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For its upcoming 19th season, UCSB Reads leans into ‘delights’

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December 3, 2024

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Written daily over one tumultuous year, Ross Gay’s “The Book of Delights” is a genre-defying collection of short lyrical essays that celebrate the small, ordinary wonders in the world around us. The essays — humorous, poetic and philosophical — cover a wide range of topics that will feel familiar to readers.

A New York Times bestseller, “The Book of Delights” (Algonquin Books, 2019) has been selected for the 2025 season of UCSB Reads, an award-winning program of UC Santa Barbara Library that brings the campus and Santa Barbara communities together to read a common book that explores compelling issues of our time.

Among Gay’s “delights”: a high five from a stranger, cradling a tomato seedling aboard an airplane, the silent nod of acknowledgement between the only two Black people in a room. Gay never dismisses the complexities, even the terrors, of living in America as a Black man, the ecological and psychic impacts of our consumer culture, or the loss of those he loves. Yet his book also serves as a powerful reminder that staking out a space in our lives for joy brings us closer together.

An award-winning poet, essayist and professor, Gay is the author of four books of poetry and three collections of essays, including the follow-up “The Book of (More) Delights.” He is the winner of the 2015 National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry, 2016 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award, 2021 PEN/Jean Stein Award, and 2022 Indiana Authors Award for Poetry. Gay has taught poetry, art and literature at Lafayette College, Montclair State University, Drew University and Indiana University, where he is a faculty member in the English Department.

Now in its 19th year, UCSB Reads 2025 will launch in January with a free book giveaway for students. Throughout the winter and spring quarters, the library will sponsor talks, book clubs, workshops and other learning, experiential and social events to explore the book’s themes. Instructors are encouraged to incorporate “The Book of Delights” into their winter or spring courses. The library will provide free copies of the book to all students who are assigned to read it as part of coursework.

UCSB Reads will culminate with a free talk by the author at Campbell Hall on May 8, 2025. This public lecture is presented in partnership with UCSB Arts & Lectures.

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