Informal Reading Groups  
Fall Semester 2010

Meet just one hour per week with 10-15 students and one faculty member 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.”

- 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

Groups begin the week of August 30 - September 3, and meet from 5 to 12 weeks as indicated. There are also five groups that begin the week of October 11 - 15, listed last in this brochure. To participate, email your request to HonorsReading@ou.edu – groups are filled on a “first-come, first-served” basis, so it would be helpful to indicate a second choice, if you have one.
Richard Rhodes’
ARSENIOS OF FOLLY:
THE MAKING OF
THE NUCLEAR ARMS
RACE
Wednesdays, 3:30 to 4:20,
160-E David L. Boren Hall
6 weeks
The third book in Pulitzer Prize winner Richard Rhodes’ four volume history of the atom and hydrogen bombs, the arms race, the Cold War, and the making of the twentieth and early twenty first centuries, Arsenals of Folly brings us through the fall of the Soviet Union. Part narrative history and a dual biography of Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, Rhodes focuses on the role these two leaders played in engaging international diplomacy in the shadow of nuclear annihilation and the impact nuclear weapons played in their respective governments and societies. The group will be moderated by Dr. Rich Hamerla, Honors College Associate Dean. Students interested in participating in the Reading Group should be aware that Rhodes will be coming to the Honors College during the Fall term as a guest of Professor Hamerla and Professor Lifset for their Dream Course, The Atom and the American Experience.

James Joyce’s
DUBLINERS
The 15 Short Stories That Are His First Major Work
Mondays, 4:30 to 5:20,
The HUB, 140 David L. Boren Hall – 5 weeks
A collection of 15 short stories by the author of ULYSSES. Highly controversial when published, in this book Joyce was said to have “reinvented the art of fiction.” The stories center on Joyce’s idea of an “epiphany” - a moment where a character has a special moment of self-understanding or illumination. This group will be moderated by Dr. Melanie Wright, Director of Curriculum in the Honors College.

THE ORNAMENT OF THE WORLD:
HOW MUSLIMS, JEWS, AND CHRISTIANS CREATED A CULTURE OF TOLERANCE IN MEDIEVAL SPAIN
by María Rosa Menocal
Mondays, 12:00 to 12:50,
182 David L. Boren Hall
7 weeks
Yale historian María Rosa Menocal brings to life a lost world: medieval Spain from 750 to 1492, where Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived together in peace and created a vibrant, extraordinary civilization. Arabic was the lingua franca, and Jews and Christians held prominent positions in Muslim society and government. The book is “fascinating, splendid, lively, and seductively written with a lavish sense of place.” This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.
WHY KEROUAC MATTERS:
THE LESSONS OF ON THE ROAD
(they’re not what you think)
by John Leland

Mondays, 1:00 to 1:50, 160-E David L. Boren Hall - 5 weeks

This short book presents a revisionist interpretation of Jack Kerouac’s novel ON THE ROAD. Kerouac was 26 when he started the novel. “My writing is a teaching,” Kerouac noted in his journal, and journalist John Leland believes that, contrary to its reputation as a call to youthful rebellion, Kerouac’s most important book is really about becoming an adult. Group members do not need to have read ON THE ROAD to participate. This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.

INDIAN GIVERS
HOW THE INDIANS OF THE AMERICAS TRANSFORMED THE WORLD
by Jack Weatherford

Tuesdays, 12:30 to 1:20, 180 Cate 1 Hall - 6 weeks

Written in a lucid style, and described as “remarkable, lively, thoughtful, interesting and entertaining,” this book documents the impressive sophistication of Indian cultures and shows that their contributions to the world’s economy and culture have been ignored and under-rated. This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.

Tyler Priest’s
THE OFFSHORE IMPERATIVE:
SHELL OIL’S SEARCH FOR PETROLEUM

Fridays, 10:00 to 10:50 AM, 180 Cate 1 Hall – 6 weeks

The Gulf of Mexico is the most explored, drilled and developed offshore petroleum province in the world. It provides over a quarter of all US oil and gas production exceeding Texas and soon Alaska. For several decades Shell Oil dominated the Gulf of Mexico discovering and producing more oil and gas than any other firm. Tyler Priest has written a history of Shell’s activities in the Gulf providing insight into how this company became a dynamic industry leader in geophysical prospecting, petroleum geology, enhanced recovery and pipelining. While tracing the evolution of the technology that made deep offshore possible, we shall gain some insight into the political and business context that has now produced what might very well become the worst marine ecological disaster of the post-WW II period.” This group will be moderated by Dr. Robert Lifset.
New York Times reporter Stephen Kinzer examines the 1953 CIA-sponsored coup that removed from power democratically-elected Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh. After nationalizing the oil industry, previously run by the British, Mossadegh was the target of the CIA’s first successful major operation to overthrow a government. Kinzer also notes that the 1953 conspiracy plunged the C.I.A. into the regime-change business, leading to coups in Guatemala, Chile and South Vietnam, as well as to the Bay of Pigs. This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.

Humankind derives energy primarily from food, but sometimes people turn to psychoactive drugs to boost flagging mental energy. In this book, the author demonstrates how the history of one drug — amphetamine — captures the twentieth-century American obsession with confidence-grounded optimism and a never-ending supply of productively channeled energy. This fascinating tale of amphetamine’s discovery, development, marketing, and use offers insights into the evolution of the modern pharmaceutical industry, the social and cultural histories of drug use in the United States, and the failure of the American health care system. This group will be moderated by Dr. Sarah Tracy.

In this memoir, Isabel Allende, a novelist whose works are associated with “magical realism,” evokes the culture and landscape of her lost homeland. The book circles around two life-changing moments. The assassination of her uncle, President Salvador Allende on 9-11, 1973, sent her into exile and transformed her into a literary writer, followed by the terrorist attacks of 9-11, 2001, on her adopted homeland, the United States. This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.
**Ralph Ellison**

by Arnold Rampersad

The Definitive Biography of the Author of *INVISIBLE MAN*

*Thursdays, 11:30 to 12:20, 180 Cate 1 Hall 12 weeks*

Ralph Ellison’s *INVISIBLE MAN* has been called “The Great American Novel,” and its author “one of the nation’s most brilliant writers and most important cultural intellectuals.” Born in Oklahoma in 1913, Ellison spent his first 17 years in Oklahoma City, before going on to major literary fame. This definitive biography has been described as “stunningly revealing... of the very complex and vulnerable man behind Ralph Ellison’s own masks and myths.” Cornel West said “this masterful book is the most powerful and profound treatment of Ellison’s undeniable artistic genius, deep personal flaws, and controversial political evolution.” This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.

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**The Dark Side**

by Jane Mayer

The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on America’s ideals

*Fridays, 12 noon to 1 PM, 182 David L. Boren Hall 7 weeks*

Recommended by President Boren when he visited the Honors College in March for “Pizza with the Prez,” this book was the most requested by Honors students for inclusion in Fall Semester’s reading groups. This hard-hitting expose examines both the controversial excesses of the war on terror and the home-front struggle to circumvent legal obstacles to its prosecution. New Yorker correspondent Mayer details the battle within the Bush Administration over a new anti-terrorism policy of harsh interrogations, indefinite detentions without due process, extraordinary renditions, secret CIA prisons and warrantless wiretappings. This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.

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**Andrew Lih’s The Wikipedia Revolution: How a Bunch of Nobodies Created the World’s Greatest Encyclopedia**

*Wednesdays, 1:30 to 2:20, 160-E David L. Boren Hall 5 weeks*

Since Wikipedia was launched online in 2001 as “the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit,” it has blossomed to more than a billion words spread over 10 million articles in 250 languages, including 2.5 million articles in English, according to Wikipedia cofounder Jimmy Wales. Author Andrew Lih covers much more than how Wikipedia works, from the influence of Ayn Rand on Wikipedia cofounder Jimmy Wales and the “burnout and stress” of highly active volunteer editors-writers to controversies, credibility crises and vandalism. This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.
THE THINGS THEY CARRIED
Tim O’Brien’s “Profoundly Moving Masterpiece” on the American War in Vietnam

**Wednesdays, 4:30 to 5:20, 182 David L. Boren Hall 6 weeks**

The author is a National Book Award winner and this best-selling book was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, as well as being named by the New York Times as one of “the Books of the Century.” The Washington Post said it was “rendered with an evocative, quiet precision not equaled in the literature on Vietnam. Written as fiction, but obviously based on fact, one critic said it seemed like Thucydides and Hemingway combined. This group will be moderated by Dr. Ben Alpers.

THE AWAKENING
Kate Chopin’s Classic 1899 Novel

**Mondays, 3:00 to 3:50, 160-E, David L. Boren Hall 5 weeks**

Set in New Orleans and the Southern Louisiana coast at the end of the nineteenth century, this major novel centers around Edna Pontellier and her struggle to reconcile her increasingly unorthodox views on femininity and motherhood with the prevailing social attitudes of the turn-of-the-century South. It is one of the earliest American novels that focus on women’s issues without condensation. It is also one of the most important novels written by an American woman in the nineteenth century. This group will be moderated by Honors College students Amanda Niedzwiecki and Elizabeth Abell.

Dante’s INFERNO

**Fridays, 3:30 to 4:20, 182 David L. Boren Hall 7 weeks**

Dante Alighieri’s THE DIVINE COMEDY is of course one of the most important works in all literature, comparable to the works of Shakespeare and Goethe. One cannot be considered well-read without having attempted it. THE INFERNO is Volume One of this famous epic poem, and has been described by one critic as “at once haunting, dark and yet grotesquely beautiful.” This group is reading the Hollanders’ translation, which has been very highly praised for its readability, beauty, and close faithfulness to the original Italian. This group will be moderated by Honors College student Maura Cremin.
THE ALCHEMIST
A Fable by Brazilian Novelist Paulo Coelho

Fridays, 4:30 to 5:20, 182 David L. Boren Hall 5 weeks

This remarkable book is by a Brazilian writer whose books have sold more than 65 million copies in 150 countries and have been translated into 60 languages. Described as a “compelling story told with shimmering elegance, beneath which lies a bedrock of wisdom about following one’s heart.” This short novella has been praised by Nobel laureates, self-help gurus, and even Madonna. This group will be moderated by Dr. Vicki Schaeffer, Honors College Director of Recruitment.

Robert Heilbroner’s WORLDLY PHILOSOPHERS: THE GREAT ECONOMIC THINKERS

Wednesdays, 12:30 to 1:20 PM, 180 Cate 1 Hall – 9 weeks

Economics may well be “the dismal science,” but at this time of painfully slow recovery from the deepest recession since the Great Depression and a near melt-down in the financial markets, most thoughtful Americans realize they need to know something about it. In the last edition (1998) of this 50-year-old classic, economist Robert Heilbroner presents brilliant chapter-length introductions to Adam Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, Karl Marx, Thorstein Veblen, John Maynard Keynes, Joseph Schumpeter, and others. This is a great place to start. This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.

JUDE THE OBSCURE
Thomas Hardy’s Last and Most Controversial Novel

Thursdays, 1:30 to 2:20, 160-E David L. Boren Hall 9 weeks

Beginning as a magazine serial, this novel was first published in book form in 1895 and publicly burned the same year by the Bishop of Wakefield. The hero is Jude Fawley, a working-class young man who dreams of becoming a scholar. The two other main characters are his earthy wife, Arabella, and his cousin, Sue. Themes include class, scholarship, religion, marriage, and modernization. In an elaborately structured plot, the novel suggests how human loneliness and sexuality can stop a person from trying to fulfill his dreams. This group is a continuation of the group that read Tess of the d’Urbervilles last spring but new members are encouraged and welcome. This group will be moderated by Honors College student Geri Richlin.
THE SAVAGE DETECTIVES
One of the most important major works from Chilean-born novelist Roberto Bolaño

Thursdays, 3:30 to 4:20, 160-E David L. Boren Hall 5 weeks

Hilarious and sexy, meandering and melancholy, full of inside jokes about Latin American literati that you don’t have to understand to enjoy, The Savage Detectives is a companionable and complicated road trip through Mexico City, Barcelona, Israel, Liberia, and finally the desert of northern Mexico. It’s the first of Bolaño’s two giant masterpieces to be translated into English. This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray. **WARNING:** This book contains profanity, violence, and some graphic scenes many would consider obscene. If you find such material offensive, DO NOT sign up to read this book.

Bronwyn T. Williams’ SHIMMERING LITERACIES: POPULAR CULTURE AND READING AND WRITING ONLINE

Tuesdays, 1:30 to 2:20, 180 Cate 1 Hall 6 weeks

A reviewer says: “this book examines the powerful role of popular culture in the daily online literacy practices of young people. Whether as subject matter, discourse, or through rhetorical patterns, popular culture dominates both the form and the content of online reading and writing. In order to understand not only how but why online technologies have changed literacy and popular culture practices, this book looks at online participatory popular culture from Facebook pages to fan forums to Twitter.” This group will be moderated by Dr. Brian Johnson, Director of the Honors College Writing Center.

VIRGIN SUICIDES
A Novel by Jeffrey Eugenides

Mondays, 7:00 to 8:00 PM, 182 David L. Boren Hall 12 weeks

Called “tantalizing and macabre” by critics, Eugenides’ first novel opens with the first of five suicides. This reading group will be a continuation of the feminist literature group that started last spring; new members are welcome. Over the course of the semester, this group will read literature covering seven broad topics—body image, sexuality, “the problem that has no name,” the intersection of gender and race, the politicization of gender, girls and girl culture, and gender and material culture. The group reads more than one book, at a faster pace than other groups, and will vote on further readings. This group will be moderated by Honors students Chris Scott and Madison Mélon.
LA GRAMMAIRE EST UNE CHANSON DOUCE
by award-winning novelist Eric Orsenna

**Thursdays, 3:30 to 4:20, 182 David L. Boren Hall**
5 weeks

This group is reading a book in the original French, but discussion will be conducted primarily in English (although comments in French are also welcome). Publishers’ Weekly describes this small and delightful book as “a witty rumination on words and grammar.” 10-year-old Jeanne and her 14-year-old brother, Thomas, are shipwrecked on a strange island where words have become independent. Rendered mute, the siblings visit the Word Market, where one can buy the perfect word for any occasion. They also travel to a town full of independent words that strut around without the need for human beings to utter them. The marriages that take place between nouns and adjectives or adverbs are particularly clever. This group will be moderated by Honors student Brandon Harney.

FICCIONES
By Jorge Luis Borges
The Argentine writer’s greatest short stories

**Mondays, 2:00 to 2:50, 160-E David L. Boren Hall**
8 weeks

This group is reading a book in its original Spanish, but discussion will be conducted in English (comments in Spanish are also welcome). Called “the most important Spanish-language writer since Cervantes,” in this book Borges has created 17 very short pieces of fiction that offer up diabolical tigers, imaginary encyclopedias, ontological detective stories, labyrinths, libraries, lotteries, doubles, dreams, mirrors, heresiarchs, and scholarly commentaries on nonexistent books. In so doing, he expands forever fiction as a genre and has enormous impact on dozens of major writers who follow him. This group will be moderated by Honors student Katie Baker.

THE CHINESE IN AMERICA: A NARRATIVE HISTORY
by Iris Chang

**Thursdays, 4:30 to 5:20, 182 David L. Boren Hall**
10 weeks

An outstanding study of the multiple waves of Chinese-American immigration, this is a major work by the author of the bestselling *Rape of Nanking* (1997). Chang focuses not just on why people left China, but also on how they were received in the US, and how they survived even the racist Chinese Exclusion Act of 1880. Chang finds 20th-century Chinese-Americans navigating a rocky road between identity and assimilation, surviving new waves of immigrants from a troubled China and more recently from Taiwan and Hong Kong. This reading group is a response to suggestions by distinguished recent Honors College graduates, who noted a lack of consideration of the Asian-American experience at OU. This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.
WATCHMEN
Dave Gibbons and Alan Moore
“The ultimate graphic novel”

Fridays, 2:30 to 3:20, 182 David L. Boren Hall
5 weeks

This is the collected edition of the graphic novel which originally appeared in a 12-issue series during 1986-87, and since has become a cult classic and the inspiration for the 2009 film. Proving it transcends the limitations of the genre, TIME magazine named it one of the 100 Best English-Language Novels Published Since 1923. TIME praised it as “a superlative feat of imagination, combining sci-fi, political satire, knowing evocations of comics past and bold re-workings of current graphic formats into a dystopian mystery story.” This group will be moderated by Honors College student Sean Bender. [NOTE: Books for this group were purchased through the contribution of a faculty member. No Honors College funds were used.]

THE LONG WALK: THE TRUE STORY OF A TREK TO FREEDOM
by Slavomir Rawicz

Mondays, 1:00 to 1:50, 160-E David L. Boren Hall
6 weeks
This Group Begins the Week of October 11-15

Cavalry officer Slavomir Rawicz was captured by the Red Army in 1939 during the German-Soviet partition of Poland and was sent to the Siberian Gulag along with other captive Poles, Finns, Ukrainians, Czechs, Greeks, and even a few English, French, and American unfortunates who had been caught up in the fighting. A year later, he and six comrades from various countries escaped from a labor camp in Yakutsk and made their way, on foot, thousands of miles south to British India, where Rawicz reenlisted in the Polish army and fought against the Germans. The Long Walk recounts that adventure. This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.

THE HISTORY OF LOVE
A Novel by Nicole Krauss
“Brilliant, hilarious, heart-breaking”

Tuesdays, 2:30 to 3:20, 180 Cate 1 Hall
6 weeks
This Group Begins the Week of October 11-15

A hauntingly beautiful novel about two characters whose lives are woven together in such complex ways that the reader is left to wonder what really happened. These twists and turns only strengthen the impact of this enchanting book. The History of Love spans of period of over 60 years and takes readers from Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe to present day Brighton Beach. At the center of each main character’s psyche is the issue of loneliness, and the need to fill a void left empty by lost love. This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.
A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN
By James Joyce

Mondays, 4:30 to 5:20, The HUB, 140 David L. Boren Hall
5 weeks
This Group Begins the Week of October 11-15

This is a semi-autobiographical novel by James Joyce, which first appeared in book form in 1916. Joyce traces the formative years of young Stephen Dedalus as he begins to question and rebel against the Catholic and Irish conventions of his upbringing. In this work, Joyce pioneers some of his modernist techniques that will later come to fruition in ULYSSES. Modern Library ranked it as among the three greatest English novels of the 20th century. This group will be moderated by Dr. Melanie Wright, Director of Curriculum in the Honors College.

AMERICAN INDIANS AND THE LAW
An Introduction for the General Reader
by N. Bruce Duthu

Tuesdays, 12:30 to 1:20, 180 Cate 1 Hall - 6 weeks
This Group Begins the Week of October 11-15

Indian tribes have a legal status that is unique among America’s distinct racial and ethnic groups: they are also sovereign governments that engage in governmental relations with Congress. This book provides a comprehensive summary of the major events and court cases over 250 years. Highly recommended for those who are considering law school as a postgraduate option, and for anyone interested in often overlooked aspects of US history. This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.

Charles R. Morris’ TWO TRILLION DOLLAR MELTDOWN
Explaining the Financial Crisis of 2008-2009

Fridays, 12:30 to 1:20, 182 David L. Boren Hall
5 weeks
This Group Begins the Week of October 11-15

One of the very best accounts of the multiple causes of the meltdown in the financial markets of 2007-2008 that produced the deep recession of 2008-2009, from which recovery has been extremely slow. Complex events are explained with clarity and precision, and from a moderate and practical perspective that is critical of both ideological extremes. You won’t find a better introduction to the huge economic crisis that is affecting all of us. This group will be moderated by Prof. David Ray.
Surprising Benefits of Informal Reading Groups at the OU Honors College

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

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.