



HONEYBEE CAPITAL FOUNDATION

WINTER BOOK LIST JANUARY 2020

The days in Boston are short this time of year, but that leaves more evening hours for curling up with good books! Here I'm delighted to share some recent favorites, along with a few earlier highlights for good measure.

It brings me great joy to share these book-friends with you, with best wishes for the new year, and the new decade, with all that they will bring.

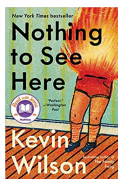
BOOKS THAT HELP US TO IMAGINE

[THE STARLESS SEA](#), by Erin Morgenstern



This is one of my favorite novels in a very long time. I dove into it on a recent flight and by the time we landed I felt like I'd already been on a terrific journey, far far away. And it features bees and books and a bendy sense of time and space, so clearly was written just for me. Some stories that employ magical realism turn sappy or overly clever, relying more on tricks than real story, but Morgenstern is both an excellent storyteller and also an excellent magician. If you enjoyed her earlier novel, [The Night Circus](#), or if you are a fan of Garcia Marquez or Marukami, this might be the book for you.

[NOTHING TO SEE HERE](#), by Kevin Wilson



I laughed, I cried - it was better than Cats! This zippy story pulls you right along, kind of crazy but ultimately more real than you'd ever guess from chapter one. Yes, it features small children who burst into flames when upset... which might sound absurd unless you have the good fortune to spend time with small children, in which case you know that it is pretty close to a literal description. There's a tenderness underneath the zaniness here that makes this short novel a real treat.

[OLIVE, AGAIN](#), by Elizabeth Stroudt



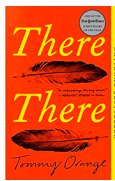
This continuation of Stroudt's narrative puts us right back in coastal Maine, where Olive is now an older woman and the town around her continues to change and not-change, as all places do. Stroudt's writing has helped me to see others – and myself – with a little more understanding and a little more kindness, which is just about the greatest gift that any writer can give. For those who have followed Olive through Stroudt's earlier [Olive Kitteridge](#) (or if you are lucky to have seen the [miniseries](#) with Frances McDormand's terrific performance), you will feel reunited with an old and slightly cantankerous friend, one who is not always pleasant, but who is nonetheless steadfast and beloved.

NICKEL BOYS, by Colson Whitehead



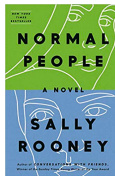
This book might not land on a lot of “top beach reads” lists, but it will be on a lot of “best books of the decade” lists, a much more interesting achievement. Whitehead is able to tell serious stories in a way that is true and clear, without exaggerating the good guy/bad guy dynamic that pulls with such an irresistible undertow. Our world is full of institutions like Nickel, past and present, and in many ways we are all still trying to recover from our own creations. Whitehead weaves this story together in a way that is awful yet not despairing, hopeful yet not cloying. Reflecting on this story might help us to consider what recovery and healing might look like, both individually and collectively.

THERE THERE, by Tommy Orange



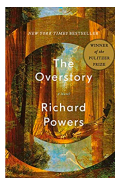
One of the greatest things about reading is that it can introduce us to other communities. When I was a little kid in rural Pennsylvania, I read about New York City. When I was a liberal arts student in the 20th century, I read about Edo Japan. When I am working in finance, I read about bees. The great gift of *There There* is that it avoids the single story, introducing us to a whole web of individuals as they weave together to form a complete, painful, beautiful narrative about the urban Native American community around Oakland. It is powerful and awful and infuriating and gorgeous and one of the best books I’ve read in years.

NORMAL PEOPLE, by Sally Rooney



I have been searching for modern Irish writers, and was (rightfully) assured that Sally Rooney is a must-read author. I don’t know how to describe the mix of lightness and darkness that goes into the best Irish writing (maybe the best of all writing), but it’s right here for all to see. This book does not satisfy readers with an easy, pat ending, but it offers a deeper satisfaction, one of nuance and navigation and ongoing connection – one that is much more true to life.

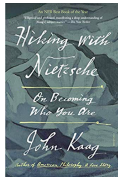
THE OVERSTORY, by Richard Powers



This is my favorite novel of the past couple of years. It’s really a collection of intertwining novellas, each rooted in a different and deep connection (or reconnection) to trees. There are threads within that link to research like Suzanne Simard’s work, and David Haskells’s [THE SONGS OF TREES](#), so it’s scientifically interesting, too. The premise of a novel composed of grove of tree-stories might sound contrived, but these tales are beautiful and varied and heartbreaking, and they remind us of the ties we have that run so strong they are sometimes subconscious, until circumstance pulls them to the surface. I read much of this during a stormy indoors weekend and felt like I’d been for a long walk in the woods, which is a testament to the power of this book.

BOOKS THAT HELP US TO CONSIDER (AND RECONSIDER):

HIKING WITH NIETZSCHE, by John Kaag



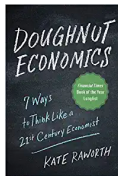
I've had the chance to hear John Kaag at some Santa Fe Institute gatherings, and he brings a great sweep of philosophical insight to every issue, framing discussions within the scaffolds of their essential questions. It is a great gift to be able to translate from application to essence, from everyday to eternal, from personal to universal, and Kaag's *Hiking with Nietzsche* is a vivid display of this gift. The weaving together of his own life with Nietzsche's illuminates the ideas and experiences of both in an unforgettable way.

CAPITALISM WITHOUT CAPITAL, by Jonathan Haskel and Stian Westlake



Most of our business and analytical tools were created during the industrial era, geared towards assessing and nurturing equipment and factories and properties. These days most of our companies rest upon intangible assets – software, creativity, employee motivation, customer loyalty – and our structures have not yet caught up. This book dives into the question, 'how are intangible assets different?' and it explores both the pitfalls and possibilities of less capital-intensive capitalism. The role of equity changes from funding assets to providing liquidity, for example, and we also have the chance to employ thoughtful sustainability considerations to extend our time horizons. A great book for re-orienting from the rearview mirror to the forward-facing windshield... highly recommended as a duet with [DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS](#).

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. It is healthy to question our assumptions once in a while, and the tenets (and mathematics) 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](#).

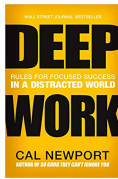
HOW TO CHANGE YOUR MIND, by Michael Pollan



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 pharmaceuticals to tobacco to sugar to sunshine.

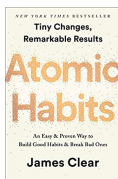
NEW YEAR'S SPECIAL! BOOKS THAT HELP US TO LEARN AND WORK:

DEEP WORK, by Cal Newport



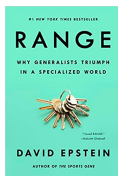
I am inherently skeptical of productivity books, in part because the form rarely matches the function. If authors really wanted me to be more productive, they could explain their ideas in 10 pages instead of 200 pages, right? Well I'm happy to report that there are occasional exceptions that call out my bias, and *Deep Work* is one of them. Newport reminds us that amazing things are possible when we truly focus, and that we need to plan as carefully for the conditions that make our work possible as for the work itself. I have employed Newport's approach off and on over the past year, and my goal for the next year is to be more on and less off, since all of my best thinking and doing has resulted from these periods of focus and intensity.

ATOMIC HABITS, by James Clear



As noted above, I am not a huge fan of how-to books, except for the intensely practical ones, like how to make blueberry jam or how to fix a dishwasher hose. Usually I have one of two thoughts: *everybody knows this already* or *this should be a post-in note and not a book*. However, once in a while there is a book on an important topic with just enough depth and focus, with the perfect mix of reflection and action. Clear's explanations will help you to understand the gap between your ideals and your activity in a clear and blameless way, and (if you want) to engineer ways for that gap to lessen, and to stick. I listened to this book in one long car ride and by the time I arrived at my destination I'd already sketched out a simple and effective action plan for one of my most important goals.

RANGE, by David Epstein



We've all heard a lot about the 10,000-hour rule, about the need to build deep expertise and domain knowledge. And we've all seen the toddler Tiger Woods photos where he's holding a golf club, which seem to have the curious effect of making parents of young children feel that they are late for something very important indeed. Epstein makes a helpful counter-point here, highlighting the case for generalists, for experimentation, and even for quitting. In the ongoing fox vs. hedgehog debate, perhaps we'd all benefit from aiming for a little of both, as Epstein notes – T-shaped or Pi-shaped expertise, with a mix of both breadth and depth. Most of us are neither Federer nor Woods, but we can aim to be polymaths, rather than dilettantes or monomaniacs.

BOOKS THAT HELP US TO REFLECT:

EROSION, by Terry Tempest Williams



I am lucky to live near Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Terry Tempest Williams has been in residence at Harvard Divinity School for the past few years. Every time I hear her speak I'm moved to tears. She says the things that many of us cannot bear to say; she finds the words for circumstances that seem to be beyond language. *Erosion* is a collection of essays on loss and mourning and grief and hope and love, highlighting the essential truth of our deep interconnection with place. With erosion in nature, something is lost but something else is revealed. It is the perfect image for our times, and in her writing Tempest Williams honors both the loss and the revelation.

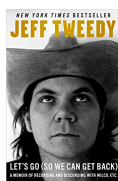
LOST WORDS, by Robert Macfarlane



The book was created in response to a batch of words being swapped out of the Oxford Junior Dictionary – mostly natural creatures being replaced by techno-lingo. What kind of fool would prefer *blog* to *bluebell*, *voicemail* to *kingfisher*, *attachment* to *newt*? Surely there are better choices that could be made, including the choice to have a slightly longer dictionary. In any event, this beautifully illustrated book does each word justice, from the adder to the fern to the willow. I have lost some prayers I used to know by heart, some recipes I used to make without googling, some journeys I used to take without a map, some songs I used to play from memory. These could all be revived, and this book is proof. One look at MacFarlane's acorn and you know it is safe, so vibrant and loving is the presentation. This book is perfect to share with young friends, and there is a wonderful guide for exploring together produced by the [John Muir Trust](#).

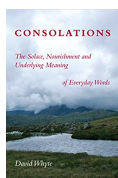
I have also loved Macfarlane's longer books like [Landmarks](#), and am diving into his most recent and widely acclaimed [Underland](#) next.

LET'S GO (SO WE CAN GET BACK), by Jeff Tweedy



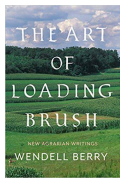
It makes sense that the book written by the musician who came up with "You were right about the stars/ Each one is a setting sun" would be pretty terrific, and it is. I moved it from the middle of my book pile to the top after my brother mentioned it was making him laugh out loud, and my experience has been further enhanced by listening to the audio version read by Tweedy himself, whose deadpan delivery adds even more delight.

CONSOLATIONS, by David Whyte



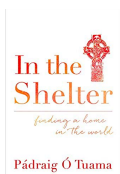
I dipped in to this series of essays this past year; each stands on its own, and they also gradually weave together into a blanket of - as the title suggests - consolation and comfort. One wonderful thing that happens when poets write prose is that you get phrases like this one, on regret: "Except for brief senses of having missed a tide...youth is not yet ready for the rich current of abiding regret that runs through and emboldens a mature life." Or this one, on rest: "Rest is the conversation between what we love to do and how we love to be." Before I transcribe the entire book, please go ahead and read it for yourself.

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.

IN THE SHELTER: FINDING A HOME IN THE WORLD, by Padraig O Tuama



Listening to Padraig O Tuama on a recent [OnBeing episode](#) felt like a wonderful homecoming. Okay, that's partly because he sounds like my great-grandparents did, but it's also because of the powerful subjects he addressed, with a healthy dollop of humor and poetry (you can see more details on this in a recent [Sunday Best post](#) from Honeybee). We can learn so much from digging a little more, whether in life or in language, and O Tuama illustrates this beautifully. I want to learn more from anyone who knows that, in at least one language, “trust” translates as, “you are the place where I stand on the day when my feet are sore.”

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. 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>*

STAYING IN TOUCH

Our next book list will be out at mid-year, and we're already looking forward to it. If you'd like to stay in touch in the meantime, remember that we publish our short [Sunday Best](#) reflections every week. Just go to HoneybeeCapital.org and look for “subscribe” - it's a grey arrow on the right side of the screen for larger devices, and an orange banner at the bottom of the screen for smaller devices.

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