

BOOKS *that* INSPIRE



SOONER MAGAZINE
HIGHLIGHTING
THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA'S
FIRST EXHIBITION OF BOOKS THAT INSPIRE

BOOKS THAT

Half-a-hundred faculty members determine what single book has made a difference in their lives, then make a case for their choices and offer them up for public consumption.

Few inventions have had a greater impact on human society than the book. The development of the printing press made books one of mankind's first mass-produced products and contributed significantly to the diffusion of knowledge. While they have undergone changes in production methods, the concept of the book is much the same as it was 500 years ago. Books have remained a preferred vehicle for transferring information and ideas from one person to another.

One reason that books have continued to be so useful is their ability to connect us with the thoughts of others. By so doing, they tend to influence our own thoughts either positively or negatively. We all have read books by authors with whose ideas we disagree. We tend to place those books back on the shelves not to be read again. Conversely, we encounter books in which the author's message has a profound influence upon our thinking or the way we view other events or other people. We treasure these books and enthusiastically recommend them to others. Books that fall into this latter category formed the selections in this exhibit. Those viewing it found books that have enlightened, inspired, or influenced the lives and careers of the readers.

There were 51 participants in this exhibit composing a representative cross section of academic disciplines from the arts, sciences and humanities. Interestingly, only one book was mentioned more than once. The participants' statements about their books indicate that some were influenced quite early in life, while others were influenced as adults. Common to all was the realization that the contributor, as a reader, was impressed by the book's author to the point that the reader's life was altered to some degree. Changes such as those described by contributors to this exhibit were compelling tributes to the power of books and reading. Calling attention to this power to change and influence lives was one of the underlying motives for staging this exhibit. Another was to observe National Library Week and to note that libraries hold these and many other books that contain equally forceful messages for those who read them. Thirdly, we hoped that this exhibit would inspire those who viewed it to make reading a frequent activity. Books make a difference in our lives, and it is part of the library's teaching mission to help people realize their importance.

*Sul H. Lee
Dean, University Libraries
The University of Oklahoma*

continued

INSPIRE

Books that Inspire

A Random Sampling

Michael
Ashby

Chemistry & Biochemistry

Pu Ning. *Red in Tooth and Claw: Twenty-six Years in Communist Chinese Prisons.*
New York: 1994.



I have a penchant for reading the biographies of ordinary people. *Red in Tooth and Claw*, the biography of Han Wei-tien, written by Pu Ning (whose nom de plum translates as Mr. Anonymous), is a remarkably moving account of inner strength and dignity. Pu Ning, like the Nobel Laureate Alexander Solzhenitsyn, has devoted his literary life to exposing the underbelly of communist rule. Wei-tien tells us “You must believe my eyes” as he recalls the twenty-six years he spent as a political prisoner. What Wei-tien saw was horrific, and his memories left an indelible impression on me.

Deborah A.
Chester

*Journalism &
Mass Communications*

Dumas, Alexandre.
The Three Musketeers.
New York: n.d.



When I was nine, I read this book as my first foray into grownup fiction. It opened the gates into a marvelous story world that offered me exciting action, villainous intrigue and heartrending tragedy. I was amazed by Milady’s capacity for evil, and I felt such pity for Athos. After reading this wonderful story, I just couldn’t go back to kiddie books and continued to explore historical fiction. Before long, I decided that writing novels was what I wanted to do with my life. Thirty-two published novels later, that childhood decision of mine remains valid.

David L.
Boren

President

Mill, John Stuart.
On Liberty.
London: 1901.



One book which has been especially important to me is *On Liberty*, an extended essay of political philosophy written by John Stuart Mill in 1859. It was very helpful to me as a public official as I grappled with questions of how far government should go in regulating individual behavior. It left me with a strong sense of the value of freedom and the dangers of censorship. It deepened my belief that our society should be a free marketplace idea because no generation and no prevailing group has ever had a corner on the truth. The book helped teach me that any suppression of freedom or open debate should be viewed with great concern.

Rosa
Cintrón

University College

Calderón de la Barca,
Pedro.
La Vida es Sueño.
New York: 1904.



... as a little girl looking out my window I wondered whose reality I beheld . . . no sidewalks, cold unpaved roads. Was I looking in or out? Which one is my real home, the shack or the home with the nice window?

In high school and college, we had the opportunity to read and discuss Calderón de la Barca’s *La Vida es Sueño* that spoke of the images from the window of my childhood. As I read it, I realized I had been Segismundo. His monologues spoke of social cruelties and power. His modest solitary life challenged the propensity to regard bounty as inadequate. His reflections proposed that life, even if an illusion or dream, was our unique experience and responsibility.



Kelly Damphousse
**Kelly
 Damphousse**
Sociology

Griffin, John Howard.
Black Like Me.
 Boston: 1961.

This was one of the first books to inspire me. I grew up in northern Canada and only knew about the African-American experience by watching *Roots* on television. I was moved by the miniseries, but this book allowed me to experience the “hate stare” and to feel unwanted. *Black Like Me* showed me that reading is an active form of learning. It has become my favorite hobby (and the best part of my job). An aside: my adopted sister is Indian and *Black Like Me* also helped me to understand why her life experiences would always be different from mine.



Julia C. Ehrhardt
**Julia C.
 Ehrhardt**
Honors/Women's Studies

Wilder, Laura Ingalls.
*On the Banks of
 Plum Creek.*
 New York: 1937.

My mom gave me this book when I was five, and I’m sure I’ve read it 50 times since. Laura was my hero. She slept in a dugout, survived a grasshopper plague, and braved hailstorms and blizzards. The Little House books taught me that girls could be adventuresome and courageous—and that they could be writers when they grew up.



J. Madison Davis
**J. Madison
 Davis**
*Journalism &
 Mass Communications*

Herodotus.
The Persian Wars.
 New York: 1942.

Herodotus suited my temperament when I first read him at age twelve and still does. His story of how the Greeks against all odds preserved themselves against two despots cannot fail to inspire. But there is more. Herodotus was interested in “stuff” for its own sake: how mummies were preserved, how some nations (curiously, he thought) relieve themselves in private and how Gyges was blackmailed into murdering his king. Herodotus opens your eyes to the wonder and complexity of the human comedy, then and now.



George Henderson
**George
 Henderson**
Human Relations

Fanon, Frantz.
*Black Skin,
 White Masks.*
 New York: 1967.

Frantz Fanon’s book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, gave me my first significant cross-cultural understanding of racism as an international phenomenon. By carefully juxtaposing the writings of Alfred Adler, Aimé Césaire, George Hegel, Jean-Paul Sartre and Richard Wright—to mention a few authors discussed in the book—Fanon laid the foundation for my positive self-concept as a *human being*, not merely as an African American. In doing so, I found my voice as a community activist and scholar. And it has yet to be silenced!

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Mariëlle
Hoefnagels
*Zoology/Botany &
Microbiology*

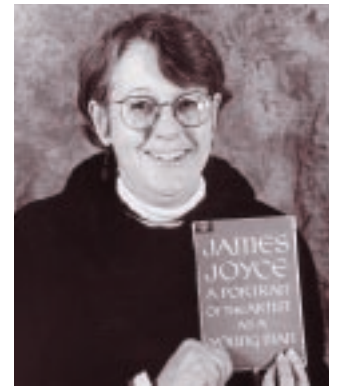
Carson, Rachel.
Silent Spring.
Boston: 1962.



One of the first “grown-up” books that I remember reading was Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, written in 1962. I had always been interested in human impacts on the environment, and I loved how Carson wrote passionately, yet with clear and simple language, about the many ways pesticides disrupt the natural world. *Silent Spring* paints a convincing picture of the disasters that can slowly, unintentionally unfold when humans try to tinker with individual strands of the web of life. Her imagery continues to shape my personal philosophy and academic life.

Penny
Hopkins
Zoology

Joyce, James.
*A Portrait of the Artist
as a Young Man.*
New York: 1928.



It was the first class of the semester of my first year of college—Freshman Honors English with Professor Roger Brooks. As the clock struck the hour, Dr. Brooks strode to the front of the classroom and without any introduction began reading from a book:

“Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road . . .”

As he read, an explosion occurred in my head: This was like nothing I had ever read in high school! I wrote a senior Honors thesis on Joyce and have remained a lifelong reader.

Trina
Hope
Sociology

Gottfredson, Michael R.,
and Hirschi, Travis.
*A General Theory
of Crime.*
Stanford: 1990.



The book that has most inspired me is *A General Theory of Crime*, by Michael R. Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi. I first read the book while in my first year of graduate school at the University of Arizona, and it changed the way I thought about criminological theory. Unlike many other theories that attempt to explain crime and deviance, Gottfredson and Hirschi begin with the known facts about crime and create a simple, straightforward theory that explains these facts. Using a wonderful combination of logic and wit, the authors shook up the field of criminology in a way few modern theorists have.

Roy
Knapp
*Petroleum & Geological
Engineering*

Adler, Mortimer J.
*How to Read a Book:
The Art of Getting
a Liberal Education.*
New York: 1940.



I am reluctant to call this an inspirational book. It is a useful book. It helped me develop better reading and listening skills. My reason for wanting it included in this group is that it is a really good guide to understanding critical reading. I believe reading is the fundamental learning skill, and we must work hard to develop and maintain that skill. This book was (and continues as) an excellent guide for me. It is a book that I recommend to our students and graduates.



Nancy Mergler
Nancy Mergler
 Senior Vice President and
 Provost

Piercy, Marge.
*Circles on the Water:
 Selected Poems of
 Marge Piercy.*
 New York: 1986.

There are two poems by Marge Piercy, written 17 years apart, that recommend all her poems. The title poem of a 1973 collection, "To Be of Use," was my personal talisman during the seemingly endless labors of graduate school, and it still re-centers me even today. I recommend a daily reading. A second poem, "Excursions, Incursions" from *The Moon is Always Female* (1980), has a hilarious reference to a professional woman with unmanicured, gardener's hands. In the middle of a meeting when you see me smiling down at my folded hands, it is because I just thought (again) of that poem. Both these poems are included in *Circles on the Water*.



Osborne Reynolds
Osborne Reynolds
 Law

Dostoyevsky, Fyodor.
Crime and Punishment.
 London; New York:
 1991.

Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* was a book that greatly inspired and influenced me. I was impressed that most of the action occurred within the mind of one person, yet the story was suspenseful and enthralling. In a larger sense, the story illustrated the universal struggle between good and evil, and it exposed problems related to discovering the truth and dealing with it. I was in high school when I first read the book, and it kindled my interest in the law by making me think about society's rules and how we treat those who break them.



Andrew Phelan
Andrew Phelan
 Art

Hoban, Russell.
Riddley Walker.
 New York: 1980.

Riddley Walker has haunted me ever since I read it two decades ago. Why? Because *Riddley Walker* asks poignant (and ultimately unanswerable) questions that make the reader reflect on the history of civilizations and why they have disappeared leaving only artifacts and myth. Hoban writes of a future, when, as the survivors begin to sift through the detritus of ruins and uncover parts of our civilization, they rediscover the process to make a substance which they worship and incorporate into rituals. Hoban's hypothesis is that, in George Santayana's memorable phrase, "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."



Kristina L. Southwell
Kristina L. Southwell
 University Libraries

Ellison, Ralph.
Invisible Man.
 New York: 1952.

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) is a vivid portrayal of a young black man's travels in the American South and North, in search of his place in American society. Ellison, a native of Oklahoma City, created a significant contribution to contemporary American literature with this controversial novel and added a heretofore unheard black point of view to the dialogue on 1950s race issues in America. Ellison's efforts garnered him the National Book Award for fiction in 1953. Although critics and scholars often focus on the overt themes of racism and anti-communism in the novel, *Invisible Man* represents to me the general problem of alienation from the culture in which one lives and the price one pays for creating a life outside the establishment.

continued

Jill
Tao

Political Science

Paton, Alan.
*Cry the Beloved
Country: A Story of
Comfort in Desolation.*
New York: 1948.



Sometimes a good book goes unappreciated because the reader has not yet reached the place where the story resides. However, some books are so powerful that they pull you in and teach you things beyond your experience. *Cry the Beloved Country* was such a book for me. At its heart, it tells a tragic tale, not because of the politics of apartheid, not because of the downward spiral such a system exerts upon the human soul. It is the attempt to chronicle the search for dignity and meaning in a place where such things remain elusive that makes it an inspiring tale.

Zev
Trachtenberg

Philosophy

Wills, Garry.
*Nixon Agonistes:
The Crisis of the
Self-Made Man.*
Boston: 1970.



What is so remarkable to me about *Nixon Agonistes* is the way Wills moves from journalistic reporting of particular moments, to the presentation of the arc of an individual's career, to a philosophical interpretation of a period in the nation's history. This book demonstrates how a careful accounting of events can make philosophy meaningful—and how events are made meaningful by philosophy.

Danny P.
Wallace

Library and Information
Studies

Vonnegut, Kurt.
Cat's Cradle.
New York: 1998, c1963.



Cat's Cradle is the ultimate exposition of the uneasy balance between the seemingly pure motives of science and the naively corrupt purposes technocrats, politicians and militarists apply to the products of science. Vonnegut entices the reader to lace a loop of string between his or her hands and ask "Where is the Cat? Where is the Cradle?"

Valerie
Watts

Music

Levine, Lawrence W.
*Highbrow/Lowbrow: The
Emergence of Cultural
Hierarchy in America.*
Cambridge, Mass.: 1988.



As a musician, the majority of my time is spent practicing my instrument. As a result, reading is a luxury. I must choose the books I wish to read with great care. *Highbrow/Lowbrow* was a gift from my sister, who is a cultural historian. I am so thankful she gave me this book because it transformed my attitude about being an artist in the United States today. It was shocking to discover that at one time in this country every citizen (no matter what social status) could quote from Shakespeare and was familiar with the Beethoven symphonies. This book will shame all artists and the institutions that support them to make their works truly accessible to everyone once again. It will also inspire the average American to seek out the rich culture that this country has to offer and demand that it be available for all rather than only those who can afford it. The good news: reading is still an affordable educational pastime. Take advantage of it!

Books that Inspire

a complete list of Participants and Selections

1. Robert Anex (AMNE)—*The River That Flows Uphill: A Journey From the Big Bang to the Big Brain*. William Calvin.
2. Michael Ashby (Chemistry & Biochemistry)—*Red in Tooth and Claw: Twenty-six Years in Communist Chinese Prisons*. Pu Ning.
3. Peter Barker (History of Science)—*The Sleepwalkers: A History of Man's Changing Vision of the Universe*. Arthur Koestler.
4. Paul Bell (Arts & Sciences)—*On the Origin of the Species*. Charles Darwin.
5. David L. Boren (President)—*On Liberty*. John Stuart Mill.
6. Mack Caldwell (Architecture)—*Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life*. Gregg Levoy.
7. Deborah A. Chester (Journalism & Mass Communication)—*The Three Musketeers*. Alexandre Dumas.
8. Rosa Cintrón (University College)—*La Vida es Sueño*. Pedro Calderón de la Barca.
9. Kelly Dampousse (Sociology)—*Black Like Me*. John Howard Griffin.
10. J. Madison Davis (Journalism & Mass Communication)—*The Persian Wars*. Herodotus.
11. David Deming (Geology & Geophysics)—*The Spiritual Journey of Joseph L. Greenstein*. Ed Spielman.
12. Ralph Doty (Classics)—*Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Shunryu Suzuki.
13. Julia C. Ehrhardt (Honors/Women's Studies)—*On the Banks of Plum Creek*. Laura Ingalls Wilder.
14. Brian Fiedler (Meteorology)—*The Moral Animal*. Robert Wright.
15. M. Charles Gilbert (Geology & Geophysics)—*Dynamics of Faith*. Paul Tillich.
16. Blake Gumprecht (Geography)—*Chavez Ravine*. Don Normark.
17. Richard Hamerla (Honors)—*The Castle*. Franz Kafka.
18. Jeffrey Harwell (Engineering)—*Crime and Punishment*. Fyodor Dostoyevsky.
19. George Henderson (Human Relations)—*Black Skin, White Masks*. Frantz Fanon.
20. Larry B. Hill (Political Science)—*The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. Jacob Burckhardt.
21. Mariëlle Hoefnagels (Zoology/Botany & Microbiology)—*Silent Spring*. Rachel Carson.
22. Trina Hope (Sociology)—*A General Theory of Crime*. Michael R. Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi.
23. Penny Hopkins (Zoology)—*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. James Joyce.
24. Manyul Im (Philosophy/International Programs)—*Chuang-tzu*. Chuang-tzu.
25. Jason Baird Jackson (Anthropology)—*The Spirit of Folk Art*. Henry Glassie.
26. Ghada A. Janbey (Modern Languages)—*Daughter of Fortune*. Isabel Allende.
27. Mike Kaspari (Zoology)—*The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. John Steinbeck.
28. Charles Kenney (Political Science)—*On Violence*. Hannah Arendt.
29. Clara Sue Kidwell (Native American Studies)—*The Great Chain of Being*. Arthur O. Lovejoy.
30. Roy Knapp (Petroleum & Geological Engineering)—*How to Read a Book: The Art of Getting a Liberal Education*. Mortimer Adler.
31. Kae Koger (Drama)—*Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Luigi Pirandello.
32. A. Robert Lauer (Modern Languages)—*Don Quixote*. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra.
33. Andy Magid (Mathematics)—*The World of Mathematics*. James R. Newman.
34. Nancy Mergler (Provost)—*Circles on the Water: Selected Poems of Marge Piercy*. Marge Piercy.
35. JoAnn Palmeri (History of Science)—*Amadeus: A Drama*. Peter Shaffer.
36. Andrew Phelan (Art)—*Riddley Walker*. Russell Hoban.
37. Osborne Reynolds (Law)—*Crime and Punishment*. Fyodor Dostoyevsky.
38. Betty Robbins (Marketing/Women's Studies/Film Studies)—*Man's Search for Meaning*. Victor Frankl.
39. Joe Rodgers (Psychology)—*Godel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*. Douglas R. Hofstadter.
40. Jay Shorten (Libraries)—*Esperanto*. John Cresswell and John Hartley.
41. Nickie Singleton (Law)—*Gravity's Rainbow*. Thomas Pynchon.
42. Kristina L. Southwell (Libraries)—*Invisible Man*. Ralph Ellison.
43. Gregory Stephens (Human Relations)—*Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. Werner Sollors.
44. Jill Tao (Political Science)—*Cry the Beloved Country: A Story of Comfort in Desolation*. Alan Paton.
45. Zev Trachtenberg (Philosophy)—*Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man*. Garry Wills.
46. Denise Vale (Dance)—*The Power of Myth*. Joseph Campbell.
47. Connie Van Fleet (Library & Information Studies)—*The Glass Bead Game (Magister Ludi)*. Hermann Hess.
48. Danny P. Wallace (Library & Information Studies)—*Cat's Cradle*. Kurt Vonnegut.
49. Valarie Watts (Music)—*Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Lawrence W. Levine.
50. Eleanor Weinel (Architecture)—*The Immense Journey*. Loren C. Eiseley.
51. Logan Whalen (Modern Languages)—*Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Francois Rabelais.