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Michelle Zauner's "Crying in H Mart" named UCSB Reads 2026 book

For its 20th anniversary year, UCSB Reads, the campus's award-winning common book program, has selected Michelle Zauner's "Crying in H Mart," a provocative book about identity, food, grief and culture.

The selection was announced by UC Santa Barbara University Librarian Todd Grappone and Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost David Marshall.

A vibrant and sensory memoir, "*Crying in H Mart*" explores self-discovery, grief and Korean-American culture through the celebratory lens of food and family. In a series of personal essays, Zauner recounts growing up as one of a few Asian-Americans in her Oregon town and reconnecting with her Korean identity as a young adult. When she moves home at 25 to care for her mother, who is facing terminal cancer, food becomes a vital language of love, memory and cultural heritage. The book chronicles her coming of age and complex family dynamics, showing how she navigates the profound grief of a parent's illness and death by embracing the traditions that define her.

Zauner's debut spent 60 weeks on The New York Times hardcover non-fiction bestseller list. The book received a 2022 American Book Award and the 2021 Goodreads Choice Award for Memoir & Autobiography. It was also named a top book of the year by numerous publications, including TIME, The Atlantic and Entertainment Weekly. The New Yorker described it as "a book you experience with all of your senses: sentences you can taste, paragraphs that sound like music.

[Zauner] seamlessly blends stories of food and memory, sumptuousness and grief, to weave a complex narrative of loyalty and loss.”

A Korean-American musician, singer, songwriter, director and author, Michelle Zauner is the lead vocalist of acclaimed indie pop band Japanese Breakfast. The band’s third album, “Jubilee” (2021), charted on the Billboard 200, peaking at No. 56, and was nominated for two Grammy Awards – for Best New Artist and Best Alternative Music Album. TIME magazine named Zauner one of the 100 most influential people of 2022.

UCSB Reads 2026 will launch in January with a free book giveaway for UCSB students. Throughout the winter and spring quarters, the library will sponsor a variety of free learning, experiential and social events to explore the book’s themes. Instructors are encouraged to incorporate “Crying in H Mart” 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 2026 will culminate with a free public talk by Michelle Zauner at UCSB Campbell Hall on May 7, 2026, presented in partnership with UCSB Arts & Lectures.

Now entering its milestone 20th year, UCSB Reads fosters a shared sense of belonging by bringing the campus and Santa Barbara communities together to read a common book that explores compelling issues of our time. Each year, an advisory committee composed of UCSB faculty, staff, students and community partners helps the library select an intellectually stimulating, interdisciplinary book by a living author that appeals to a wide range of readers and can be incorporated into the UCSB curriculum.

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About UC Santa Barbara

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