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Acalanes Adult Ed course focuses on three mysteries with strong historical context

When Joan Trezek's husband was dealing with some serious heart issues, they were trying to figure out how best to treat the problem and find ways to fill the "down time." Trezek headed to the library and found the thickest spy novels she could find. "That seemed to do the trick until he was ready to become more active," said Trezek.

The trip sparked an idea: the experienced teacher, who holds a master's in English from the University of Illinois, decided to pursue teaching a class through Acalanes Adult Education. For the past three years, Trezek has taught "Favorite Award-Winning Mysteries," a six-week course offered through AAE. She changes the titles/authors with each session. The upcoming session, which begins Jan. 18, focuses on three works featuring solid historical context: "Maisie Dobbs," with a World War I backdrop; "In the Woods," which structures events around the economic downturn in Dublin, Ireland, in the early '80s; and "The Round House," which focuses on social and legal issues on a North Dakota Indian reservation.

"I provide the titles in the school brochure which is sent to all previously enrolled students as well as to all the libraries in Contra Costa County. In that way, those who sign up can get a head start reading if they choose." Trezek introduces each book with biographical information on the author, their awards as well as literary criticism and often brings in video clips of author interviews as well as historical figures/events. "I typically prepare what I hope are thought-provoking questions related to the characteristics of all stories: plot, setting, theme, characters and then break the class into small groups for 15 minutes or so, in order that they can share insights. Then we come together as a larger group and discuss."

The classes tend to draw avid readers, Trezek says, particularly of mystery/suspense novels. "Many grew up on Christie/Doyle as well as Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys, or so it would seem. Participants tend to be repeat customers and often husband/wife couples attend together."

The class runs from 10 a.m. to noon on Thursdays, Jan. 18 through Feb. 22. AAE is located at 1601 Tice Valley Blvd. in Walnut Creek. Cost is \$80 general; \$72 for seniors. To register, visit www.acalanes.k12.ca.us/adultedonlineregistration or call (925) 280-3980. The course number is 064037.

- J. Wake

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