Informal Reading Groups
Fall Semester 2015

Meet just one hour per week with 10-15 Honors College students to discuss roughly 50 pages of reading from specific books on the topics described in the following pages. The only commitment you make is a good-faith effort to complete the reading and attend group meetings as often as you can, with the understanding there may be one or two weeks when you are unable to attend.

- No tuition or fees
- No quizzes or tests
- No grades
- Free books
- Discuss important topics of mutual interest with other Honors College students

Reading groups will begin the week of August 31-September 4 and will meet for 3-15 weeks as indicated in this brochure.

To reserve a spot in the group of your choice, email your preference to oureadinggroups@gmail.com. Groups are filled on a first-come, first-served basis, so it is helpful to indicate a second choice.

Books will be distributed at the Reading Groups Open House on Thursday, August 27 in David L Boren Hall, Rooms 180 and 182. Students who have not reserved a spot in any group are welcome to attend the Open House and sign up for any reading group with available spots, but please note that quantities may be limited.
THE DIGITAL DOCTOR: 
Hope, Hype, and Harm at the Dawn of Medicine's Computer Age

Wednesdays 11:30-12:20
DLBH 180/181
(7 weeks)

Published in April 2015, The Digital Doctor has received overwhelmingly positive reviews and been described as “funny, informative, well written, accessible, brilliant” and “destined to be a classic.” A thoughtful eyewitness account of the effects on the practice of medicine of recent and rapid computerization, the author takes a balanced view, understanding that in the pervasive use of electronic medical records, much has been lost and much has been gained. He is aware that technology has enormous potential for positive change, but also has already produced surprising and unintended negative consequences.

Moderator(s): Prof. David Ray

OUR KIDS: 
The American Dream in Crisis

Thursdays 4:30-5:20
DLBH 182
(7 weeks)

While Robert Putnam is a Harvard social scientist, he has also been described as the “poet laureate of American civil society.” His 1997 book, Bowling Alone, is a major classic and received bipartisan acclaim. It argued that civic life in the US is declining with ominous consequences. Bill Clinton brought him to Camp David, the campaigns of Al Gore and George W. Bush sought his advice, and Barack Obama gave him a medal. In Our Kids, Putnam brings his talent for launching a high-level discussion to a timely topic — the state of upward mobility. Widening income gaps, he argues, have brought profound but underappreciated changes to family life, neighborhoods and schools in ways that give big advantages to children at the top and make it ever harder for those below to work their way up. Putnam will visit OU in January, 2016, to give the Humphreys Distinguished Lecture on this book.

Moderator(s): Prof. David Ray and Dean Gregg Garn of the College of Education

GÖDEL, ESCHER, BACH: an Eternal Golden Braid

Fridays 3:00-3:50
DLBH 182
(15 weeks)

Douglas Hofstadter’s Pulitzer Prize- winning Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid delves into the concepts of philosophy, art, and logic in a playful exposition (and a relaxed demonstration) of the famous Gödel’s Incompleteness Theorem of mathematical logic. Often mistaken for just another “math book,” GEB reads more like a philosophical treatise, interspersing M.C. Escher drawings, discussions of Bach canons, and whimsical dialogues— one of which reads the same backwards and forwards— into its main theme: self-reference. GEB excels at presenting the challenging logical-mathematical concept of self-reference in a manner suitable for a wide audience while expanding the scope of its arguments across a large range of topics. According to Nature, “[GEB] is an entire humanistic education between the covers of a single book.” The group will read selected chapters of GEB to provide a sampling of the diverse range of material.

Moderator(s): Evan White and Jeff Terry
DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?
by Philip K. Dick

Mondays 11:30-12:20  
DLBH 180/181  
(4 weeks)

This is perhaps the best-known science fiction novel by the prolific and gifted American writer Philip K. Dick. First published in 1968, the book served as the primary basis for the 1982 film *Blade Runner*. The novel is set in a post-apocalyptic near future, where Earth and its populations have been damaged greatly by nuclear war during World War Terminus. Most types of animals are endangered or extinct due to extreme radiation poisoning from the war. To own an animal is a sign of status. In Dick’s futuristic dystopian novel, life has become a tenuous existence for those who have stayed behind after the war and exodus to other planets. The protagonist struggles as a bounty hunter in San Francisco to destroy a new breed of androids nearly undetectable to humans. However, he finds himself battling with empathy for the supposed lifeless beings—especially when he must team up with one to achieve his goal.

Moderator(s): Prof. David Ray

HUBBLE’S UNIVERSE:  
Greatest Discoveries and Latest Images

Mondays 12:30-1:20  
DLBH 182  
(4 weeks)

This is the best of many books about the Hubble Space Telescope published since it was launched in 1990. What makes this superbly well-produced volume unique is 300 images that have never been made public before. The author explains the 2009 “reboot” and describes how astronomers use a process called drizzling to create Hubble’s astonishingly sharp images, such as a two-page look at “a small segment of the night sky the size of a period in this book held at arm’s length,” filled with thousands of galaxies, each containing billions of stars. He also elucidates Hubble’s “top discoveries,” from proof that “supermassive black holes are common in galaxies” to success in measuring the universe’s expansion rate. Its ten chapters showcase a selection of Hubble’s most significant images with explanations of the discoveries they helped make. Especially fantastic are the images of solar wind stripping away large gas clouds that harbor stellar nurseries; images of Hubble’s deep field, revealing galaxy clusters from halfway across the universe.

Moderator(s): Prof. David Ray

A NEW ERA IN U.S. HEALTH CARE:  
Critical Next Steps Under the Affordable Care Act

Mondays 2:30-3:20  
Cate One 217  
(4 weeks)

The Affordable Care Act has promised revolutionary changes for America’s health care system. This book offers a concise, readable, and insightful explanation of the problems that necessitated this law, the process through which it was adopted and is being implemented, and the reforms that it will bring about. One reviewer calls it “a succinct account of a mind-bogglingly complicated piece of legislation.”

The book suggests an agenda for policy-makers and the health industry alike. Another very prominent reviewer described it as “clear, elegant, smart, sober, insightful, and highly recommended.”

Published as part of the “Stanford University Briefs” series.

Moderator(s): Prof. David Ray
This group will read two books consecutively, both by the highly regarded American writer Kurt Vonnegut, author of Slaughterhouse Five.

Written in 1963, Cat’s Cradle, his fourth novel, is an apocalyptic satire that is both blackly fatalistic and hilariously funny. It has been praised by critics as “one of the 20th century’s most important works.” Published in 1965, his fifth novel focuses on Eliot Rosewater, drunk, volunteer fireman, Harvard graduate, and primary trustee of the fabulously wealthy Rosewater Foundation. When Rosewater is about to attempt a noble experiment with human nature, his relatives attempt to have him declared insane. When Vonnegut graded all his books – “comparing myself with myself” – Cat’s Cradle is one of only two that received an “A+” grade, and Mr. Rosewater received an “A.” One reviewer has said that “the one unifying thread that runs throughout all of his works, is the knowledge that the universe is a Big Damn Mess, and that’s a terrible thing, but also pretty funny when you stop to think about it.”

Moderator(s): Prof. David Ray

A crippled slave in the ancient Mediterranean world, Epictetus remarkably became one of the best-known Stoic philosophers of the Classical era. He taught his followers to attempt only to change what was within their control, while submitting themselves to whatever uncontrollable circumstances befell them, be it exile, imprisonment, loss of loved ones, or poverty.

Epictetus was also a philosopher of the Classical era, but the lifestyle he taught his followers was radically different from that of the Stoics. In Epicureanism, the highest good came from pleasure, be it through friendship or the fulfillment of bodily desires. Epicurean philosophy was that each person should be free to pursue whatever pleasures they wished, so long as they did not pain those around them.

This reading group will cover most of the surviving works of these two great thinkers. Given that Epicureanism and Stoicism advocated such divergent lifestyles, reading Epicurus and Epictetus side-by-side will encourage participants to critically analyze both philosophies.

Moderator(s): Benjamin Acker
British fantasist China Miéville mashes up cop drama, cults, popular culture, magic, and gods in a Lovecraftian New Weird caper. When a nine-meter-long dead squid is stolen, tank and all, from a London museum, curator Billy Harrow finds himself swept up in a world he didn’t know existed: one of worshippers of the giant squid, animated golems, talking tattoos, and animal familiars on strike. Forced on the lam with a renegade kraken cultist and stalked by cops and crazies, Billy finds his quest to recover the squid sidelined by questions as to what force may now be unleashed on an unsuspecting world.

Moderator(s): Prof. Brian Johnson and Prof. Catherine Garmon

Charles King’s timely new book describes how interwar Istanbul transformed itself from the Ottoman imperial capital to a European city of refugees, jazz bars, muezzins and spies. Today’s city is a rare blend of Islam and democracy. History grabbed at the city’s coattails as the Ottoman Empire staggered to its collapse. At the end of World War I, Istanbul suffered its first foreign occupation since 1453. The Pera Palace Hotel became one of the places where Ottomans and Westerners could meet. Mustafa Kemal, the future founding president of the Turkish republic, took rooms there the very day the Allies assumed control of the city. Later the city and hotel would see Hemingway and Trotsky, among many others.

According to the New York Times, King tells this complex and highly nuanced story in a “hugely enjoyable, magnificently researched and deeply absorbing book.”

Moderator(s): Prof. David Ray

Why did the size of the U.S. economy grow by 3 percent in one day in mid-2013—or Ghana’s balloon by 60 percent overnight in 2010? The answers to these questions lie in the way we define and measure national economies around the world: Gross Domestic Product. The author traces the history of this artificial, abstract, complex, but exceedingly important statistic from its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century precursors through its invention in the 1940s and its postwar golden age, and then through the Great Crash up to today. The reader learns why this standard measure of the size of a country’s economy was invented, how it has changed over the decades, and what its strengths and weaknesses are. The book ends by making the case that GDP was a good measure for the twentieth century but is increasingly inappropriate for a twenty-first-century economy driven by innovation, services, and intangible goods.

Moderator(s): Prof. David Ray
The Story of Alice: Lewis Carroll and the Secret History of Wonderland by Robert Douglas-Fairhurst was published in Spring 2015 as a part of the one hundred and fifty year celebration of the publication of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. D-F’s historical book illuminates the transition from pre-modern Victorian literature and notions of childhood into the beginning of a more modernist era. It also explores the strange world of Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwig Dodgson) and Oxford University. "Wonderland" continues today as a troubling metaphor of coming of age and resistance to adulthood. It also represents how effective marketing strategies keep this resilient metaphor producing vast amounts of revenue decade after decade.

Readers are encouraged to re-read Alice's Adventures in Wonderland prior to the first meeting.

Moderator(s): Prof. Nancy Mergler
THE ARTIST’S WAY
by Julia Cameron

Wednesdays 2:45-3:35
Cate One 217
(13 weeks)

As Julia Cameron states, this is “the seminal book on the subject of creativity.” This international best-seller offers a twelve-week course in discovering and recovering your creative self. Cameron is not only an author but also a well-known playwright, novelist, filmmaker, and composer. She uses readings, weekly activities, and personal reflection to consider self-sabotage, limiting beliefs, jealousy, and other inhibiting forces and encourages replacing them with creative confidence and artistic productivity.

The new format of this group is fresh and may interest those who otherwise would not consider participating. Creative activity/trip/adventure is planned for week 13!

Moderator(s): Lucy and Rosemary Mahaffey

OUR DECLARATION: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality

Tuesdays 3:30-4:20
Cate One 201
(9 weeks)

Winner of the Society of American Historians’ 2015 Francis Parkman Prize for best nonfiction work of history on an American theme and the Zócalo Public Square Book Prize for the American work of nonfiction that most enhances our understanding of community, Our Declaration is an exploration not only of the Declaration of Independence, but also of how we write and read in a democracy. Combining memoir, history, and philosophy, Our Declaration grew out of Danielle Allen’s experience of reading the Declaration with classes of college students and of older adults. Allen argues that the Declaration still has important lessons to teach us about democracy, equality, and liberty, but that it yields these lessons only through close reading. An Honors College reading group, in which students gather together to read closely, thus seems the perfect venue in which to experience and consider Our Declaration.

Moderator(s): Prof. Benjamin Alpers

KAFKA ON THE SHORE
by Haruki Murakami

Tuesdays 5:00-5:50
Cate One 201
(10 weeks)

Haruki Murakami, one of the world’s most beloved and influential living authors, has been widely praised for his unique voice, surreal take on contemporary life, and deeply felt emotion. Kafka on the Shore is a powerful work reflective of the author at the peak of his abilities.

In this 2002 novel, a young man named Kafka Tamura runs away from home to escape his oppressive father and find his long-lost mother and sister. At the same time, the book follows the story of Satoru Nakata, an elderly man who, in a mysterious World War II incident, lost most of his intelligence but gained the ability to talk to cats. These two protagonists’ paths draw them inexorably together as they travel across a Japan filled with spirits, supernatural occurrences, and postmodern hijinks.

Moderator(s): Emiyle Lewin and Will Goree
**THE BELL JAR**
by Sylvia Plath

*Thursdays 7:00-7:50*
*DLBH 182*
*(6 weeks)*

When Esther Greenwood wins an internship at a New York fashion magazine in 1953, she is elated, believing she will finally realize her dream of becoming a writer. But in between the cocktail parties and piles of manuscripts, Esther’s life begins to slide out of control. She finds herself spiraling into serious depression as she grapples with difficult relationships and a society that refuses to take her aspirations seriously.

Taken as an autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar* addresses themes of gender roles, identity, and coming-of-age with characteristic nonchalance. The dark humor and dry wit are made even more poignant by their relation to the author’s own tragic life. In this group, we’ll look at these themes from several different perspectives and try to decide what it truly means to be human.

**Moderator(s):** Ryan Fritz and Andrew Anderson

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**THE MAYOR OF CASTRO STREET: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk**

*Wednesdays 11:00-11:50*
*Cate One 214*
*(8 weeks)*

Author Randy Shilts traces the inception and growth of Harvey Milk’s personal and political life and eventual political assassination in this compelling book, one of the source materials for the 2008 Oscar-winning film, *Milk*. One of the first gay political biographies ever published, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* is a 1982 political biography of not just the eponymous Milk, but also the budding 1970’s gay political movement in San Francisco’s Castro neighborhood. There, Milk saw a group of displaced and persecuted individuals whom he transformed into building blocks for a grass-roots political movement, which is still developing today. Though only in office for eleven months before his assassination, Harvey Milk’s legacy as San Francisco’s first openly gay city commissioner has firmly cemented him as a trailblazer for LGBTQ rights in America.

**Moderator(s):** Erik Flom and Jordan Crawford

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**JONATHAN STRANGE & MR. NORRELL**

*by Susanna Clarke*

*Thursdays 3:00-3:50*
*Cate One 201*
*(13 weeks)*

Set in a universe alive with magic, romance, and intrigue, Clarke’s debut novel has a breadth of scope unparalleled in modern fantasy. The reader is presented with a world reminiscent of classical epic fiction and drawn vividly in hues of humor and imagination. The novel’s complex plot encompasses a host of profound themes like the line between sanity and madness, poverty and oppression, and the nature of morality.

*Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* is the recipient of numerous awards including the Hugo Award, the Nebula Award, the World Fantasy Award, and *Time’s* Best Novel of the Year. Clarke’s writing has been compared to Neil Gaiman, Jane Austen, and Ursula K. Le Guin. In fact, Gaiman said about the book: “Unquestionably the finest English novel of the fantastic written in the last seventy years.”

**Moderator(s):** Erik Holbrook
THE THINGS THEY CARRIED
and
REDEPLOYMENT
The Effect of War on Those Who Fight It

Tuesdays 1:30-2:20
Cate One 217
(12 weeks)

Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* has long been established as one of the preeminent pieces of war-related literature. A collection of interrelated short stories which ultimately reads with the dramatic force of a novel, *The Things They Carried* is simultaneously a testament to the men who risked their lives in the Vietnam War and a commentary on the frailty of humanity.

Poised to become the next classic in the tradition of war writing, Phil Klay’s *Redeployment* chronicles the experiences of soldiers and veterans who served during the Iraq War, revealing the intricate combination of monotony, bureaucracy, comradeship, and violence that make up a soldier’s daily life.

Both collections explore the emotional toll war takes on soldiers and how experiences with war alter the rest of soldiers’ lives. Despite the differences between the wars in Vietnam and Iraq, the stories in *The Things They Carried* and *Redeployment* are interwoven with themes of brutality and faith, guilt and fear, helplessness and survival.

Moderator(s): Stephanie Allred

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1984
and
BRAVE NEW WORLD
Dystopias and Today

Tuesdays 4:30-5:20
DLBH 182
(12 weeks)

In their iconic books, Aldous Huxley and George Orwell offer two similar, yet different views of a dystopian future. Both Orwell and Huxley envisioned futures under totalitarian regimes that face problems such as invasion of privacy, police brutality, political corruption, and distortion of news. These are also pressing issues in our society today, allowing for analysis that brings fiction into reality.

The two classic books differ greatly in terms of how they imagine government control would be achieved. Orwell’s totalitarian regime uses fear as a primary motivator for compliance, while Huxley’s uses pleasure. Both books are more relevant now than ever, as they illuminate elements of our modern world that need to be discussed.

Reading the books back-to-back will give us the opportunity to compare and contrast their dystopian worlds and our own.

Moderator(s): Caitlin Royse
BEING MORTAL by Atul Gawande

Thursdays 2:00-2:50
DLBH 182
(7 weeks)

By New York Times bestselling author Atul Gawande, *Being Mortal* is an account of the shortcomings of the care provided to the aging American population. It details the many problems that are present in end-of-life medicine through firsthand accounts of the author’s experiences as a practicing physician. A strong summary of the current healthcare system and its inadequacies is interspersed with the personal accounts of two physicians dealing with the troubles of end-of-life care.

This book is a strong read for anyone interested in pursuing a career in medicine as it provides a perspective oft lacking in clinical experiences, providing a dignified voice to the elderly who are fast-approaching an end to their self-reliance.

Moderator(s): Suparshva Parikh and Kyle Smith

EXTREMELY LOUD AND INCREDIBLY CLOSE by Jonathan Safran Foer

Tuesdays 6:00-6:50
DLBH 182
(7 weeks)

September 11th, 2001 deeply affected the lives of many Americans—particularly that of nine-year-old Oskar Schell, whose father was killed in the attack. Following that tragic event, Oskar struggled with insomnia, depression, and panic attacks. One day, Oskar discovers a key in a vase that once belonged to his father, with only a single clue: the last name “Black.” He then embarks on a journey to find the matching lock, with the intention of meeting everyone in New York City with that name until he finds it.


Moderator(s): Lindsay Beck and Ainsley DeNoyelles

ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE by Robert Pirsig

Wednesdays 9:30-10:20
DLBH 182
(12 weeks)

Incorporating elements of both eastern and western philosophy, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* is a fascinating inquiry into how modern humans think. The timeless book discusses a number of important topics, but its most lasting contribution is its concept of Quality. In an amusing and often frustrating paradox, Quality is both in need of a definition yet inherently impossible to define. It is the very essence of things, a "beingness" that Pirsig asserts is lost when we classify, define, or label things.

*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* will introduce readers to Quality as well as a number of related ideas, all seldom thought about, yet vitally important and perpetually interesting.

Moderator(s): Jeff Terry and Robert Bellafiore
China’s rise as a global power is one of the most important developments of the 21st century in terms of international relations. In the past few decades, China’s economy has experienced unprecedented growth that has been accompanied with increasing military power. David Shambaugh, a leading expert on China, provides a description and analysis of the several ways through which China is beginning to assert a global influence, including economics, diplomacy and military power. Shambaugh examines how China is currently interacting with the global community, and what China’s rise may mean for the U.S. particularly. For anyone who is interested in international politics, this book is a must-read.

Moderator(s): Prof. Marie Dallam

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Mukoma wa Ngugi’s *Nairobi Heat* is a fast-paced crime novel set in Madison, Wisconsin and Nairobi, Kenya. Writing in the *New York Times*, NoViolet Bulawayo explains, “besides the usual fun and thrill of crime novels, what makes the book [Nairobi Heat] a delicious read is that it’s also packed with engaged and relevant social commentary, including the often unexplored relationship between Africans and African-Americans, and the shenanigans that go on in the world of international philanthropy.”

This is a great book for people who love mysteries and crime novels, but also enjoy exploring new places through literature and contemplating complex issues concerning international relationships.

The author, Mukoma wa Ngugi, will be visiting the University of Oklahoma and giving a public lecture in October.

Moderator(s): Prof. Daniel Mains

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Do you feel uncertain about how to “do” college? Do you have concern that, as a student, you won’t live up to the expectations of parents, professors, or even yourself?

An ideal group for freshman and stressed students, this book, and the conversations it will likely promote, should help. Professor Jon Gould gives straightforward advice about how to strategize for success in the academic realm of college. Through his eyes, we get the perspective of a person responsible for teaching, giving assignments, and grading, and thus we get a glimpse of what those power-holders are really looking for.

Moderator(s): Prof. Marie Dallam

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Moderator(s): Adam Brobsen and Keelan Cassidy
BELOVED
by Toni Morrison

Mondays 12:30-1:20
Cate One 217
(7 weeks)

Winner of the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for fiction and a finalist for the 1987 National Book Award, Beloved is perhaps Toni Morrison’s most discussed novel. Beloved is set after the Civil War with themes exploring family, trauma, and the nature of memory. Morrison deftly demonstrates her ability for writing magic realism when writing the story of Sethe and her family while bringing to light many of the psychological effects of slavery and the functionality of various mother-daughter relationships.

Inspired by the true story of a woman who escaped slavery, Beloved promises to be a chilling novel with both cringe- and cry-worthy scenes.

Moderator(s): Alexandra Smith and Christine Elliot.

THE ANCHOR BOOK OF NEW AMERICAN SHORT STORIES

Mondays 7:00-7:50
DLBH 182
(8 weeks)

Author and fiction editor Ben Marcus claims that there are two types of stories: those about strangers who come into town and those about people leaving on a trip. The stories in this collection, though sometimes remotely, fall somewhere along this spectrum.

Short stories are an excellent way to indulge in a wide variety of literary styles, subjects, and authors without the time commitment of reading an entire book, and Marcus has collected some of the most powerful stories of modern American literature. Twenty-nine modern American short stories are included in this anthology, some by well-known authors such as Jhumpa Lahiri and David Foster Wallace and others by relatively unknown authors such as Aimee Bender and Sam Lipsyte. Marcus’s collection of American short stories promises a variety of styles and subjects, exposure to diverse authors, and plenty of fodder for intellectual discussion.

Moderator(s): Sophie (Tuong-Phi) Le and Lindsay Jones.

THE PRINCESS BRIDE
by William Goldman

Mondays 3:00-3:50
Cate One 201
(10 weeks)

Before the 1987 movie adaptation that turned William Goldman’s “tale of true love and high adventure” into an enduring classic, there was The Princess Bride, a tongue-in-cheek love letter to the fantasy genre and all its time-tested tropes.

With the story of Buttercup and Westley, two country lovers willing to challenge kings and risk death for the possibility of a happy ending, Goldman guides the reader through the genres of fantasy and adventure with a practiced familiarity. He also examines the relationship between reader and story, with elaborate framing devices that challenge how we think about children’s stories and fairy tales.

This novel is sure to invoke nostalgia as members discuss themes such as cleverness, vengeance, and love.

Moderator(s): Jessica Roberts and Sarah Miles.
Using essays from scholars of both evolution and literary analysis, Jonathan Gottschall and David Sloan Wilson shift the current paradigm of knowledge towards the integrations of the humanities and the sciences. Both editors seek to understand how to approach literature from an evolutionary perspective and to believe that the relationship between both bodies of knowledge is mutually reinforcing. One revolutionary approach, known as Darwinian literary studies, is based on a few simple premises: evolution has produced a universal landscape of the human mind that can be scientifically mapped. These universal tendencies are reflected in the composition, reception, and interpretation of literary works. Together, students can discuss what it means to be multidisciplinary in order to relate to the vastly different disciplines represented by fellow students.

Moderator(s): KC Poe
The Alchemist

by Paulo Coelho

Mondays 1:30-2:20
Cate One 217
(5 weeks)

"Tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself," the alchemist replies. "And that no heart has ever suffered when it goes in search of its dreams, because every second of the search is a second’s encounter with God and with eternity."

Begin pursuing your Personal Legend as you read the tale of Santiago, a shepherd boy whose decision to follow his dreams became the most rewarding choice he ever made. The Alchemist is an exceptionally easy read, yet it spurs deeply introspective thoughts within its readers. It is a timeless fable that often encourages readers to reshape their perceptions of both themselves and the people existing around them.

If you’re looking for an stimulating story to read at the start of this semester, then this is the reading group for you.

Moderator(s): Daniel Rennix

Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More

by Janet Mock

Wednesdays 5:00-5:50
DLBH 180/181
(8+ weeks)

In response to suggestions from participants last semester, this group will read Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More. This memoir, written by transgender activist Janet Mock, documents her personal journey as a transgender adolescent of color and the difficulties she faced as she sought to become her true self without any role models to follow. A New York Times bestseller, Mock’s book is a vital text not only in the LGBTQ canon, but also in coming-of-age literature.

As Mock states in an interview, "We need space to discuss unspoken, uncomfortable, dark truths"; this group is intended to be one of those spaces. Please note that you do not have to identify as LGBTQ in order to participate in this group. As well, if there is sufficient interest, we may read additional works nominated by group members.

Moderator(s): Prof. Julia Ehrhardt

The 360 Degree Leader: Developing Your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization

Mondays 6:00-6:50
Cate One 217
(8 weeks)

A myth-buster, The 360 Degree Leader introduces you to the unlikeliest of leaders, most of which have little (perceived) power but manage to produce effective results.

Bestselling author and expert on leadership, John C. Maxwell, inspires and challenges the leader within us through proven principles “with the clarity of a teacher and the passion of a seasoned executive coach”. This is not a “self-help” book, but it is rather a self-challenge, confirming that great leaders are not only at the top, but somewhere in the middle as well.

Participants will have access to a free online Comprehensive Self-Assessment Test and a 29-page report, translated in graphs and charts to identify your strengths and weaknesses in leadership.

Moderator(s): Honors College staff member Lisa Tucker
Upwards of 2.2 million people are currently incarcerated in U.S. federal prisons, state prisons, and county jails. This group comprises about 1% of the adult population of the country.

Angela Y. Davis’s watershed book questions the foundational assumptions of both the American system and carceral punishment itself. Employing rigorous historical analysis, Davis shows the genealogy of the prison-industrial complex, its role in structural racism and sexism, the futility of reform, and abolitionist alternatives to prison.

To help cultivate a rich and inclusive discussion, handouts will be provided.

Moderator(s): Cooper Williams
SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL: Economics as if People Mattered by E.F. Schumacher

Mondays 5:00-5:50
DLBH 182
(7 weeks)

Called an “eco-bible” by Time, E. F Schumacher’s first book, Small is Beautiful, is a richly researched collection of essays posing the question of sustainability and how the contemporary world struggles to balance economic growth with the human cost of globalization. Schumacher, an ardent economist, addresses his discomfort with the state of our planet while looking at issues that were prevalent during the 1973 energy crisis. While some of the figures are now out of date, the issues and principles remain as relevant today as they were when Small is Beautiful was written.

As a reading group, we will discuss Schumacher’s predictions on the issues such as our reliance on imports and exports, the energy crisis, issues with oil consumption, and dual economies in developing countries. These discussions will take an in-depth look behind Schumacher’s ideas and thoughts, while coming to a better conclusion of why we think Schumacher was driven to write this piece.

Moderator(s): Emily Alspaw and Kathryn Hillis

DAYS OF WAR, NIGHTS OF LOVE
Anarchist Collective by CrimethInc.

Thursdays 5:00-5:50
Cate One 217
(8 weeks)

“No genres, no masters! We wrote a ‘book’ to say no one should write books anymore!”

What we can say for sure about Days of War, Nights of Love is simple: it’s an attempt at being as free as humanly possible. If you are interested in Chiapas or Rojava, in people who’ve been arrested by the FBI for writing a book, or in cross-dressing Muslim women in the early 1900s, then this book is for you.

If you think it might be time for a new word for politics, since the old one has been made into such a swear word, come read with us. “The wages of sin are freedom, so we better start sinning as soon as possible.”

Moderator(s): Adam Burnett and Carl Roberts
Surprising Benefits of Informal Reading Groups at the OU Honors College

[Excerpts from a letter from Jordan Rogers, engineering major and Honors College alumnus]

I remember anticipating the reading group featuring Other Colors and commenting to a friend that I did not expect to enjoy myself. This was because of nothing more than the fact that I had, “no interest in Turkey, and no interest in literature.”

I soon found that I was completely in the wrong. As I engaged in the book as well as dialogue with a professor and with other students, especially the ones who had visited Turkey, I found myself thrilled and excited to learn more about Orhan Pamuk, Istanbul, the Ottoman Empire, and Turkey.

And then I understood what might be the most important lesson I’ve ever received: I AM interested in both Turkey and literature. This is something that I would have never anticipated for I have no personal connection or natural interest in either.

The implications of this discovery were astounding, for my lack of interest in Turkey was actually a presumed lack of interest, and it only took one book to prove otherwise.

But if this was true of Turkey and literature, what wouldn’t I find fascinating if I took the time to study? Suddenly, everything in the world was interesting. I was overwhelmed, but in a very positive way.

When I started the informal reading groups this semester I had to be very disciplined to finish the 50 pages required for both books each week.

Since my epiphany, if it can so be called, I have required myself to read 50 pages of any book every day. At first, this seemed like a chore, for my days were full already with school and clubs. But I pushed myself, and every day it seems less and less like a chore. I’m feeling now the daily desire to read, the feeling that I WANT to read, something I have never felt before.

You’ll be amazed to hear that I wake up about 90 minutes earlier now just so I can start the day right - with a book. By the time you read this I will have finished three books in as many weeks - all fiction classics.

I want to emphasize that the books we read and the discussions we had among the students were great... and I left feeling energized about reading. My definition of education has drastically morphed, and I now challenge myself to pursue lifelong learning.