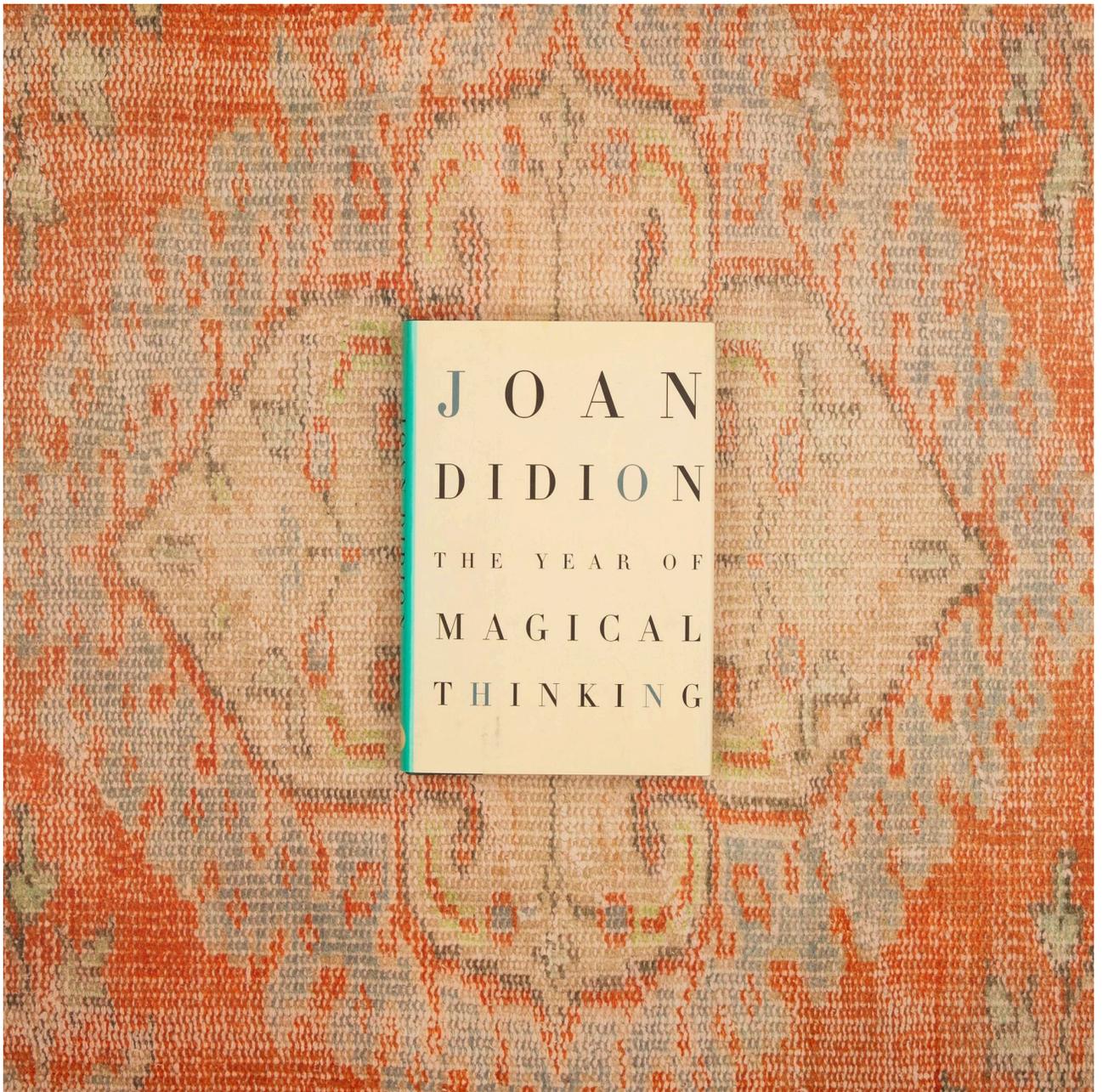


***The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion (2005), 227 pages**

This National Book Award winner is a heartbreaker and modern classic about grief and the devastation of loss. The late, great Didion recounts her life in the year following the sudden death by heart failure of her husband, writer John Dunne, and the concurrent serious illness of their only daughter, Quintana Roo. There are so many regrets to mull. So many tricks the mind plays. "Survivors look back and see omens, messages they missed," Didion writes. As she pages through a dictionary left open on Dunne's desk, she panics: "What word had he last looked up, what had he been thinking. By turning the pages, had I lost the message?" It's just beautifully written, with so much food for thought and discussion.

***What Art Does: An Unfinished Theory* by Brian Eno, illustrated by Bette Adriaanse (2025), 128 pages**

Brian Eno, a founding member of the band Roxy Music and a producer for other musicians (David Bowie, U2, Coldplay), was inspired to write this homage to art after meeting a 15-year-old who reported that her teachers said she was too smart to attend art school. "Art schools should not have to compete with science subjects as though they are important in the same way," Eno says in a YouTube video about the book, which is exuberantly illustrated in pink and white. Art, he posits, is everything nonessential — including haircuts, bay windows and card tricks. Every object we touch, every movie we watch, every song we hear and every building we see started with a spark of an idea. Art is also the adult form of play; it puts us in touch with our feelings and lets us imagine our way through problems. His words are inspiring for new artists and affirming for anyone devoted to creativity.



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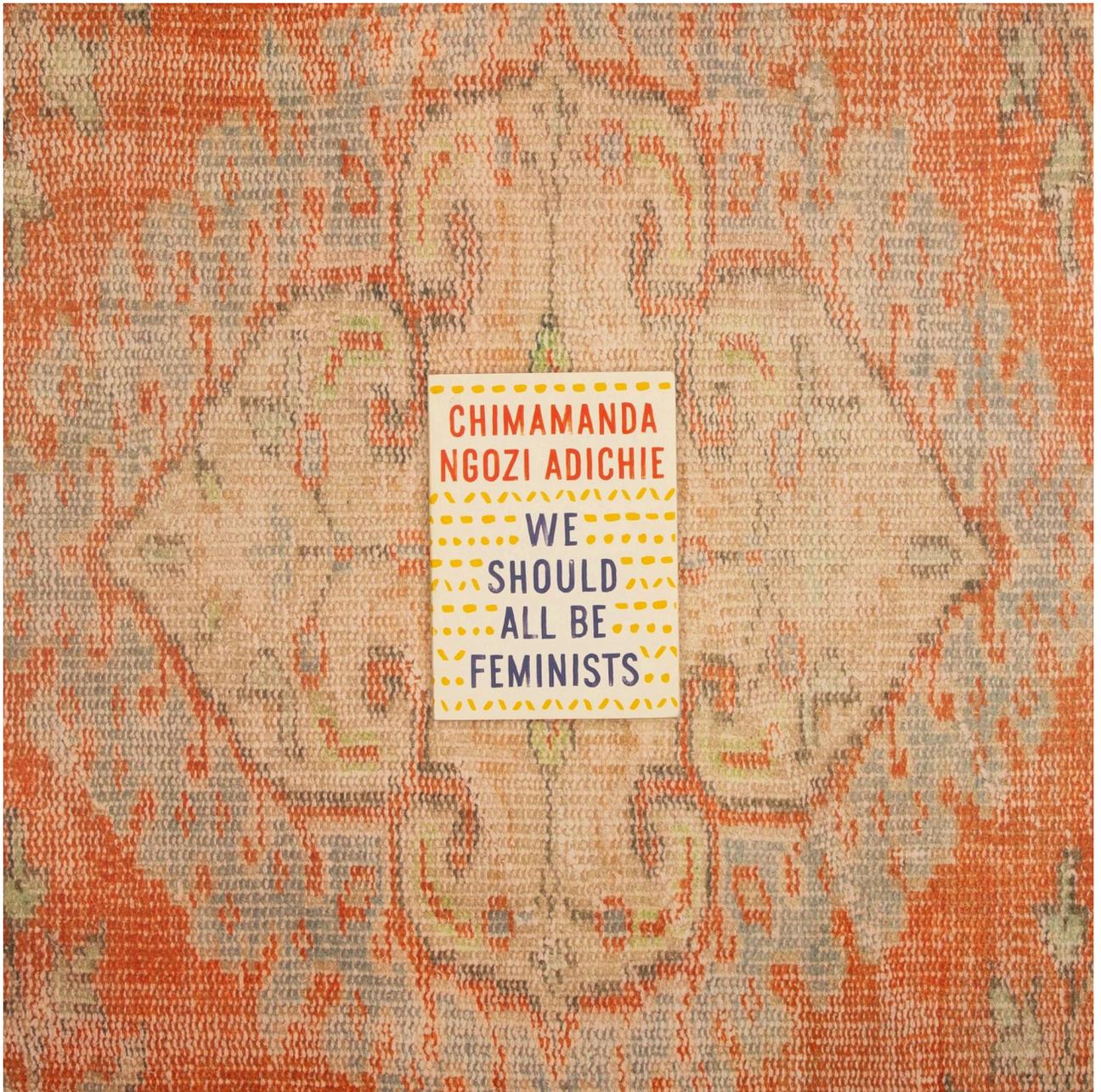


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***We Should All Be Feminists* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2014), 64 pages**

The author of the best-selling 2013 novel *Americanah*, among others, outlines her evolution from a Nigerian teenager who had to look up the word “feminist” in the dictionary to a grown woman who sees sexism everywhere — including in her native country, where restaurant servers address her male companion while ignoring her. “Gender matters everywhere in the world. And I would like today to ask that we should begin to dream about and plan for a different world,” she writes in this forthright essay that started life as a TED Talk. It’s both a satisfyingly quick read and a reminder that equal rights for women have yet to be fully realized. For earlier takes on the age-

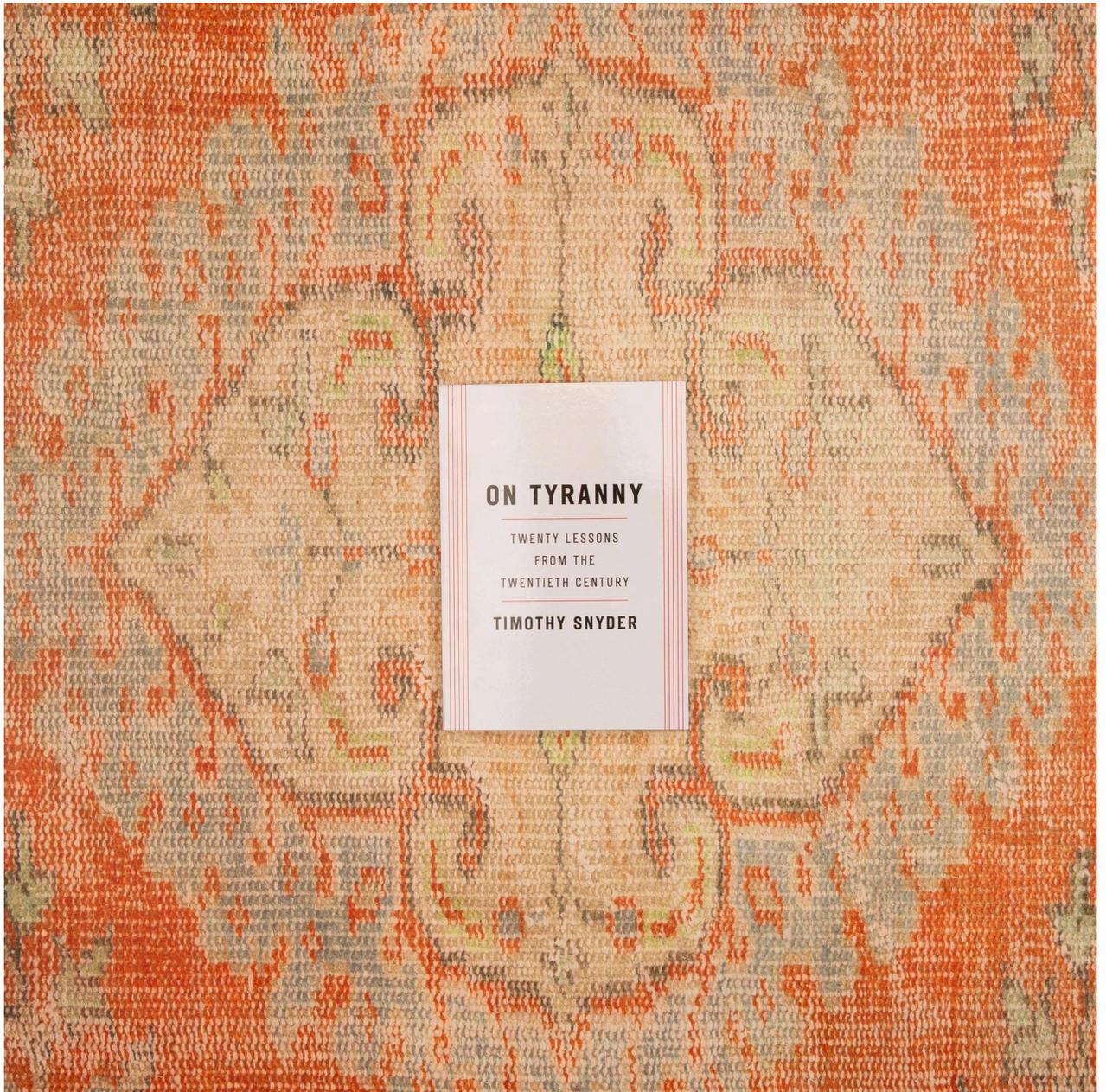


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old problem, try Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), 128 pages, and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by Mary Wollstonecraft (1792), about 150 pages.

***On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons From the 20th Century* by Timothy Snyder (2017), 128 pages**

Timothy Snyder is a Yale history professor and esteemed Holocaust historian, author of 2015's *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*. His pocket-size, best-selling volume, *On Tyranny*, is an essential guide and thought-provoker for anyone who worries about what power-hungry leaders can do without adequate checks and balances. He draws lessons from the rise of totalitarian regimes from 20th-century history and offers practicable ways to fight back when a society begins its turn toward dictatorship – the signs of which are remarkably consistent, he argues. Among his lessons: “Believe in truth,” because when facts are abandoned, “no one can



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criticize power, because there is no basis on which to do so”; and “Do not obey in advance,” because “anticipatory obedience is a political tragedy.” His more recent book, 2024’s *On Freedom*, is an incisive look at how governments can allow their citizens to truly flourish.

For more suggestions, check out Kenneth C. Davis’s *The World in Books: 52 Works of Great Short Nonfiction* (2024), in which the author describes a year’s worth of wonderful short books (if you read one a week, that is) and what makes each one worth a read.

Maria Speidel is a writer who lives in Los Angeles with a house full of books.

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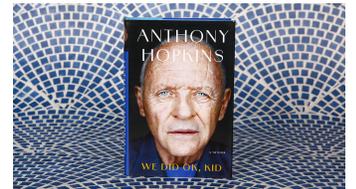
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