Informal Reading Groups
Spring Semester 2013

Meet just one hour per week with 10-15 students from the Honors College to discuss about 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 get the reading done and come to the group meeting as often as you can, with the understanding there may be one or two weeks when you need to do other things. Meet other Honors students with similar interests. Our goals are “maximum information and enjoyment, with zero stress.” Books are distributed at the first meeting of each group.

- No tuition or fees
- No quizzes or tests
- No grades
- Free books
- Read, think, discuss with other Honors College students on important topics of mutual interest

Signing up for reading groups begins January 7th. Thirty-eight of the listed groups begin the week of January 21st - January 25th, and meet from 4 to 14 weeks as indicated in this brochure. There are two groups that begin later in the semester, as specified. These groups are listed at the end of the brochure. Books will be distributed at the first meeting. To participate in any of these groups, email your request on or after January 7th to HonorsReading@ou.edu. Groups are filled on a “first-come, first-served basis, so it’s helpful to indicate a second choice.
THE GREATER JOURNEY: AMERICANS IN PARIS
David McCullough

Mondays 1:30 – 2:20
Cate Center 1, Room 217
12 weeks

David McCullough, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Biography for his works Truman and John Adams, turns his investigative eye on an eclectic bunch of sojourning Americans in his newest book The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris. The Greater Journey is more a collection of stories than a single story; however, the disjointed lives of Charles Sumner, John Singer Sargent, Samuel Morse, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and more explain the profound impact the French city had on American history. The book also provides an American perspective on Parisian events, including the publishing debut of the diary of Elihu Washburne, American Ambassador to France who remained in Paris during the Franco-Prussian war, the long siege of Paris, and the ill-fated Commune.

This group will be moderated by Honors senior Travis Ruddle.

"SURELY YOU'RE JOKING, MR. FEYNMAN"
Adventures of a Curious Character
Richard P. Feynman

Thursdays 11:30 – 12:20
Cate Center 1, Room 217
8 weeks

Richard Feynman was among the first pop-scientists, achieving public fame through both his high-profile research, including the Manhattan Project and the investigation following the Challenger disaster, as well as his ability to educate, through televised public lectures and his publically-available undergraduate course. In his memoir “Surely You’re Joking, Mr. Feynman”, the Nobel Prize-winning Physicist addresses both the frivolous and heavy sides of his life, from his interests in safe-cracking to attempts at samba dancing, from a retrospective on the Manhattan Project to a critique of science education. Dr. Feynman unsurprisingly achieves the blend of entertainment and enlightenment in his memoir that characterizes most of his public works.

This group will be moderated by Honors senior Zachary Eldredge.

THE WAVES
Virginia Woolf's Greatest Novel

Thursdays, 10:00 – 11:00
Cate Center 1, Room 217
7 weeks

Ever the modern amongst the modernists, Virginia Woolf writes in a highly experimental fashion in her self-described "playpoem" The Waves. Published in 1931, the book intersperses a series of soliloquies reflecting on the life of a dead friend with third-person descriptions of a coastal scene to relate the individual consciousness to a continuous group consciousness. Virginia Woolf is widely celebrated as one of the foremost modernist writers and has survived the test of time.

This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.
THE AFFLUENT SOCIETY
John Kenneth Galbraith—
"A true classic, ahead of its time"

Fridays 10:30 — 11:20
Cate Center 1, Room 217
7 weeks

Though written during America's successful, post-WWII years, Galbraith's book is timeless in its application of economic reasoning to problems such as income disparity, inadequate social and physical infrastructure, and a reverence of production as an index of social progress. The Affluent Society addresses the negative impact of valuing private wealth over public wealth. The fact that these issues are still very much present in America today speaks to a continuing popular ignorance, one which can be addressed by a thorough reading of Galbraith most famous work.

This group is moderated by Honors junior Daniel Meschter.

TINKERS
By Paul Harding—
Pulitzer-Prize-winning debut novel—"rare and beautiful"

Tuesdays 12:00 — 12:50
Cate Center 1, Room 217
5 weeks

Paul Harding's Pulitzer-prize-winning novel, Tinkers, tells the story of a dying clock repairman, his father, and his grandfather. As George Washington Crosby lies on the brink of death, he tells his children and grandchildren of his own childhood growing up poor in Maine with a father battling with epilepsy. George's memories intertwine with his father's and his grandfather's, a Methodist preacher gone mad. Tinkers is simultaneously heartbreaking and relatable and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Marilynne Robinson praises it saying, "it confers on the reader the best privilege fiction can afford, the illusion of ghostly proximity to other human souls."

This group will be moderated by Honors senior Isaac Beckett.

A WALK IN THE WOODS:
Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail
Bill Bryson

Wednesdays 8:00 — 8:50
David L. Boren Hall, Room 182
14 weeks

After spending most of his adult life in England, the overweight Bill Bryson and his less-healthy friend, Stephen Katz, decided to walk the entirety of the 2200-plus mile-long Appalachian Trail without any previous hiking experience. A Walk in the Woods, in addition to the narration of this ill-fated comedy of a journey, tells the story of the trail, of the region's culture, and more generally of the state of ecology in the United States. As much research essay as journal, Bryson presents an insightful take on the urbanization and deforestation of America while lamenting the preference roadside attractions over natural wonder in modern-American tourism.

This group is a continuation of the multi-book evening group that has been meeting over the past several semesters. The group will choose more books after finishing A Walk in the Woods, with deference given to travel literature.

This group will be moderated by Honors senior Lindsay Gardner.
NOTE: This group will consist of half Honors students and half OU Scholar athletes.

The Real All Americans is the account of how the Carlisle Indian Industrial School came to be the foremost football power during 1911-1912. The book tracks the history of the closing of the west to the ascension of football as the national pastime, beginning with a military battle in 1866 and culminating in the pseudo-battle between West Point and Carlisle Indian Industrial School in 1912, featuring both Jim Thorpe and Dwight Eisenhower. Sally Jenkins writes about the power of sport bringing disparate groups together behind a common goal. This group will be a collaboration between the Honors College and the Athletic Department including both honors students as well as scholar-athletes.

This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.

NOTE: This is a continuation of the group that met during Fall Semester 2012, and has read through Book Two Part Four. Participants should be prepared to begin with Book Two Part Five.

War and Peace

Leo Tolstoy—Continuing from Fall Semester

Fridays, 11:30 —12:20
Cate Center 1, Room 217
14 weeks

The book tracks the history of the closing of the west to the ascension of football as the national pastime, beginning with a military battle in 1866 and culminating in the pseudo-battle between West Point and Carlisle Indian Industrial School in 1912, featuring both Jim Thorpe and Dwight Eisenhower. Sally Jenkins writes about the power of sport bringing disparate groups together behind a common goal. This group will be a collaboration between the Honors College and the Athletic Department including both honors students as well as scholar-athletes.

This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.

NOTE: This is a continuation of the group that met during Fall Semester 2012, and has read through Book Two Part Four. Participants should be prepared to begin with Book Two Part Five.

Among the foundational works of western philosophy, Plato's dialogues deal with a wide range of issues, including understanding knowledge, the soul, and perception versus reality. The Middle Dialogues contains one of the most recognizable dialogues, The Republic, in which Plato argues ultimately for the best form of government but also covers the identification of justice and, in the famous Allegory of the Cave, the distinction between appearances and "true" forms. Although philosophy has advanced since the Golden Age of Athens, Plato's dialogues provide an introduction to a number of important philosophical topics and the Socratic method of argumentative prose is an accessible guide to discussing them.

This group is moderated by Dr. Brian Johnson, Director of the Honors College Writing Center.
In Gödel, Escher, Bach, Douglas Hofstadter, professor of computer-science and cognitive-science, doesn't write about math, art, or music, but rather about what patterns in each indicate about our own, and potentially artificial, intelligence. Hofstadter identifies self-referential loops within the works of each man and then extracts information about the foundations of thinking and cognition found within neurological mechanisms. Winner of both the Pulitzer Prize for general non-fiction and The National Book Award for science in 1980, Gödel, Escher, Bach is interspersed with puzzles and invented dialogues, which often become self-referential and meta-fictitious themselves, in order to not only enhance comprehension of the ideas presented but also to reduce the gravity of those complex ideas.

This group will be moderated by Honors seniors William Lonn and Robert Sparks.

Viktor Frankl was a prisoner at four concentration camps, including Auschwitz, and Man’s Search for Meaning is his self-acclaimed attempt to identify the psychological effects of such horrendous conditions on the day-to-day life of prisoners. After losing his entire family to the Holocaust, Frankl addresses his existential crises by developing logotherapy, where human existence is defined by a will to find meaning in one’s life. Frankl’s suggestion is that each individual can find meaning in each individual moment, particularly in their suffering. Furthermore, each person’s ability to choose, even while suffering or under the threat of death, creates a sense of identity and worth. Man’s Search for Meaning has remained influential throughout the existential movement of the 20th century and remains applicable to life today.

This group will be moderated by Honors senior Dillon Carroll.

By one of the most important intellectuals of our time, this is an extraordinary story of exile and a celebration of an irrecoverable past. A fatal medical diagnosis in 1991 convinced Edward Said that he should leave a record of where he was born and spent his childhood, and so with this memoir he rediscovers the lost Arab world of his early years in Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt. Said writes with great passion and wit about his family and his friends from his birthplace in Jerusalem, schools in Cairo, and summers in the mountains above Beirut, to boarding school and college in the United States, revealing an unimaginable world of rich, colorful characters and exotic eastern landscapes. Underscoring all is the confusion of identity the young Said experienced as he came to terms with the dissonance of being an American citizen, a Christian and a Palestinian, and, ultimately, an outsider. A professor of comparative literature at Columbia, a classical pianist, and the most articulate spokesman for the Palestinian cause in the US, Said has written a richly detailed, moving, and often profound memoir. Out of Place depicts a young man’s coming of age and the genesis of a great modern thinker.

This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.
In the book that was to spark the Gonzo Journalism movement, Hunter S. Thompson relates the quasi-biographical tale of his trips to Las Vegas with lawyer and activist Oscar Zeta Acosta. Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas is the account of Raoul Duke and his attorney, Dr. Gonzo (hence: Gonzo Journalism), as they embark on a drug-fueled rampage around the decadence-incarnate city of Las Vegas. The preface to Thompson’s 1972 novel quotes Samuel Johnson: “He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man.” The self-crippling journey along with the hallucinations and ruminations of the main characters present an incredibly current retrospective of the duration and failure of the counterculture movement of the 60s.

This group will be moderated by Honors junior Brian Randall.

The incredible boom in journalistic publishing following the Bush Administration has become unwieldy to all but the most voracious readers. Jeffrey Record, in his book Wanting War, generously attempts to make the abundance of information more coherent by summarizing and analyzing the multitude of claims regarding entry into the Iraq War. Ultimately, Record argues, the main causa belli was a determination to prove American military’s might in a post-Cold War world. Furthermore, he attempts to show that Iraq was chosen not because of the risk it posed, but because it was a weak adversary.

This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.

This intergenerational book group involving OLLI members (Osher Lifelong Learning Institute) and students from OU’s Honors College will read and discuss Working in the Shadows: A Year of Doing the Jobs [Most] Americans Won’t Do. Author Gabriel Thompson spent 2008 working in various types of “unskilled” labor positions that are often held by recent immigrants. He harvested lettuce on farms, he worked the night shift in a chicken processing plant, and he became a bicycle deliveryman in New York City. These jobs brought him into contact with many different subcultures of America: not merely various ethnic groups, but groups of people whose cultural identity is defined by work life and economic status. He discovers the demanding physical and psychological skills that these jobs actually require. Thompson tracks his work life through the year with details both engaging and gruesome, and he inherently raises complicated issues around education, economics, and the work force.

This group is moderated by Dr. Marie W. Dallam, professor of Religious Studies in the Honors College.
Michael Pollan’s acclaimed and somewhat controversial book, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, has a simple enough premise: with the advent of international trade and industrial production techniques, the decision of what to eat has become incredibly complex and the required information to make such decisions is often concealed from the public. Pollan investigates the industrial, pastoral (organic), and personal (sustenance) modes of food-production in the hopes of presenting a clear ethical, economical, and environmental picture of the impacts of how we eat. Named one of the Top 10 books of 2006 by *The New York Times*, *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* makes the comparison between the choices present to modern America (fast food, processed food, organic, etc.) to those available to pre-historic humans in that both groups are generally uncertain of which foods are healthy and which are poisonous. Whereas ancient people had to use trial and error to solve their dilemma, Pollan is hopeful that investigative journalism will be just as successful.

This group will be moderated by Honors senior Ashley Higgs.

In her critically acclaimed book, *Delusions of Gender*, Cordelia Fine makes the case for abandoning distinctions, beyond the physical, based on sex. Fine begins by providing several specific arguments as to why an understanding of “hard-wired” differences between men and women’s brains is wrong. She then goes on to provide an explanation of how seemingly “hard-wired” differences when examined through the latest neuropsychological research indicates a mutable brain more affected by societal constructs of gender than differences between the sexes. Fine uses an unusual clarity and apt humor to conquer a usually weighty and contentious topic.

This group will be moderated by Honors senior Dillon Votaw.

The only Honors reading group conducted entirely en español! Fear not, for the book also contains English translations, but it is encouraged that you avert your eyes from them. García Lorca became famous for his participation in the Generation of ‘27, a group of poets defined by a common dedication to the avant-garde style. García Lorca was assassinated during the Spanish Civil War by fascist forces possibly as a result of his leftist leanings or his sexual orientation. However, after his death even falangists recognized that “the finest poet of Imperial Spain has been assassinated.” This group will proceed with the collaboration of Luis Trigueros-Ramos y López, Ph.D.—a García Lorca expert and actually-from-Spain Spanish professor here at OU.

This group will be moderated by Honors sophomore Ben Clark and Dr. Luiz Lopez.
TELEGRAPH AVENUE
New Novel by Pulitzer-Prize-winner Michael Chabon

Tuesdays 3:00 — 3:50
Cate Center 1, Room 217
10 weeks

*Telegraph Avenue,* Pulitzer Prize-winning author Michael Chabon's most recent novel, tells the story of Archy Stallings. Archy, a black man, and his white, Jewish friend and bandmate, Nat Jaffe, who operates a record store on Telegraph Avenue, the street connecting Oakland and Berkeley. Their store is threatened by an ex-NFL player's attempt to build a big box retail store on the same block. Simultaneously, Archy's absentee father, the star of a few blaxploitation films in the 70s, attempts to reenter Archy's life while Archy and his wife are themselves expecting a child. Archy and Nat's wives' midwife business is threatened by a racially-charged encounter with a doctor and Archy's illegitimate son becomes romantically involved with Nat's son. The novel closely examines the father-son relationship while recounting the agonies of failing businesses. Jennifer Egan of The New York Times suggests that "in the end, Chabon's novel suggests, what has the power to fill the void inside us isn't artifacts, but paternity. In fact, it may have been Dad who was missing in the first place."

This group will be moderated by Dr. Daniel Mains, Honors College Professor.

FUN HOME
A Family Tragicomic Alison Bechdel

Mondays 11:30 — 12:20
Cate Center 1, Room 217
6 weeks

*Fun Home* is Alison Bechdel's innovative, illustrated method of addressing a troubled childhood, specifically a strained relationship with her father, the owner of a funeral home, as well as understanding her own sexual orientation. Bechdel's father was a teacher at the local high school until losing his job in the wake of a sex scandal and subsequently took his own life. Listed as one of the best books of the first decade of the 21st Century by The Time of London, *Fun Home* blends the graphic novel and memoir genres and proposes a novel way of approaching our past through literature.

This group is moderated by Honors junior Ivana Jaworski.

AFGHANISTAN: HOW THE WEST LOST ITS WAY
Tim Bird and Alex Marshall

Fridays, 1:30 — 2:20
Cate Center 1, Room 317
7 weeks

*Afghanistan: How the West Lost Its Way,* authors Tim Bird and Alex Marshall examine the many complexities of the Afghan conflict, including the heroin trade and its accompanying warlords, a strenuous relationship with Pakistan, and the disagreements among western nations acting within Afghanistan. Bird and Marshall argue that the intervenors have failed in both their counterinsurgency as well as their attempts at nation-building, critiquing the lack of a cohesive or clear strategy from all countries involved.

This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.
THE SILMARILLION
J. R.R. Tolkien's
"tragic and operatic history of the First Age of Middle Earth"

Mondays 10:30 — 11:20
Cate Center 1, Room 217
14 weeks

The posthumously published The Silmarillion attempts to create a mythos of the Middle-Earth universe. Tolkien originally conceived these stories as a program to apocryphally explain English history and culture in the early 20th century. Created simultaneously with The Lord of the Rings following the success of The Hobbit, The Silmarillion was originally rejected as too obscure and too celtic. JRR Tolkien’s son, Chris, compiled the book as a conglomeration of unfinished and completed incomplete texts. Despite the discrepancies in the creation, The Silmarillion still works to explain the origins of the peoples featured in Tolkien’s classics.

This group will be moderated by Honors junior Tyler Tennant.

NEVER EAT ALONE: And Other Secrets To Success, One Relationship At A Time
Keith Ferazzi

Tuesdays 4:00—4:50
Cate Center 1, Room 217
7 weeks

From workshop suits to conference glad-hands, an incredibly large number of people constantly talk about the importance of “networking.” Perhaps it’s the powerpoints or the blindingly-white smiles, but often networking seems disingenuous. Keith Ferrazzi believes in the importance of what is traditionally labeled networking but rejects the superficiality of utility-based friendships. This outlook allowed Ferrazzi to become extremely successful at a relatively young age, named one of Crain’s 40 Under 40 and selected as a Global Leader for Tomorrow by the Davos World Economic Forum. Never Eat Alone outlines Ferrazzi’s strategy for obtaining and, more importantly, maintaining friendships, from regarding your friends’ goals as equal to your own to frequent interaction, not just interaction in your own times of need.

House of Leaves is the 2000 debut of writer Mark Danielewski. Although labeled a novel, House of Leaves is highly unconventional with a non-standard, inconsistent layout and a story that relies heavily on footnotes. The book is primarily narrated by a tattoo artist who finds an academic review of a documentary, which relates the terrifying account of children becoming lost in a house that grows larger and larger on the inside than it is on the outside. Simultaneous story lines and encoded stories tell of the descent into mental instability of the unreliable narrator Johnny Truant and his mother. House of Leaves has been described by the author as a love story with the feeling of a horror book.

This group will be moderated by Honors junior Tyler Tennant.

This group will be moderated by Honors senior David Postic.
John Dos Passos’s masterpiece the U.S.A. trilogy is comprised of The 42nd Parallel, 1919, and The Big Money. Dos Passos implements four modes of innovative storytelling to describe America during the first three decades of the 20th century; fictional narrative, “the camera eye” or stream of consciousness, “newsreels” including headlines and article fragments, and biographies of historical figures. U.S.A. features the development of several fictional characters throughout this historical period and is largely pessimistic about the political and economic direction of the United States after the end of World War I. Although finished in 1936, U.S.A. remains influential and was ranked 23rd on the Modern Library list of the 100 Best English-Language Books of the 20th Century.

This group will be moderated by Dr. Rich Hammerla, Associate Dean of the Honors College.

In the wake of the 2008 economic crisis, President Obama named his centerpiece Wall Street regulation the Volker Rule. Paul A. Volker was Chairman of the Federal Reserve under Carter and Reagan and Chairperson of the President’s Economic Recovery Board. During the threat of inflation in the 70s and throughout his career, Volker demonstrated the stabilizing power of a determined, politically neutral central banker. William Silber’s The Triumph of Persistence is based largely on a series of over 40 interviews with Volker himself. The book focuses largely on Volker’s life as a public servant, with his private and corporate life largely glossed over. However, Silber’s work still provides an unequalled depiction of the last half-century regarding international monetary policies and the personalities that shaped them.

This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.

Khalid Al-Khamis’s novel Taxi is an entertaining conglomeration of politics, God, poverty, conspiracy theories, and sex as the narrator zig-zags across the streets of Cairo. Each of the 58 short chapters is a narration of a taxi ride with a different driver who colorfully gives a snapshot of one of Egyptian society’s many parts. In a city where taxi drivers come from every background, from high school dropouts to graduates of law school and from Upper Egypt to Cairo’s city-center itself, the cultural value of this book is hard to overstate. The frustrations, hardships, and injustices of daily life give the reader an idea of the building pressure leading up to the revolution of January 25, 2011. The Egyptian sense of humor is maintained throughout, and the book is a fun way to access some aspects of Arab life far from the heaviness of news reports and the dryness of textbooks.

This group will be moderated by Honors senior Chase Smithburg and Instructor: Hossam Barakat.
Epileptic
David B — "One of Europe's most important and innovative graphic artists"

Fridays 1:30 — 2:20
Cate Center 1, Room 217
9 weeks

Epileptic is David B's autobiographical graphic novel depicting his childhood spent growing up with an epileptic brother. Because of his brother's epilepsy, the narrator's family spends his youth following false hope after false hope in attempt to beat the disease. In a visually stunning masterpiece David B merges his own story with that of his grandparents' experiences through both World Wars. The trauma of his brother's battle with epilepsy and his grandfathers' physical battles along with the striking black-and-white images create a relatable, inescapable, and heartbreaking glimpse into the sorrowful reality of the disease and the horrible pain it can cause for an entire family.

This group is moderated by Honors senior Michael Wilkinson.

Life, the Universe and Everything
Douglas Adams

Tuesdays 5:00 — 5:50
David L. Boren Hall, Room 182
6 weeks

NOTE: This group is a continuation of the previous Hitchhiker's Guide group and will begin with the third book. Life, the Universe and Everything, deals with the ethnocentric planet Krikkit and the population's desire to rid itself of the pesky problem of the rest of the universe.

This is the third of five books in the comedy science fiction "trilogy" by Douglas Adams. The novel is an adaptation of the first four parts of Adams' BBC radio series of the same name. Join hapless hero Arthur Dent as he travels the galaxy with his intrepid pal Ford Prefect, getting into horrible messes and generally wreaking hilarious havoc. Dent is grabbed from Earth moments before a cosmic construction team obliterates the planet to build a freeway. One reviewer writes: "You'll never read funnier science fiction; Adams is a master of intelligent satire, barbed wit, and comedic dialogue." A massive bestseller translated into 30 languages, over the years it has gradually become an international multi-media phenomenon.

This group will be moderated by Honors junior Christi Connolly and Honors senior Taylor Jensen.

On the Road
Jack Kerouac — Prototypical novel of the Beat Generation

Mondays 4:30 — 5:20
David L. Boren Hall, Room 182
7 weeks

Jack Kerouac is considered amongst the best candidates for personifying the Beat Generation, and On the Road as his most representative work. Kerouac's novel is the largely autobiographical tale of Sal Paradise, Kerouac, and Dean Moriarty, Neal Cassidy, and the characters they meet as they take a carefree adventure around the United States and into Mexico. Famously written as a single manuscript over 120-feet long, On the Road's stream-of-consciousness feel acts to accentuate the nonconformity and blissful detachment experienced by the main characters, and more generally typifies the specific era of the jazz age defined by individual, highly personal attempts to find meaning and belonging.

This group is moderated by Honors freshman Kunal Naik and Honors senior Adam Avoian.
**The Divine Comedy**
By Dante Alighieri

*Thursdays 2:00 — 2:50*
*Cate Center 1, Room 217*
*8 weeks*

This group will pursue a thorough introduction to a work that, for T.S. Eliot, was more important than Shakespeare’s. You could even say it’s *stand beyond time* (and if you don’t know the reference, consider joining the group!). Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, translated by Allen Mandelbaum, is an epic poem written by Dante Alighieri between 1308 and his death in 1321. It is widely considered the preeminent work of Italian literature and one of the greatest works in all world literature. On the surface, the poem describes Dante’s travels through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven, but at a deeper level, it represents allegorically the soul’s journey towards God. The discussion will be accompanied by the fantastic engravings of Gustave Doré (illustrator of the Bible and the works of Byron, Poe, Cervantes, Coleridge, etc...)

This group will be moderated by Honors sophomore Ben Clark and Honors freshman Ashten Duncan.

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**Be Good: How to Navigate the Ethics of Everything**
By Randy Cohen

*Thursdays 1:30— 2:20*
*Cate Center 1, Room 317*
*8 weeks*

"The New York Times Magazine’s original “Ethicist” Randy Cohen helps readers locate their own internal ethical compasses as he delivers answers to life’s most challenging dilemmas—timeless and contemporary alike. Organized thematically in an easy-to-navigate Q&A format, and featuring line illustrations throughout, this amusing and engaging book challenges readers to think about how they would (or should) respond when faced with everyday moral challenges, from sex and love to religion, technology, and much more. Sure to ignite brain cells and spark healthy debate, *Be Good* is a book to refer to again and again."

This group will be moderated by Honors sophomore Whitney Thompson.

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**Neal Postman's Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business**

*NETWORK—Sidney Lumet’s 1976 Film*

*Tuesday 11:30 — 12:20*
*Cate Center 1, Room 317*
*8 weeks*

Orwell’s 1984 and Huxley’s *Brave New World* both portray a dystopic future in which individual humans have ceased to have any meaningful civil rights, becoming slaves to the state. Neil Postman argues in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, published in 1985 but still incredibly relevant, that while guarding against the oppression of 1984, society has become complacent in the forfeiture of our rights by taking the “soma” of sensational, anti-rational, sound-bite-driven television. By embracing passive entertainment at the expense of critical involvement, e.g. through reading, society no longer has the depth or accuracy of knowledge necessary for honest intellectual participation and rational argument. Postman seems to accurately predict the appallingly dishonest superficiality of the 2012 election and more generally our current 24-hour news cycle.

This group will also watch the 1976 film *Network* written by Paddy Chayefsky and directed by Sidney Lumet.

This group will be moderated by Honors senior Daniel Phillips.
This ambitious group will read about 100 pages per week, and in only eight weeks will read three great works by three of the greatest writers of the twentieth century. In William Styron's *Darkness Visible*, the novelist who won major literary awards chronicles his descent into depression and his near-fatal night of "despair beyond despair". He explores the causes of depression and describes his subsequent recovery, as well as relates his experience to the depression suffered by other writers. Gertrude Stein describes her life with her long-time partner in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Living in Paris during the first three decades of the 20th century, Stein and Toklas presided over one of the most famous literary and artistic salons in history. Dedicated attendees included Pablo Picasso, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Thornton Wilder, Sherwood Anderson and Henri Matisse. *Speak, Memory* is novelist Vladimir Nabokov's memoir covering his pre-American life, praised for its convergence of fact and fiction in writing one's own biography. This group will be moderated by Honors sophomore Ben Clark.

* Originally created in tandem with Stanley Kubrick's influential film of the same name, *2001: A Space Odyssey* tells the story of an enigmatic monolith's effect on humanity, spanning from the advent of tools in prehistoric Africa to manned space flight. Arthur C. Clarke creates an artificial intelligence HAL 9000 that is meant to assist the human venture to Saturn (Jupiter in the film and subsequent Odyssey novels). The voyage is meant to be a rendezvous with whoever was responsible for an 3-million-year old alarm beacon to Saturn originating from the moon. HAL 9000 ends up being too human-like and his neurosis threatens to derail the entire mission. *2001: A Space Odyssey* is concerned with the space-age problems of the consequences of rapid technological growth and space travel. *2010: Odyssey Two* is a continuation of the story from *2001* in which a new U.S.-Soviet crew encounters the perils of returning to Jupiter and the monolith's continued interference.

This group will be moderated by Honors junior Lillian Flannigan.
NARCISSUS AND GOLDMUND
"A stunningly beautiful novel"

and

THE FAIRY TALES
"Timeless, imaginative stories"

and

POEMS
A Bilingual edition
All by Nobel-Prize-winner
Hermann Hesse

Thursdays 8:00 — 8:50
David L. Boren Hall, Room 182
14 weeks

Hermann Hesse was a German writer and poet working around the time of the early 20th century. His *Poems* is a collection of poems written between 1899 and 1921, with themes of nature, romance, and homesickness; his style is highly imagic and not obfuscated as that of many poets, which enables the resonance modern readers still feel with his poems. *Narcissus and Goldmund* is the story of a young man who leaves his monastery school to become a wandering artist, abandoning his friend and mentor, who later becomes the head of the monastery. The novel traverses themes from balance to morality and aesthetics to the plight of the seeker.

This reading group will cover one poem per meeting, along with a section from one of Hesse's later novels *Narcissus and Goldmund*, then a fairy tale from his compilation, in order to get a broad view of the author's varying styles and threads of thought.

This group will be moderated by Honors junior Sarah Smith.

Kurt Vonnegut's
First Three Novels

PLAYER PIANO,
THE SIRENS OF TITAN
and
MOTHER NIGHT

Tuesdays, 10:00 — 10:50
Cate Center 1, Room 217
14 weeks

*Player Piano* is Kurt Vonnegut's first novel. Published in 1952, the novel tells the story of a near-future world in which all manual labor has been replaced by machines. While working at General Motors, Vonnegut saw punch-card computers replacing machinists and remarked that "[t]o have a little clicking box make all the decisions wasn’t a vicious thing to do. But it was too bad for the human beings who got their dignity from their jobs." *Player Piano* explores the effects of capitalism and automation by portraying a dystopian post-World War III world in which the rise of the technocracy comes at the expense of the forcibly-unemployed poor. *The Sirens of Titan*, published in 1959, is Vonnegut's second novel and involves issues of free will, omniscience, and the overall purpose of human history. Much of the story revolves around a Martian invasion of Earth. *Mother Night* (the title is taken from Goethe's *Faust*) was published in 1961 and is Vonnegut's third novel. It is the fictional memoirs of Howard W. Campbell Jr., an American, who moved to Germany in 1923 at age 11, shortly after World War I, and then later became alternately a well-known playwright and a Nazi propagandist.

This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.
Arthur Koestler’s harrowing story of an Old Bolshevik—that is, a member of the Bolshevik party before the revolution in 1917—as he is arrested and tried for treason during Stalin’s Great Purge. The allegorical tale never names the USSR or Stalin specifically but the protagonist Rubashov faces a similar fate as a number of revolutionaries later disowned and tried by Stalin’s government. While undergoing both psychological and physical torture, Rubashov relates a life devoted to the party so desperately trying to frame him and exposes the bankruptcy of a dictatorship as liberator. Koestler’s novel was ranked #8 on Modern Library’s 100 Best English-language Novels of the 20th Century.

This group will be moderated by Honors seniors Karl Schaettle and Jessica Johnson.

Political journalist and author of 1984 and Animal Farm, George Orwell recounts his experiences and observations while fighting (for the better side) in the Spanish Civil War. After deciding to take up arms against fascism, Orwell joined an anti-Stalinist faction of the resistance and began writing in an attempt to stir up fervor amongst complacent French and British civilians. After over three months of fighting, Orwell found himself taking fire from a former leftist ally and became increasingly exasperated with the factionalism within the anti-Franco parties. Orwell’s Homage to Catalonia was critical of the Spanish Communists and was thus poorly received by the Communist-leaning left in Britain and its eventual publication was overshadowed by the outbreak of war with Germany. Homage to Catalonia, however, has received critical acclaim in the decades following the war and has been ranked among the Modern Library’s 100 Best Nonfiction works.

This group will be moderated by Honors sophomore Ben Clark.
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.