



HONEYBEE CAPITAL

FOUNDATION

HONEYBEE CAPITAL SUMMER BOOK LIST AUGUST 2018

By our modern calendar, summer is already coming to an end – school supplies have been purchased, flip flops are being retired, and I am sad to report that I have already spied the first bags of Halloween candy corn for sale at the market.

But by the real calendar, summer is in her full splendor! We have weeks left until the autumn equinox, weeks of balmy evenings and gardens in full bloom and real corn, on the cob.

There is nothing better than a terrific book to make summer feel endless. Here are some of my recent favorites, plus a few earlier highlights repeated here for good measure.

BOOKS THAT HELP US TO IMAGINE:

[CIRCE](#), by Madeline Miller

Last year I picked up a children's book of mythology and was reminded of the power and duration and depth of these stories that frame so much of our thinking, even today. And then along came this novel, *Circe*, which is just what the title implies, the story of the goddess best known to us through *The Odyssey*. This book creates a sweeping and coherent view of her life, connecting the dots that are left disconnected in the stories where Circe is a minor character. And it does so with a strong spine of scholarship, since Miller has an MA in classics. The writing is graceful, the essence of the stories is mesmerizing, and the underlying premise – that we are all the main characters of our own stories - makes you wonder about the backstories of all the intriguing characters you've ever encountered, whether in fiction or in life.

I loved this book so much that I immediately bought [The Song of Achilles](#), Miller's earlier novel, so that I could prolong the joy of being immersed in eternal tales.

CONVENIENCE STORE WOMAN, by Sayaka Murata

It's a good sign when you can't quite come up with words to characterize a work of fiction. Convenience Store Woman is quirky and compelling and weirdly heroic, charting the course of a mini-mart employee in Japan as she finds her own unexpected definitions of identity and success. If you like Murakami ([1Q84](#)), or Han Kang's [The Vegetarian](#), or Lauren Groff's short fiction (see below), I bet you will like this book too.

FLORIDA, by Lauren Groff

Well, it's called "Florida," but this is no spring break storybook. Groff's collection of short fiction is dark and murky and *good*. A wonderful counterbalance to the sugary stuff that's often served up for vacation reading.

AN AMERICAN MARRIAGE, by Tayari Jones

The best stories show no seam between the macro and micro elements of their narrative, and this is how I know that Jones is an outstanding artist: this novel is seamless. The book is about a marriage, as the title says, but not just that. It's about growing into relationship, but not just that. It's about the justice system, and family, and race, and roots and grafts, and creation and destruction. And love. This is one of my favorite books of the year.

SING, UNBURIED, SING, by Jesmyn Ward

Woah, this book pulls you in. It's like reading Foucault, you think you're following along but then the narrator shifts and the time frame slips out from under you and before you know it you've done a chutes-and-ladders transfer to a whole different part of the story, each piece compelling and well crafted and haunting, and each page squeezes your heart a little bit more. By the end the pieces connect and the full picture finally comes into view... like arriving at an open vista after a twisty turny footpath that's been obscured by brush the whole way up. If you admire Toni Morrison's [Beloved](#), this is the book for you.

THE ONE INSIDE, by Sam Shepard

Part fiction, part autobiography, often confusing, a little disturbing, and thoroughly compelling... this book will stick with you, its loop-de-loop narrative gradually forming a knotted-together whole. Shepard often worked at the Santa Fe Institute, and I liked to imagine these words echoing through the building there as he typed away. As it turns out, this was also Shepard's last published work, and there can be no more vivid example than this of what was lost in his passing. I listened to the audiobook version read by Bill Pullman, which added immeasurably to the experience. Also, I'm not sure these two have ever been connected before, but I happened to read this book within a few months of Sing, Unburied, Sing (above), and their puzzle-piece constructions have some fascinating similarities.

BOOKS THAT HELP US TO CONSIDER:

BAD BLOOD, by John Carreyrou

In the “truth is stranger than fiction” category is this tale of Theranos, the visionary blood-testing idea gone horribly wrong. It’s easy to read this whole tale with a good dollop of judgment, thinking that it should have been easy to spot this business as a farce - but that’s a real copout, as there’s so much more to learn here. For me there are two lessons for me in reading Carreyrou’s detailed reporting of the company: first, a reminder of the role of fear and what a powerful motivator it can be. Fear of losing, fear of being left behind when a great new thing emerges, fear of looking foolish, fear of going against those in power, even if the power is falsely held. And second, a sort of sweet counterpoint, it reminded me how much we all want to believe in heroic, helpful, revolutionary ideas, even when faced with powerful contrary evidence. We are fearful creatures, and hopeful too. Theranos is a great case study in both.

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR MIND, by Michael Pollan

If you’re trying to break the ice with a hipster from Brooklyn or Oakland, you might want to ask about their ayahuasca experience. There’s been a big uptrend in the use and understanding of this and many other psychedelics in recent years, though Pollan’s book is the first to examine the arena with his characteristic mix of journalistic thoroughness and first person perspective. This book is making me reconsider all I thought I knew about psilocybin, mescaline, and the rest – and in the process, makes me consider the long arc of other shifting perceptions we’ve collectively held, from tobacco to sugar to sunshine.

TEN ARGUMENTS FOR DELETING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS RIGHT NOW, by Jaron Lanier

One of the talks that has stuck with me most from the 2018 TED conference is Jaron Lanier’s “How We need to Remake the Internet.” Despite the titles of both that talk and this book, Lanier is not a ranting technophobe – quite the opposite. He holds a view of technology’s potential that is both idealistic and astute. Informed by his own pioneering career in VR, he speaks from an informed insider’s point of view, unlike many tech critics. He’s also poetic, for example when he summarizes social media economics as “selling people back to themselves.” If you are looking for a way to think about your own social media use, or if you think there is nothing to question in these business models, Lanier’s commentary presents a thoughtful, nuanced view that is worthy of deep consideration.

For an introduction to some of the ideas in this book, see Lanier’s fascinating [TED Talk](#) from 2018.

FACTFULNESS, by Hans Rosling

Oh, Hans Rosling, how you are missed! This book was published posthumously, in partnership with Rosling’s son and daughter-in-law, who also run the [Gapminder Foundation](#). The book is, as the name implies, full of facts – and important ones – but even more than that, this is a book that helps us all to be more statistically numerate. If you want to move beyond short-term-ism in your own thinking, if you

want your kids to grow up with the capacity to assess data and to think critically about statistics, this book (and all of Rosling's work) is invaluable. It is also a great reminder of Rosling's own roots as a physician in Mozambique and the DRC, which informed his lifelong work. And if you need added endorsement, Bill Gates is a longtime fan of Rosling; this book is tops on his summer reading list.

There's a natural pairing between [Factfulness](#) and Matt Ridley's [Rational Optimist](#), or Steven Pinker's new [Enlightenment Now](#). Curiously Pinker's work has come under vicious attack, despite solid scholarship and careful presentation – one source of critique is the type that accompanies any endeavor that takes sweeping view of complex topics, where some important context is always lost in generalization. But another strand of critique runs deeper, and meaner, and is harder to explain. I wonder if this second is perhaps it is a sign that many of us are too fearful to allow for hope or optimism, even when it is rooted in accurate observation. At any rate, these two are also well worth reading and assessing for yourself.

You can see Rosling's legendary TED talks here:

https://www.ted.com/speakers/hans_rosling

[DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS: SEVEN WAYS TO THINK LIKE A 21ST CENTURY ECONOMIST](#), by Kate Raworth

Ignore the dorky title – though the book is indeed reader-friendly, as the cover implies, Raworth's content is important and serious and terrific and revolutionary. Even if you disagree with some of her arguments, it is healthy to question our assumptions once in a while, and the tenets of neoclassical economics run deep in our current economic and political systems. Raworth helps us to pull them into the light, so they can be properly seen, assessed, and updated.

If you prefer a video mini-version, here is Raworth's excellent TED talk –

https://www.ted.com/talks/kate_raworth_a_healthy_economy_should_be_designed_to_thrive_not_grow

[ADAPTIVE MARKETS](#), by Andrew Lo

"The financial system is more like an ecosystem of living organisms than a mechanical system of inanimate parts, and we need to manage the system accordingly." So, yeah, I really like this book.

[THE DIVERSITY BONUS](#), by Scott Page

If you are looking for a super-rational argument for diversity, without too much messy emotional stuff, this is the book for you (and that is a compliment!). Page's work on diversity has continued since his well-regarded earlier publication, [The Difference](#), and here he presents a compelling set of evidence for considering cognitive diversity (in all its forms) when constructing teams. If you want to fix the sink, you might want 3 plumbers, but for problems like designing new products or analyzing companies or navigating an unfamiliar forest, you need a more diverse group. And our most interesting questions are always more like a forest than a leaky pipe.

BOOKS THAT HELP US TO REFLECT:

THE WISDOM OF INSECURITY, by Alan Watts

Do you ever have the sense of being deeply connected and disconnected at the same time? Like you've done a full loop, dove down so deep you've resurfaced on the other side? Or maybe you've swum partway down a pool of reflection and then just spun around in dizzy circles, feeling alone? Okay maybe that's just me... but this is why I turn to Alan Watts, because whenever I read his writing I am reminded that it's not just me, or you, or us. Some questions are essential and perhaps even eternal, and some states are better understood without words. Just realizing this is a great comfort. "What is true and positive is too real and too living to be described, and to try to describe it is like putting red paint on a red rose."

THE ART OF LOADING BRUSH, by Wendell Berry

I've been spending many Sunday mornings with Wendell Berry – well, with his writing – and there could be no better company. In this volume Berry speaks with poetry and frankness, cautioning against ungrounded idealism as much as mindless extraction.

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF THEODORE ROETHKE, by Theodore Roethke

I came across Roethke most recently when a [quote](#) of his appeared on my Bloomberg terminal at work. "Deep in their roots, all flowers keep the light." His writing is hopeful precisely because it does not ignore the darkness.

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. In fact, one of my favorite ways to get to know a new town is to seek out its bookstore and its coffeeshop (sometimes one and the same). The IndieBound organization can help you find these local booksellers wherever you may be (including my personal favorite, Brookline Booksmith) – and if you are an e-loving person, they have handy online functions too.

<http://Brooklinebooksmith.com>

<http://www.indiebound.org>

***Beware the person of one book.
- Thomas Aquinas***