



Michigan Humanities

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha’s Book, ‘What the Eyes Don’t See,’ Chosen as This Year’s Great Michigan Read**

*Pediatrician Tells of How She Grew Concerned about Lead in Flint’s Water Supply*

**FLINT, Mich.** — Residents throughout Michigan were invited today to join in reading and discussing “What the Eyes Don’t See,” Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha’s riveting account of her discovery that Flint’s children were being poisoned by lead leaching into the city’s drinking water. The book is Michigan Humanities’ choice for the 2019-2020 Great Michigan Read, and was unveiled today at the Flint Public Library.

“Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha’s willingness to fight for children and tirelessly advocate for change in and beyond Michigan will have readers cheering as she follows the science and her young patients’ experiences to uncover one of the state’s worst public health catastrophes,” said Shelly Hendrick Kasprzycki, Michigan Humanities president and CEO. “We believe it’s important for Michigan citizens to read, discuss and learn from what she has so skillfully written, and we’re anticipating an engaging, timely Great Michigan Read program that addresses water quality and access, environmental injustice, and intersection of the humanities and science. It’s Michigan Humanities’ hope that this book will increase opportunities for civil discourse in our state.”

The Great Michigan Read aims to connect Michigan residents by deepening readers’ understanding of our state, our society, and our humanity. A statewide panel of teachers, librarians, community leaders and book lovers selects the Great Michigan Read every two years. The 2017-18 book was “X: A Novel,” a fictionalized account of the early life and Michigan roots of civil rights leader Malcolm X. The 2019-20 Great Michigan Read is supported by The National Endowment for the Humanities, Meijer Foundation, and Martin Waymire.

Hanna-Attisha is the founder and director of the Michigan State University and Hurley Children’s Hospital Pediatric Public Health Initiative, an innovative and model public health program in Flint. Currently an associate professor of pediatrics and human development at the MSU College of Human Medicine, she has been named one of *Time* magazine’s 100 Most Influential People in the World for her role in uncovering the Flint water crisis and leading recovery efforts. She was one of the first to question if lead was leaching from the city’s water pipes after an emergency manager switched the city’s water supply to the Flint River in 2014. She also is committed to increasing literacy in Flint and elsewhere.

“I’m so honored Michigan Humanities chose ‘What the Eyes Don’t See’ for the 2019-2020 Great Michigan Read,” the Flint pediatrician said. “There is so much Michigan love in this story – from my first days in the state as a Yooper, to growing up in Metro Detroit, to my education and training in Ann Arbor, East Lansing, and Detroit, and most important, my work with kids in Flint.

“From the resistance of the Flint sit-down strikers to the reign of demagogue Charles Coughlin, Michigan’s DNA is full of history – some good and some bad and some shared and some hidden – which we must understand in order to address our present-day challenges,” Hanna-Attisha said in explaining how the concepts of place and history are critically important to her book. “Like so many Michiganders, my story is an

immigrant story. It was critical to share this part of the story in this memoir because it informs how I see the world and the work that I am privileged to do.”

Jamie Gaskin, president and CEO of the United Way of Genesee County, encouraged readers throughout Michigan to read the book. Noting at today’s news conference that he observed first-hand the effects the Flint water crisis had on the city and its residents, Gaskin said it was important that people discuss “What the Eyes Don’t See” through programming sponsored through the Great Michigan Read. The Rev. Dr. Shannon Polk, a Michigan Humanities board member and attorney, echoed the importance of conversation around the book.

The Great Michigan Read kicks off in September 2019 and runs through fall 2020. In addition to free books, Great Michigan Read partners receive free reader’s guides, teacher’s guides, bookmarks, and other supplemental materials. Schools, libraries, colleges, arts and cultural institutions, and a range of other nonprofits are eligible to be Great Michigan Read partners. Registration is open now through Michigan Humanities (<https://www.michiganhumanities.org/>). Hanna-Attisha will participate in an author’s tour, with times and locations to be announced at a later date.

The 2019-20 Great Michigan Read title was selected by six regional selection committees representing all corners of Michigan. After reading books with Michigan themes or locations from June through September 2018, the selection committee chairs met in Lansing in October 2018 and selected “What the Eyes Don’t See” as the next Great Michigan Read. “What the Eyes Don’t See” also has been chosen by the states of Maryland and Rhode Island for their programs similar to the Great Michigan Read.

Action grants of up to \$750 will be available to help support registered partners’ Great Michigan Read programming centered on the themes found in the book’s title. Sponsorship opportunities also are available to support partner events throughout the state. Contact Michigan Humanities to find out how to get involved.

### **About Michigan Humanities**

Michigan Humanities inspires Michigan residents to come together in creative and freely expressed ways to deepen our understanding of ourselves and enrich our communities. In carrying out this mission, Michigan Humanities builds awareness and excitement for humanities in everyday life, achieves best practices and sustainability for all humanities programs and services in Michigan, and upholds the following key values: inclusion, diversity, and equity; discovery and understanding; authentic conversation; respectful collaboration; and meaningful experiences. Michigan Humanities’ vision is for all people of Michigan to experience and understand the importance of humanities to enrich lives.

### **About the Great Michigan Read**

The Great Michigan Read kicked off in 2007-08 with “The Nick Adams Stories” by Ernest Hemingway. The 2017-18 Great Michigan Read was “X: A Novel,” a fictionalized account of the early life and Michigan roots of civil rights leader Malcolm X written by Ilyasah Shabazz and Kekla Magoon. During 2017-18, a total of 295 participating organizations shared 8,000 copies of the books with readers in 59 of Michigan’s 83 counties, and Shabazz and Magoon spoke at 19 author events.

Other Great Michigan Read books include “Stealing Buddha’s Dinner,” by Bich Minh Nguyen (2009-10); “Arc of Justice,” by Kevin Boyle (2011-12); “Annie’s Ghosts,” by Steve Luxenberg (2013-2014); and “Station Eleven,” by Emily St. John Mandel (2015-16).

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## More Information on ‘What the Eyes Don’t See’

“Stirring . . . [a] blueprint for all those who believe . . . ‘the world should be full of people...raising their voices.’” —THE NEW YORK TIMES



### What the Eyes Don’t See



A STORY OF CRISIS, RESISTANCE, AND  
HOPE IN AN AMERICAN CITY

**Mona Hanna-Attisha**



“Revealing, with the gripping intrigue of a Grisham thriller.”  
—O: THE OPRAH MAGAZINE

#### Awards received by “What the Eyes Don’t See” include:

- 2019 Finalist for Science & Technology, *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize
- *The New York Times*’ 100 Notable Books of 2018
- 2019 One Maryland One Book selection
- 2019 Reading Across Rhode Island selection
- 2019 Michigan Notable Book
- 2018 Great Lakes Great Reads Adult Non-Fiction Award

#### From the publisher:

“Here is the inspiring story of how Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, alongside a team of researchers, parents, friends, and community leaders, discovered that the children of Flint, Michigan, were being exposed to lead in their tap water—and then battled her own government and a brutal backlash to expose that truth to the world. . . . At the center of the story is Dr. Mona herself—an immigrant, doctor, scientist, and mother whose family’s activist roots inspired her pursuit of justice.”

The book was first released June 19, 2018 in hardcover, and as an e-book and audio book. A paperback version is now available.

Video of today’s news conference is available on the Michigan Humanities website at <https://www.michiganhumanities.org/>.