



empowering women since 1881

Ithaca Insights

November/December 2025

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Ithaca Insights is the monthly publication of the Ithaca, New York, Branch of AAUW

AAUW Mission

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) advances gender equity for women and girls through research, education, and advocacy.

In principle and practice, AAUW values and seeks a diverse membership. There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization based on age, ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, geographical location, national origin, race, religious belief, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status.

Winter Programs.

Saturday, December 13 • 10:30 a.m. • Kendal

Holiday Celebration & Luncheon

Here's Your Invitation to Our Holiday Celebration:

Join us Saturday morning, December 13th at 10:30 a.m. at Kendal. We will begin in Conference Room A with a fun workshop—*The Wisdom of Being You*. At noon we will adjourn to the Kendal Cafe for lunch. Invite friends and family.

Kendal is a retirement community located at 2230 N. Triphammer Road, Ithaca. There are several parking areas around the complex.

Workshop • *The Wisdom of Being You*:

Discover the Character Strengths that Bring You Joy. See page 2 for details.

Lunch at the Kendal Cafe. Bring your credit card. The Cafe does not accept cash.

We will meet our TC3 Scholarship winner, Brandi Henry. We're eager to learn about her plans and how our AAUW Ithaca Branch Scholarship supports them.

We will also have two opportunities to celebrate the holidays by giving back. Bring items you would like to donate with you.

(1) Each year we collect food donations for Loaves and Fishes in downtown Ithaca. This welcoming place provides free meals, hospitality, companionship, and advocacy for those in need, regardless of their faith, beliefs, or circumstances. Our donations are especially important this year as more people are facing food scarcity.

(2) We are also collecting items for an organization called Bra Recyclers (thebrarecyclers.com). See p. 4 for details.

Dates to Remember

Monday, December 8 • 7:00 p.m. • Book Group discusses, via Zoom, *Miss Austen* by Gill Hornby.

Saturday, December 13 • 10:30 a.m. • Holiday Party & Luncheon •
Kendal, Conference Room A & the Kendal Cafe

Monday, January 12 • 7:00 p.m. via Zoom • **Book Group** discusses *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

President's Letter

The Wisdom of Being You: Discovering the Character Strengths that Bring You Joy

Our Workshop: Have you ever taken one of those little personality quizzes that promise to tell you all about yourself by indicating what your favorite color is or whether you're an Early Bird or a Night Owl?

I have a suggestion for something a bit deeper and more meaningful. In preparation for our Holiday Celebration, you'll have an opportunity to take a free online assessment to help you understand who you really are.

The Survey provides insight into who you are at your best. It identifies and ranks your Character Strengths.

The Survey is supported by over 1000 research papers showing greater validity than the famous Big 5 or Myers Briggs scales.

Character Strengths are the abilities that we naturally enjoy using; we feel good when we use them. We feel fulfilled and as we use them, we also tend to make other people feel good too.

Character Strengths help us
experience our highest potential
make our best decisions
feel whole.

It's truly important for you to become aware of and use your strengths. There is ample research pointing to their value in enhancing our health, well-being and happiness.

Research shows that Character Strengths:
Buffer against, manage and overcome problems
Improve relationships
Enhance health and well-being
Protect against mental health problems
Build resilience
Improve work satisfaction and performance
Create less stressfulness, more engagement, more energy and happiness

Like any valuable resource, if we fail to use our strengths, they can atrophy and cause us to become disconnected from ourselves.

Unfortunately, we are frequently blind to our greatest strengths. Research shows that only 1/3 of people are aware of their strengths.

We have many types of strengths.

All are important.
Talents, what we naturally do well
Skills, what we train ourselves to do
Resources, our external supports
Interests, what grabs our attention
Values, what we hold dear

But *Character Strengths* are the most important because they define our true identity. They help us express our authentic self.

When we face a big life challenge, our strengths are what we take with us for encouragement and support for planning and deciding on the next best steps in our lives.

During the Workshop, we'll learn more about character strengths like
Curiosity
Honesty
Kindness
Leadership
Forgiveness
Gratitude
Hope

We'll explore our strengths and how to use them to enrich our lives and the lives of others. And we'll play with some ideas for how to incorporate them more fully into our experiences.

In the next few weeks, you'll receive more information about the Workshop and how to sign up for the Survey. Of course, participation is completely voluntary, but experience tells us that the more we take part, the greater the value—and the more fun we have!

—Lin Tollefsen, President (ltollefsen11@gmail.com)

Saving the Environment & the Children

Scott Doyle, Ithaca College's Director of Energy Management & Sustainability, presented an engaging program in October outlining the environmental work at Ithaca College. He leads IC's Climate Action Plan. He focuses on efforts to soften the impact of energy usage in a way that balances current needs and those of generations to come. An example is the Eco Car. We were tempted to take it for a spin. We also learned about community projects that build on student participation.

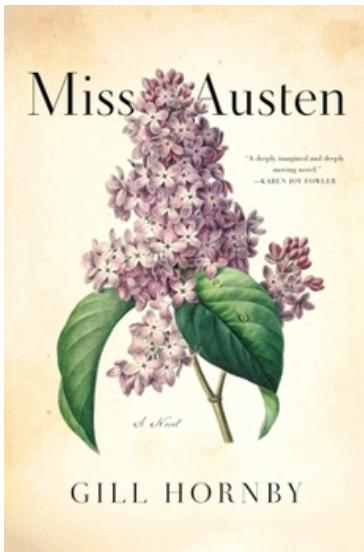
In November, Ruth Merle-Doyle, Work/Life Program Manager at Cornell, described how hard it is for working parents to find good child care in the Ithaca area. There is one spot for every three children 5 years old and under who need care.

Book Group

Family Ties

Brighten the darkest month of the year by reading *Miss Austen* by Gill Hornby or watching the Masterpiece Theatre production of this historical novel. Then join the Book Group, via Zoom, on Monday evening, December 8, to discuss this memorable story.

The main character is not the famous author. This is the story of Jane Austen's older sister Cassandra and



her work to protect her family and build a satisfying life as a single woman. She is a thoughtful, tactful woman it is a pleasure to meet. At the time in Regency and early Victorian England, most people thought that marriage was the only possible happy ending for a woman.

Like Jane Austen's novels, *Miss Austen* turns on family interactions and village life. *Miss Austen* brims

with memorable characters including Mary, Mary Jane, Dinah, and Jane Austen herself. Jane Austen's *Persuasion* plays a key part in the plot, so now may be a good time to read or re-read what many consider to be her best novel.

All members and guests are invited to join us, via Zoom, Monday evening, December 8. We begin at 7:00 p.m. with tea (yours) and conversation. At 7:30 p.m. Kathy Earnest-Koons will lead our discussion. Contact Lin Toffelsen to be added to the Book Group e-list.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Last thoughts on *The Thanksgiving Play*

Mary-Carol Lindbloom, our DEI chair, let the Book Group's discussion of Larissa Fasthorse's hilarious satire. Four white performers are trying to create an enlightened, educational Thanksgiving play for grade school children. The director thought she had hired a Native American actor—she was wearing a turquoise necklace—to add an indigenous perspective. It turns out she only plays Indian characters: "I'm an actress. I pretend to be other people." When the history teacher tells them of how the Pilgrims attacked the natives not long after that harvest dinner, they reject that as too violent for children. What to do?

Mary-Carol asked us, "At Thanksgiving, what do you tell your children about the holiday? What did you learn when you were young?"

The Great American Novel

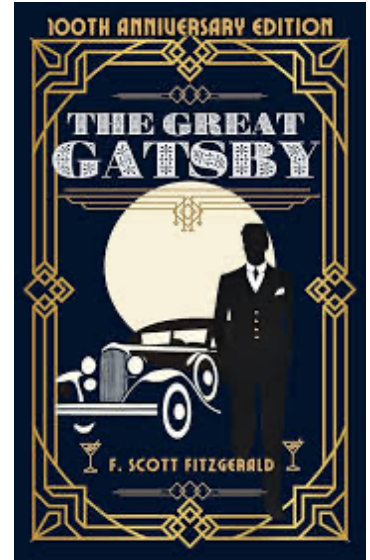
Begin the new year by reading (or re-reading) *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, which turned 100 in 2025. Then join us, via Zoom, for our discussion on Monday evening, January 12.

Although now a century old, this most famous of novels is still read and taught and filmed and inspiring parties, like the Halloween bash at Mar-a-Lago in October.

Unlike books that sold far better in their own day, *The Great Gatsby*'s reputation has grown with time. What does this Jazz Age drama have to say to us today? The memorable writing, haunting characters and biting observations add up to a work that is not easily forgotten.

We bring ourselves to any novel, and what we saw at 18 will be different at 40 or 60 or 80. I (Jeanette) will lead the discussion, which will begin with drinks (yours) and chatting at 7:00 p.m. Our book discussion will begin at 7:30 p.m. Costumes, martinis and manhattans optional.

—Lin Tollefsen (ltollefsen11@gmail.com)
& Jeanette Knapp (jdk454@gmail.com),
Book Group Co-Chairs



When I was young, it was a day for special dishes we enjoyed once a year, roast turkey, gravy, cranberries, candied sweet potatoes with little thought to pilgrims or Indians. It was also a day to gather up stray relatives who would otherwise be alone, bachelor Uncle Paul, tedious Uncle Vance and fluttery Aunt Veda, who always brought blueberry pie because she knew I liked it.

In Ithaca, far from family, we teamed up with neighbors, one an immigrant, also far from their families. They also gathered in international students adrift that day. I was grateful for a holiday with no complications, I thought, beyond good food and good company.

I love the idea of that almost mythical sharing of a meal between natives and immigrants and wish the good will had endured. Would that those who are so hostile to immigrants now would acknowledge their own family's budging into someone else's homeland.

—Jeanette Knapp

AAUW Funds

Your Generosity Supports Education and Equity

The fall we once again invite you to support AAUW priorities including the Legal Advocacy Fund, Education and Training Fund, Economic Security Fund and the Greatest Needs Fund. We hope you will also consider supporting undergraduate women with (1) a gift to Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3) for the Ithaca Branch of AAUW Scholarship Fund, and (2) if you can, a gift to sponsor local college women to attend the 2026 AAUW Atlantic Regional Conference and the 2026 National Conference for College Women Student Leaders (NCCSWL). Your gifts in any amount are critical to AAUW and our Branch efforts to improve opportunities for women and girls.

AAUW Greatest Needs Fund #9110 Special Campaign

Carol Griffith, NYS-AAUW Public Policy Director and member of the AAUW Advancement Committee, has asked us to specifically support a campaign for the AAUW Greatest Needs Fund (#9110) from now until the end of January. Women and girls' rights and education are being challenged like never before during our lifetimes. AAUW Greatest Needs Fund provides AAUW leadership with the flexibility to respond to new national issues facing women and girls. Checks should indicate the Greatest Needs Fund #9110. Carol would like information on gifts to the fund, so please let me know if you donate via the AAUW Website. I will inform Carol.

You can give online at the AAUW website or use the form I sent to you in late October. Mail your checks to me or bring them to our December 13 Holiday Program.

—Kim Edgar, AAUW Funds Chair
kimberlysedgar@gmail.com

Meet AAUW Scholars

During our December 13 Holiday Program, Brandi Henry, the Fall 2025 Branch Scholarship Awardee, will be joining us. On Saturday, April 11, 2026, we will host a program and luncheon featuring three AAUW Fellows. These programs highlight how your gifts help women achieve their goals. Thank you for your generous support!

Membership News

Linda Brisson's new phone number: 607-972-9777
Mary Berkelman has moved to Kendal, 424 Savage Farm Drive



Ithaca Branch of AAUW Bra and Undergarments Local Community and Global Donation Project



Donations Accepted Through Saturday, December 13, 2025

The **Ithaca Branch of AAUW (American Association of University Women)** is partnering with the **Women's Opportunity Center of Tompkins and Onondaga Counties** (Womensopportunity.org) and **The Bra Recyclers** (thebrarecyclers.org) on a community donation project to collect brand new bras, good condition bras, damaged bras, and new underwear for women and girls and to reduce textile waste.

These organizations recognize the critical need for undergarments for women and girls not only locally but globally. **The Bra Recyclers** also focus their sustainability mission on recycling used undergarments through textile recyclers thus reducing global waste. The recycled textiles are converted into punching bags. These punching bags are used to teach women self-defense techniques.

To donate, please bring new or recently laundered undergarments to the Saturday, December 13, 2025, Holiday Branch Program or email IthacaBranchAAUW@gmail.com to make other drop-off arrangements. We encourage you to spread the word on our donation project. Please separate the bras and undergarments into new, in good condition, or damaged undergarments, to facilitate their donation to either the Women's Opportunity Center or to the Bra Recyclers.

For questions or other information, please contact: IthacaBranchAAUW@gmail.com.