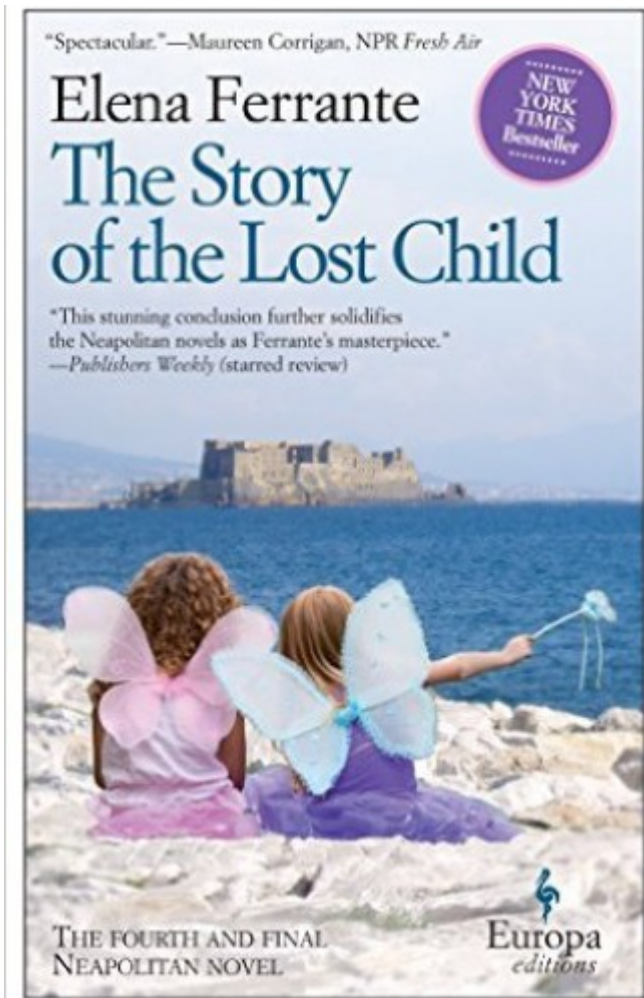


Debbie Blue's Christmas picks

selected by [Debbie Blue](#) in the [December 9, 2015](#) issue

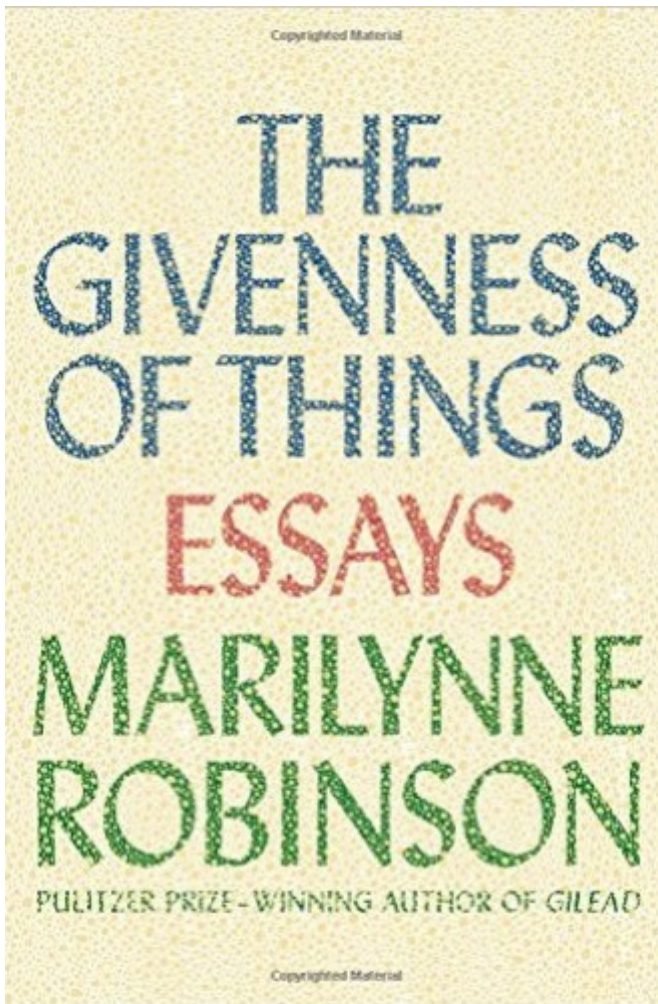
In Review



The Story of the Lost Child

by Elena Ferrante

Europa Editions



The Givenness of Things

by Marilynne Robinson
Farrar, Straus and Giroux



You're Dreaming

Cactus Blossoms
Red House Records



Co-opoly

TESA

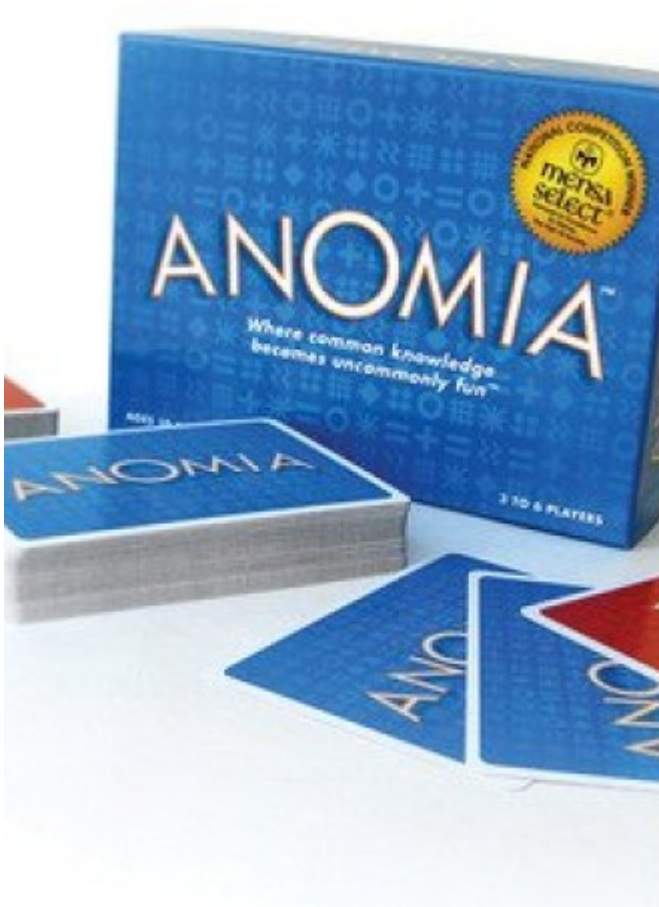
Toolbox for Education and Social Action



Loud & Proud

TESA

Toolbox for Education and Social Action



Anomia

by Everest Toys
Everest Toys

I've been engrossed in *The Story of the Lost Child*, the fourth in Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels (Europa Editions). The series follows the friendship of Elena (the narrator) and Lila (her fiery and fearless friend) from girlhood to old age. Very little of what we find precious (romance, marriage, career, motherhood) remains intact here—all of it is mined with refreshing and ferocious honesty. The novels dredge up what we might rather keep hidden: the human propensity for competition, rivalry, and profound insecurity. There's something cathartic about the experience of reading them—not unlike confession. I like that Ferrante is an anonymous author, so buying her work is supporting a novelist not a celebrity (a small victory for good writing.)

I often turn to Marilynne Robinson's essays when I'm feeling a bit doubtful about the whole Christian enterprise, so I'm thrilled that *The Givenness of Things* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) is out in time for Christmas.

If you'd like a gift that will deliver pure pleasure, preorder the Cactus Blossoms' new CD *You're Dreaming* (Red House Records, available January 22). This young brother duet has been dazzling us here in the Twin Cities with their gorgeous harmonies and sometimes playful, sometimes gut-wrenching lyrics. Garrison Keillor called the traditional yet edgy duo "the brother duet America is waiting for."

It's not easy to remove oneself from the capitalist frenzy surrounding Christmas, but I do like to give my kids something that might contribute to their questioning it. [TESA](#) (Toolbox for Education and Social Action) created Co-opoly: The Game of Cooperatives—a subversion of the ever-popular Monopoly. In Co-opoly "everyone wins, or everybody loses." My kids didn't find that game to be quite as lively as Loud and Proud, TESA's newest game, where players flip over cards (locally made and produced out of recycled materials). If the symbol on your card matches another player's, you face off and race to be the first to answer each other's card prompt. It's like Anomia—another great game—but instead of asking you to name dog breeds or doughnut flavors, it asks you to name civil rights leaders, suffragettes, and renewable energy resources.