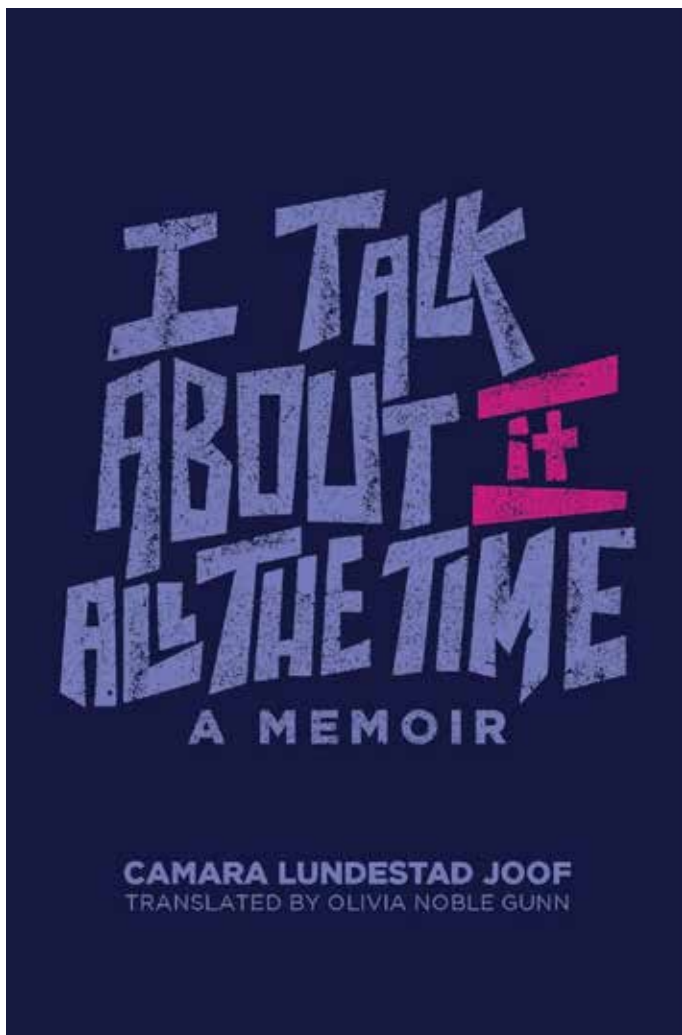


PAIDEIA SUMMER READING GUIDE



LUTHER COLLEGE®

PAIDEIA SUMMER READ 2025

Reading guide by Maren Johnson, associate professor of Nordic studies and Kathy Reed, Paideia director.

Welcome to Luther College and Paideia! We are excited to see you in August as you begin your collegiate journey with us in Decorah, Iowa. To help start you off on that journey, the Paideia Program is happy to provide you with this reading guide and your own copy of our first reading for Paideia 111: Camara Lundestad Joof's *I Talk About It All the Time*.

The summer read for this year was chosen in connection with an important historical marker for Luther College: the 200th anniversary of organized Norwegian migration to North America. In 1825, the first ship left Norway for the North American continent, kicking off a century of migration during which one third of Norway's population left their home country. Their journey became a part of the story of the place where you will be going to college.

Migration and movement of people is part of the founding story of the college. Luther College was founded in 1861 by Norwegian immigrants who came to the United States with the goal of providing an education that would propel its students into career, vocation, and service beyond the boundaries of this place. At Luther we talk about this college as one that is grounded and global—grounded in the physical space and community of northeastern Iowa, but inextricably linked to the wider world. Our history helps shape that connection to a broader world.

AN ENDURING QUESTION:

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BELONG?

I've spent a lot of time insisting on my Norwegianness, defending my right to belong, proving I own it, just as much as I own the right to wear what I want, where I want. (Joof 8).

Each year our Paideia readings and discussions are organized around what we call an "Enduring Question." This year's question is: What does it mean to belong? As you begin to find your place at Luther, we will look around us both near and far to discuss this question at both a personal and societal level. Fittingly, in this year in which Decorah and Luther College commemorate migration to the U.S. from Norway, our first reading takes us back to present-day Norway. Our summer-read author, Camara Lundestad Joof, begins her book with a childhood memory:

Throughout our childhood, the white side of our family called us negarbarna, the negro children. It was said playfully and affectionately, with love. Our cousins and second cousins got to be the children of this or that uncle or aunt, but we were always mom's negerbarn.

The chocolate children.

And so the discussion begins. Did Camara feel she belonged in her family? Her community? Her country? Who decided? Could this story have been told by someone in your family or your neighborhood or your school? And following on those questions, we can ask how things could be different. What does a person or group of people need in order to feel that they belong?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Camara Lundestad Joof is a Norwegian Gambian performing artist, playwright, and author. From 2020 to 2024 she was the playwright in residence at the National Theater of Norway. Beginning in fall of 2024, Joof became the artistic director of Dramatikkens Hus (The Norwegian Centre for New Playwriting), the national development and resource center for new dramatic writing. Her memoir, *I Talk About it All The Time* was published in 2018 and translated into English in the summer of 2024 by Olivia Noble Gunn. The text is used in high school curriculum in Norway and taught at several universities in Scandinavia and the United States. It was nominated for the Norwegian National Library Award in 2022.

READING / *TALK ABOUT IT ALL THE TIME*

I Talk about It All the Time is a series of short, poetic, autobiographical vignettes that address questions of migration, identity, and belonging. Each vignette will take only a few minutes to read—some, almost no time at all—but each deserves a longer pause for reflection. We suggest that you read with a pencil in hand, and write down a few words at the top of each essay in your book to characterize what it is about. Circle words or phrases that stand out to you.

Some of the content of the essays may make you uncomfortable, and that is as it should be for learning. Notice what makes you uncomfortable, and think about why you react the way you do. The chapter entitled “The Rope” on pages 59-64 is particularly intense and includes details about a violent assault on an adolescent. Know that we will work to create a safe environment for class discussion and offer multiple ways to process what we read.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Write down your answers to these questions and bring them with you to your first Paideia class on Monday, September 1, and the class days that follow. Having read the book and written down your thoughts will help you feel more confident participating in class discussion. Know that there is no one right or wrong answer!

1. What are the titles of three essays that you found especially interesting, or troubling, or powerful? For each title, write down one sentence that stood out to you.

2. What is one situation that Joof describes about growing up and living in Norway that affected the way she sees herself and the world around her? What happened, and how did it affect her? Give the page number of the spot you are talking about.
3. What did you find to be the most important or central moment in the book? Why?

4. How does Joof's use of personal stories, direct address (speaking to you, the reader, as if you are right there), and non-linear storytelling shape your reading experience? In what ways does her writing style reinforce the book's themes?
5. Joof writes about the tension between how she experiences her identity privately and how it is perceived or policed publicly. Find an example of this disconnect. How does it affect her sense of agency and belonging?

6. The book gives attention to subtle, often well-intentioned, yet harmful comments and behaviors. What are some examples Joof highlights? Why is it important to recognize and name these moments, and what risks does Joof take in doing so publicly?
7. Despite its heavy subject matter, the book also offers moments of humor, tenderness, hope, and resistance. Identify one such moment and discuss how it contributes to the book's overall message. What role do hope and resistance play in Joof's narrative?

8, How does Joof begin and end her memoir, and why?

9. Imagine you could write a short letter to Camara Lundestad Joof after finishing *I Talk about It All the Time*. What would you want to say? Write down a question, or expression of gratitude, or share a connection you felt with the book.

We are thrilled to announce that Camara Lundestad Joof will join us on campus for the fall 2025 Opening Convocation on Thursday, September 4, as well as an on-stage interview and book signing the evening before.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

