

# Celebrity book club

What they're reading and why

BY MICHAEL GILTZ

ask a star what they're reading, and the answer you won't get is Danielle Steel. No, they're either immersed in Tolstoy or browsing Stephen Hawking. Are our celebrities telling the truth? You be the judge (though they do seem to know what they're talking about).



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## ▲ JASON LEE

**Current project:** Alvin and the Chipmunks feature; "My Name Is Earl" on NBC Thursdays at 8 p.m.

**He's reading:** "Hunger" by Knut Hamsun.

**The plot:** In this 1890 classic by the Nobel Prize-winning author, a penniless author wanders a port town, slowly starving to death but convinced of his artistic greatness and too proud to accept help.

**What Lee says:** "I talk about this book a lot. It makes it seem like the only book I ever read. It's 'Hunger'; I'm on my second pass. I've never been so riveted by something that has nothing going on. It's just absolutely so well-written. Unbelievable. You find yourself going, 'What's going to happen? What's going to happen? What's going to happen?' Oh, my God. And you really feel the pain of the guy. It absolutely makes me look at [homeless] people I see in downtown L.A. in a different light."

**What's to be learned?:** Sometimes, karma needs you to show a little humility in order to do its work.

## ▼ SHIA LABEOUF

**Current project:** "Transformers" and "Disturbia" on DVD; shooting the fourth "Indiana Jones" film.

**He's reading:** "The Definitive Book of Body Language" by Alan and Barbara Pease.

**The plot:** An international best seller that "reveals the secrets of nonverbal communication" so readers can gain advantage in job interviews, know when someone is flirting with them, etc.

**What LaBeouf says:** "It's about how to cross your legs when you're lying. How to scratch your face when you're scared. I want to be a better actor."

**What's to be learned:** The symbolism of Indiana Jones always holding that whip in every poster for his movies, unless, of course, a cigar is just a cigar.



## ▲ CASSANDRA WILSON

**Current project:** Finishing a new album of standards, due out early next year.

**She's reading:** Manuals on PHP, a computer programming language used to build Web pages.

**The plot:** Technical books filled with dense language only Bill Gates could love.

**What Wilson says:** "I'm kind of a geek. I love to play on my computer. That's like going to the opposite side of the brain. I do that when I get off a gig. I take my time with it. For some reason, it's very soothing to master a language. It helps me get away completely from the music."

**What's to be learned?:** How to save the music industry from all those illegal downloaders.

## CASEY AFFLECK

**Current projects:** The films "Gone Baby Gone" and "The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford."

**He's reading:** Short stories, including "Incident at Owl Creek aka An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" by Ambrose Bierce.

**The plot:** A Confederate sympathizer is being hanged for sabotage during the Civil War. An acclaimed 19th-century tale, complete with a twist ending, it was filmed as a virtually silent

film in France, won the Academy Award and was later shown as an episode of "The Twilight Zone."

**What Affleck says:** "I've been reading a collection of great short stories. Mostly, I get half an hour to myself; that's all I can manage in the last few months. Maybe I can squeeze in a haiku really quick."

**What's to be learned?:** Not to celebrate until you're absolutely certain your victory isn't just an illusion.

## KENNY MELMAN, HERB OF CABARET DUO KIKI AND HERB

**Current project:** A show about singer Millie Jackson and her underappreciated hit, "Sexercise," at Joe's Pub next year.

**He's reading:** "Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture" by Jon Savage.

**The plot:** A sweeping study of adolescence and the vague years between childhood and adulthood, covering everything from Rimbaud and the mania for Rudolph Valentino to the rebellious "swing kids" in Germany and the "zoot suit" kids in L.A. during World War II.

**What Melman says:** "Amazing. Absolutely amazing. It's great."

**What's to be learned?:** What those crazy kids are thinking. ♦



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