



HONEYBEE SUMMER READING LIST - 2015

At long last, summer is here! For those who endured this past winter in New England, this new season is especially sweet. As usual, there are stacks of books in every corner of every room I inhabit. Less usual is the bliss of a few white spaces on the calendar to dive into those stacks – hooray! Here are some of the titles that have occupied me lately, along with a few that I’m looking forward to exploring in the weeks to come.

Summer afternoon, summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language.

- Henry James

*Summer breeze, makes me feel fine
Blowing through the jasmine in my mind*

- Seals and Crofts

And so with the sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on the trees, just as things grow in fast movies, I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer.

- F. Scott Fitzgerald

*When life gets rough I like to hold onto my dreams
Of relaxing in the summer sun, just letting off steam
Oh, the sky will be blue, and you guys’ll be there too
When I finally do what frozen things do
In Summer!*

- Summer song from Frozen (this year’s Boston theme song)

I know I am but summer to your heart, and not the full four seasons of the year.

- Edna St Vincent Millay

*Let’s go surfin’ now
Everybody’s learning how
Come on and safari with me*

- The Beach Boys

Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under trees on a summer’s day, listening to the murmur of water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time.

- John Lubbock

CAN READING MAKE YOU HAPPIER?

Just in case a hammock and glass of lemonade is not enough of an invitation, check out this compelling case for reading by author Ceridwen Dovey in The New Yorker:

“In a secular age, I suspect that reading fiction is one of the few remaining paths to transcendence, that elusive state in which the distance between the self and the universe shrinks. Reading fiction makes me lose all sense of self, but at the same time makes me feel most uniquely myself.”

– Ceridwen Dovey

<http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/can-reading-make-you-happier>

SUMMER OF EVOLUTION!

This spring I was fortunate to travel to the Galapagos islands, following in Darwin’s famous footsteps (as well as those of thousands of creepy-looking iguanas). Though I’ve been studying natural systems for some time now, and living within one for even longer, I realized I’d not ever spent much time studying the real nuance of evolution. We spend so much energy trying to understand human innovation, disruption, and creativity, and summertime is prime season for this sort of exploration. Where better to begin, then, than by a deeper dive into the innovation that creates our own world? Here is my pod of evolution-themed summer readings.

- [ARRIVAL OF THE FITTEST](#), by Andreas Wagner
As in many fields, attention in evolution has been disproportionately focused on one piece of a fascinating puzzle: natural selection. This piece is vital, of course, but Wagner notes that natural selection preserves innovations; it does not create innovations. This book seeks out the puzzle piece of innovation creation, the part before natural selection (hint: it’s not just chance). In exploring this library of natural components, Wagner does not hesitate to note the mega-questions that remain, painting a terrific picture of the broader landscape that is yet to be mapped.
- [EVOLVING OURSELVES](#), by Juan Enriquez and Steve Gullans
Even before we’ve fully understood natural selection, here we are, tinkering with *unnatural* selection. Enriquez and Gullans explore all sorts of ways that humans are evolving ourselves – through environment, habit, and technology. To call this book provocative is an understatement – consider just a few sections near the end of the book, with titles like Synthetic Life, Humans and Hubris, and Leaving Earth? I also appreciate the Darwin Scorecard in the appendix, which updates key Darwinian concepts for 21st century insights. If you are freaked out by plans for Mars colonies, as I am, the provocative yet straightforward tone of this book allows for less-alarmed consideration of all sorts of new possibilities.
- [SURVIVAL OF THE BEAUTIFUL](#), by David Rothenberg
This book had me hooked from the opening sentence, when the author describes coming across a bowerbird’s creation in the Australian rainforest. The book is a delightful criss-crossing of disciplines, with plenty of illustrations from each. Rothenberg is a musician, philosopher, and naturalist, so his perspectives form a great complement to the other points of view in our pod of evolutionary readings (I’m eager to explore his latest, *Bug Music*, too). Lest you think that beautiful = wishy-washy, consider the wisdom of Nobel laureate Murray Gell-Mann regarding beauty in physics (<http://go.ted.com/bGNW>). Rothenberg concludes,

“The beautiful is the root of science and the goal of art, the highest possibility that humanity can ever hope to see.” Well worth considering as the sun sets over the mountains.

- [TEAM OF TEAMS](#), by Gen. Stanley McChrystal
We’ve written a lot about organizational transformations “from lines to webs”, including in [The Nature of Investing](#) and our [TED review](#) from this spring. Somehow these concepts take on tremendous new weight when they’re explored by the commander of the Joint Special Ops Task Force. General McChrystal and his co-authors describe the shift from hierarchy to network, with all of its related challenges. I especially appreciate the conclusion, “Leading Like a Gardener”, which emphasizes that command and control does not equal strength, and a developmental mindset is anything but passive.
- [SIMPLE RULES](#), by Donald Sull and Kathleen Eisenhardt
It’s true, these days I see natural systems everywhere – and such is the case with *Simple Rules* as well. A central theme of biomimicry is the importance of simple, elegant design and operation, and the authors’ premise here is similar: that we can benefit from using simple rules to focus our attention in an increasingly complex and complicated world. I admire that this approach helps us to consider shortcuts that are not simplistic – a welcome difference from the multitude of “solutions” that are really just fragile jumbles of narrow directives. A classic example is seen in Michael Pollan’s list of food rules, highlighted front and center in *Simple Rules*: Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants. Simple rules usually have a “duh” quality on their surface, and yet we hardly ever live by them, or use them sensibly, or adapt them effectively. This book will help.
- [THE SIGNATURE OF ALL THINGS](#), by Elizabeth Gilbert
We highlighted this terrific novel on last year’s summer reading list, but it fits right in with this evolutionary mini-library. Here’s what we said then, all still true: If there is an explorer in your life (or your inner life), this novel will be of interest. *The Signature of All Things* spans a great arc from Captain Cook to Charles Darwin, and shows how it can be the slower, careful pathways that ultimately lead to the most dramatic breakthroughs – in science and in life.
- [JACOB LAWRENCE: THE MIGRATION SERIES](#), by Elizabeth Alexander
Maybe this is a stretch, but I just had to fit this book in here, and I do believe that shorter term migration is one ingredient that shifts the longer term path of evolution. I was first introduced to the striking work of Jacob Lawrence by my economist brother, who studies labor migration. The connection he made has stuck with me ever since, the recognition that all of those charts and graphs and statistics on labor force represent real live people, people who are moving and adjusting and suffering and thriving, sometimes all at once. There is no better way than to convey these many layers of adaptation and evolution than through images like Lawrence’s, and this new volume is a welcome extension of earlier, smaller publications. The full series of migration paintings is reunited at the MOMA summer 2015 and Lawrence’s *Struggle* series is currently on view at the Phillips collection in DC.
<https://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/1549>
<http://www.phillipscollection.org/events/2015-01-10-jacob-lawrence-struggle-series>

NATURAL EXPLORATIONS:

Of course, the best summery reconnection to nature is to actually GO OUTSIDE. But still, we have rainy days, and evenings, and maybe a siesta if we're lucky... here is a bucket of natural inspiration to fill those moments. These particular books are great for inspiring cross-generational or cross-geographic conversations around the picnic table, too.

- [SEEDS](#), by Wolfgang Stuppy
- [FRUIT](#), by Wolfgang Stuppy
- [BARK](#), by Cedric Pollet

All three of these books are full of gorgeous images, and all remind us of the intertwining of beauty and function that exist throughout the natural world. Stuppy is the expert on seeds and fruit from Kew Gardens, and Cedric Pollet is a botanical photographer who has focused on studying bark since 1999 (no kidding). The microscopic-level photos of in seeds and fruit are just stunning, and *Bark* won the Redoute award for most beautiful book – maybe this is all you need to know. Think seeds are all alike? How can one be as huge as 20kg or as small as a tiny mote of dust? Think you don't care about bark? Tell me that as you uncork your wine, or dust your latte with cinnamon.

SUMMER FICTION:

- [SUM](#), by David Eagleman

This is the tiniest book around, easily portable for picnicking, hiking, or a day at the beach. I picked it up at this year's TED conference, where Eagleman gave a super-cool talk about developing new senses (<http://go.ted.com/bGRc>). The talk was stunning, and yet I was left wondering whether such technical genius was really appreciative of the depth and potential of our plain old senses, the ones that come pre-loaded in most of our human bodies. This little book gives the answer, sketching 40 tiny tales of afterlives, each one more curious and thought-provoking than the last. I recommend sharing this book with a loved one, as it's bound to spark the sort of twisting looping late-into-summer-evening conversation that is so rare, and so precious.

- [THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN](#), by Paula Hawkins

I first saw this book being read by, you guessed it, a girl on a train. After seeing it everywhere these past few months, I finally dove in... and resurfaced a day later, since I could not put it down until I was done. This is perfect beach reading, fast, interesting, and energetic (if a little dark). The plot twists like a corkscrew! (Ping me if you caught that reference).

- [HONEYDEW: STORIES](#), by Edith Pearlman

I'm not sure how I missed out on Edith Pearlman for so long – she lives just a T-ride away in Brookline, and writes luminous short stories, the reading of which is perhaps my favorite summertime occupation. It's an added bonus that in this case I can try to guess how Brookline streets and establishments correspond to their fictional counterparts. Often I like sharp stories, and often I like nuanced stories, but it's rare to find both qualities in one place. Here these two qualities happily cohabitate.

She said no. He wrote Yes; and shipped the etchings; and boarded a plane. Woah.

MIDSUMMER BONUS:

Here are two almost-released books I am eagerly anticipating:

- [THE STATE WE'RE IN: MAINE STORIES](#), by Anne Beattie
I love Anne Beattie, and there is something about short stories that is especially tuned to summer (see the notes for *Sum* and *Honeydew*, above). This collection links together and I expect it will form something novel-esque when taken in its entirety. Plus, I love reading something “in place” – Austen when in England, Tolstoy when traveling to Moscow, Adichie en route to West Africa.... Beattie during summer in New England.
Side note: speaking of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, author of Americanah and Half of a Yellow Sun (both of which also will be on one of our book lists), check out her widely acclaimed Commencement address to the Wellesley class of 2015. The last 5 minutes of “big sister” advice are essential for every woman, parent of daughters, human being. “Please do not twist yourself into shapes to please others...each moment we pretend to be what we are not is wasting our time.”
<http://www.wellesley.edu/events/commencement/archives/2015/commencementaddress>
- [GO SET A WATCHMAN](#), by Harper Lee
No joke, it's really by Harper Lee – that one. The *To Kill a Mockingbird* one. Even more, this story connects with the same characters twenty years later. Publication date is mid-July but I am crossing my fingers that it will really ship in time for the holiday weekend.

EARLY-LIFE FAVORITES:

A few years ago I started a new practice – picking a few books from early school years, and having a little reading reunion over the summer. After a second meeting of the Great Gatsby, I was encouraged. After reuniting with East of Eden, I was hooked. Little did I know how books completely transform, depending on where the reader is in her own life! These “anniversary books” are on my list for summer 2015.

150 years:

[ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND](#), by Lewis Carroll

Did you know that it's the 150th anniversary of Alice in Wonderland? There has been a lot of challenging stuff written about Carroll over the years, but I am looking forward to reading Alice with as little baggage as possible. Curious. Exploring. Since I very frequently believe six impossible things before breakfast these days, I'm thinking the Queen might not be so scary anymore.

Note that if you seek out the Penguin Classics edition, you'll get *Through the Looking-Glass* and a lot of additional material, too.

100 years:

[PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN](#), by James Joyce

I am starting to pay more attention to the communities surrounding books and authors at the time of their creation. Who knew that that this book was first published as a serial in 1914-15, arranged by poet Ezra Pound, upon the recommendation of W.B. Yeats! You would think the focus on a young Irish guy in the midst of Jesuit education would be enough to make someone named Collins love this book, but the first time around I found it tough going indeed. I'm looking forward to our rematch.

75 years:

[PAT THE BUNNY](#), by Dorothy Kunhardt

Well, if you're going to go back you might as well go waaaaay back - all the way to Pat the Bunny. This book is 75 years old, and still a perennial top-10 children's book. Plus, profits go to charity supporting early brain development. Find a small child (or access your own inner child) and enjoy the fleeting simplicity of a 1940 baby's world. "Now you look in the mirror..."

50 years:

[DUNE](#), by Frank Herbert

I first was assigned Dune in a high school English class, where we did a module on science fiction. I remember liking that this story was more about human nature than crazy technological inventions, and I also remember being pretty confused by intricate plot points. It's going to be fun to reconnect with Dune.

As an investment – of both time and money - Dune's publication was a risky venture for all concerned. Both Herbert and his publisher were "all in", and the publisher was nervous. But here's what Herbert has to say about that:

A man is a fool not to put everything he has, at any given moment, into what he is creating. You're there now doing the thing on paper. You're not killing the goose, you're just producing an egg. So I don't worry about inspiration, or anything like that. It's a matter of just sitting down and working.

NOT ENOUGH VARIETY?

If the above list does not pique your interest, or seems far too short (which, of course, it is), here are a few of my favorite book-y resources:

CURATED SITES:

- BRAIN PICKINGS
We've highlighted the delightful, eclectic Brain Pickings site of Maria Popova before, due to an initial tip from Honeybee Stephanie. A quick tour through recent articles references Rilke, Kierkegaard, EB White, and Wendell Berry. Beware, you could get lost in here! But happily so.
<http://brainpickings.org>
- FARNAM STREET
First, check out the ongoing recommendations from Farnam Street's own Shane Parrish, which include lots of classics. Then, check out the recent post that highlights key Wall Street reads. Something for everyone!
<https://farnamstreetblog.com>
<https://www.farnamstreetblog.com/2015/06/what-wall-street-reads/>

COLLEGE LISTS:

- WELLESLEY COLLEGE READING LIST: <http://web.wellesley.edu/www/>
I admit to being a bit biased, but I especially love this list, as it is a compilation of faculty members' favorites, drawn from their own fields of endeavor.
- BERKELEY SUMMER READING LIST: <http://reading.berkeley.edu>
- SWARTHMORE SUMMER READING LIST: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/libraries/2015-summer-reading-list>

- STANFORD SUMMER READING LIST: <https://alumni.stanford.edu/get/page/life-long-learning/book-overview>
- COLUMBIA CORE LITERATURE READING LIST: <https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/lithum/texts>
You can click around this same site for Columbia's book lists for Contemporary Civilization.

A NOTE ON BOOKSELLERS:

Alert readers may have noticed that many of our links connect you with a Very Large Online Retailer, and indeed, we appreciate that this retailer provides terrific customer service and helpful product detail. We are also loyal patrons of local booksellers, of course (most especially Brookline Booksmith)! In fact, one of my favorite ways to get to know a new area is to seek out its bookstore and its coffeeshop (sometimes one and the same). The IndieBound organization can help you seek out these local booksellers wherever you may be – and if you are an e-loving person, they have handy online functions too.

<http://Brooklinebooksmith.com>

<http://www.indiebound.org>

EVEN BETTER THAN BOOKSELLERS, REAL LIVE LIBRARIES:

I'm smitten by each and every one of the quirky New York gems mentioned in this article:

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/06/01/tour-of-new-york-s-best-secret-libraries.html?via=newsletter&source=DDAfternoon>

*If you have a garden and a library,
you have everything you need.*

- Cicero

LIST OF LINKS

For quick and easy reference...

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- [TEAM OF TEAMS](#), by Gen. Stanley McChrystal
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- [PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN](#), by James Joyce
- [PAT THE BUNNY](#), by Dorothy Kunhardt
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CURATED SITES:

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- [FARNAM STREET](#)

COLLEGE LISTS:

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- [SWARTHMORE SUMMER READING LIST](#)
- [STANFORD SUMMER READING LIST](#)
- [COLUMBIA CORE LITERATURE READING LIST](#)