



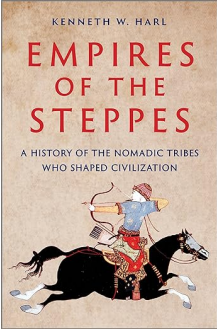
COURSES (SDGs) OFFERED FOR Winter/Spring 2024

Classes start Jan. 1st and end Apr. 28th.
Each S/DG may choose to adjust its schedule to account for holidays.

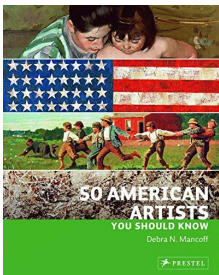
Scroll down past this page to view all 30 Course (SDG) descriptions, or click any ID/Name below to view a specific one:

1. (AGB) Empires of the Steppes: Attila, Genghis and Other Barbarians	16. (LNZ) Science and Art of Longevity - Zoom/Hybrid
2. (AMA) 50 American Artists You Should Know - In Classroom Only	17. (MOV) The Best Movies You Never Saw
3. (BOA) Your Brain on Art: How the Arts Transform Us	18. (MYC) Best Mystery Stories of the Year 2023 - In Classroom Only
4. (CLM) The Role Climate Has Played in the History of the World	19. (MYZ) Best Mystery Stories of the Year 2023 - Zoom/Hybrid
5. (GSW) How Cooperation Shaped the World	20. (ODY) The Five-Million-Year Odyssey - In Classroom Only
6. (CUB) Cuba: An American History	21. (OWI) Oscar Wilde: A Colorful Life
7. (DEC) Great Decisions - 2024	22. (PBB) Population Bomb and Bust
8. (DEM) Democracy Awakening: Notes on the State of America	23. (PRM) Once Upon a Prime
9. (DMB) Democracy Made Better	24. (RDA) Reimagining Discarded America
10. (DVL) The Devil Never Sleeps	25. (SHK) All the World's a Stage . . .
11. (GNC) Generations - In Classroom Only	26. (SIS) Science and Islam
12. (GNZ) Generations - Zoom/Hybrid	27. (SUP) The Supermajority
13. (IND) Learn About India	28. (UND) The Underworld
14. (KNW) Knowing What We Know	29. (WAI) The Origins of Wealth and Inequality

<u>15. (LNC) Science and Art of Longevity</u> In Classroom Only	<u>30. (WSC) The Exceptions: The Fight for Women in Science</u>
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		1. (AGB) Empires of the Steppes: Attila, Genghis and Other Barbarians
<div></div> <div>Common Reading: <i>Empires of the Steppes: A History of the Nomadic Tribes Who Shaped Civilization</i>, by Kenneth W. Harl <u>(August 2023)</u></div>		<p>The barbarian nomads of the Eurasian steppes have played a decisive role in world history, but their achievements have gone largely unnoticed. These nomadic tribes have produced some of the world’s greatest conquerors: Attila the Hun, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, among others. Their deeds still resonate today. Indeed, these nomads built long-lasting empires, facilitated the first global trade of the Silk Road and disseminated religions, technology, knowledge and goods of every description that enriched and changed the lives of so many across Europe, China and the Middle East. From a single region emerged a great many peoples—the Huns, the Mongols, the Magyars, the Turks, the Xiongnu, the Scythians, the Goths—all of whom went on to profoundly and irrevocably shape the modern world.</p> <p>Our recommended reading vividly re-creates the lives and world of these often-forgotten peoples from their beginnings to the early modern age. Their brutal struggle to survive on the steppes bred a resilient, pragmatic people ever ready to learn from their more advanced neighbors. In warfare, they dominated the battlefield for over fifteen hundred years. Under charismatic rulers, they could topple empires and win their own. A story not to be missed.</p> <p>Presentations could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· A deeper exploration of a topic mentioned by the author (e.g., papermaking, gunpowder, a particular religion, or one of the interesting “secondary” personalities);· An explanation using maps to demonstrate the various migrations discussed in the text;· Modern archaeological discoveries related to the relevant Eurasian areas; or· A deeper dive into the weapons of war used by these civilizations.

2. (AMA) 50 American Artists You Should Know - In Classroom Only

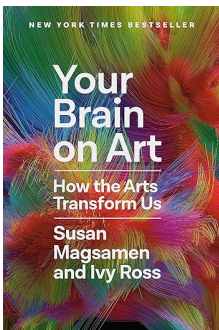


Common Reading: [50 American Artists You Should Know](#), by Debra N. Mancoff (Prestel; Illustrated edition; April 2010, paperback)

How many American Artists can you name? Well, here's your chance to learn about some American artists that you're unfamiliar with.

The history of American art is as varied as the fifty states the country is comprised of. Starting with the portraits of John Singleton Copley and the landscape masterpieces of Frederic Church, this course will examine American artists through the era of Cassatt, Whistler, and Sargent to the groundbreaking works of O'Keeffe, Cornell, and Calder. The common book, *50 American Artists You Should Know*, also celebrates the artists who placed America at the forefront of American art: Pollock, de Kooning, Rauschenberg, Warhol, Oldenburg, and Johns. This is your chance to become familiar with 21st century artists Cindy Sherman, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Matthew Barney. Topics for presentations might include any of the artists in the book, other American artists, or art movements.

3. (BOA) Your Brain on Art: How the Arts Transform Us



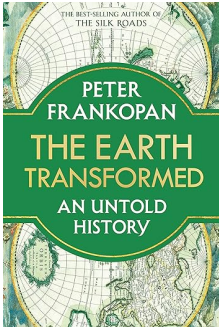
Common Reading: [Your Brain on Art: How the Arts Transform Us](#) by Susan Magsamen and Ivy Ross (March 2023)

In *Your Brain on Art*, Susan Magsamen, Executive Director of the International Art+Minds Lab at the John Hopkins School of Medicine Brain Science Institute, and Ivy Ross, a Vice-President of Hardware Design at Google and a jewelry designer, introduce readers to an emerging scientific field known as neuroaesthetics, using case studies to show how the arts have lasting benefits for our mental and physical health. The authors present compelling research on how arts and aesthetics can promote well-being and longevity. Engaging in an art project for as little as forty-five minutes can reduce the stress hormone cortisol. Dance can help manage chronic pain. Playing music enhances cognitive skills. Interactive exhibits engage our senses and improve memory. Featuring conversations with artists such as David Byrne, Renee Fleming and evolutionary biologist E.O. Wilson, the book weaves breakthrough research with insights from these

multidisciplinary pioneers and compelling stories from people using the arts to enhance their lives.

Presentations can be about the impact of art or an art form, including but not limited to paintings, photographs, poetry, plays, books, movies, music, sculpture and interactive experiences

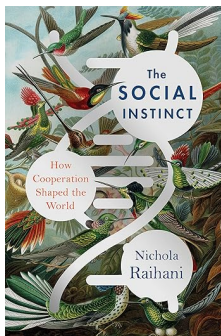
4. ~~(CLM) The Role Climate Has Played in the History of the World~~



Common Reading: [*The Earth Transformed: An Untold Story*](#), by Peter Frankopan (April 2023)

In a new book that spans centuries and continents, Oxford historian Peter Frankopan argues that nature has always played a fundamental role in history. From the fall of the Moche civilization in South America because of the cyclical pressures of El Nino to volcanic eruptions in Iceland that affected Egypt and helped bring the Ottoman empire to its knees, climate change and its influences have always been with us. Frankopan explains how the Vikings emerged due to catastrophic crop failure, why the roots of regime change in eleventh-century Baghdad lay in the collapse of cotton prices resulting from unusual climate patterns, and why western expansion of the frontiers in North America directly affected solar flare activity in the eighteenth century. Frankopan shows that when past empires have failed to act sustainably, they have been met with catastrophe. He uses a wealth of new climate data and huge advances in climate modeling to show the role that climate has played in shaping the history of the world.

Possible presentations could expand on the examples in the book, address the way climate change has influenced the scale and force of storms such as hurricanes, tornados and typhoons; explore how global warming is currently affecting the many systems on earth, such as polar-ice conditions, monsoon cycles, ocean temperature, and the dynamics of the major ocean currents and oscillations, the effect of climate changes on various communities of humans and other species; and efforts currently underway to curb various climate impacts.



Common Reading: [The Social Instinct: How Cooperation Shaped the World](#) by Nichola Raihani (August 2021)

~~5. (CSW) How Cooperation Shaped the World~~

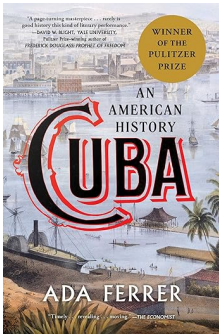
In the tradition of Richard Dawkins’s *The Selfish Gene*, Nichola Raihani’s *The Social Instinct* is a profound and engaging look at the hidden relationships underpinning human evolution, and why cooperation is key to our future survival.

Cooperation is the means by which life arose in the first place. It’s how we progressed through scale and complexity, from free-floating strands of genetic material, to nation states. But given what we know about the mechanisms of evolution, cooperation is also something of a puzzle. How does cooperation begin, when on a Darwinian level, all that the genes in your body care about is being passed on to the next generation? Why do meerkat colonies care for one another’s children? Why do babbler birds in the Kalahari form colonies in which only a single pair breeds? And how come some coral wrasse fish actually punish each other for harming fish from another species?

A biologist by training, Raihani looks at where and how collaborative behavior emerges throughout the animal kingdom, and what problems it solves. She reveals that the species that exhibit cooperative behavior—teaching, helping, grooming, and self-sacrifice—most similar to our own tend not to be other apes; they are birds, insects, and fish, occupying far more distant branches of the evolutionary tree. By understanding the problems they face, and how they cooperate to solve them, we can glimpse how human cooperation first evolved. And we can also understand what it is about the way we cooperate that has made humans so distinctive—and so successful.

Presentations could cover various societies and show how cooperation or failure to cooperate affected their future. Other topics could be how trust works in businesses, such as a restaurant, bank, education systems, and taxes.

~~6. (CUB) Cuba: An American History~~



Common Reading: *Cuba: An American History*, by Ada Ferrer
(Scribner, September 2021)

In 1961, at the height of the Cold War, the United States severed diplomatic relations with Cuba, where a momentous revolution had taken power three years earlier. For more than half a century, the stand-off continued—through the tenure of ten American presidents and the fifty-year rule of Fidel Castro. His death in 2016, and the retirement of his brother and successor Raúl Castro in 2021, have spurred questions about the country's future. Meanwhile, politics in Washington have made the relationship between the two nations a subject of debate once more.

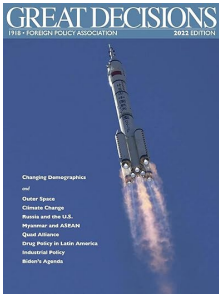
Now, Pulitzer Prize award-winning historian Ada Ferrer delivers an important and moving chronicle that demands a new reckoning with both the island's past and its relationship with the United States. Spanning more than five centuries, *Cuba: An American History* provides us with a front-row seat as we witness the evolution of the modern nation, with its dramatic record of conquest and colonization, of slavery and freedom, of independence and revolutions made and unmade.

Along the way, Ferrer explores the sometimes surprising, often troubled intimacy between the two countries, documenting not only the influence of the United States on Cuba but also the many ways the island has been a recurring presence in US affairs. This is a story that will give Americans unexpected insights into the history of their own nation and, in so doing, help them imagine a new relationship with Cuba; “readers will close [this] fascinating book with a sense of hope” (*The Economist*).

Filled with rousing stories and characters, and drawing on more than thirty years of research in Cuba, Spain, and the United States—as well as the author's own extensive travel to the island over the same period—this is a stunning and monumental account like no other.

Possible Presentation Topics: architecture, music, art, literature, tourism, medicine, educations, literature, emigration to U.S., suppression of dissident groups, international relations

~~7. (DEC) Great Decisions – 2024~~



Common Reading: Great Decisions 2024, from the Foreign Policy Association. *(The 2024 book is due out in November 2023; image above is "Great Decisions 2022")*

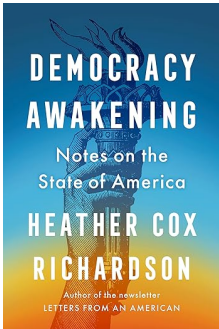
Foreign Policy Association's Great Decisions program has flourished over the past 60 years into a multi-dimensional global studies program, adapted to multiple formats, including informal discussion groups, public lectures and formal secondary and university courses. Published annually by FPA, the Great Decisions briefing book highlights eight of the most thought-provoking foreign policy challenges facing Americans today. The Great Decisions briefing book serves as the focal text for discussion groups by providing background information, expert analysis, and suggested discussion questions for each foreign policy issue.

The 8 topics (conveniently one for each class) are:

1. **Mideast Realignment**, by Marc Lynch
2. **Climate Technology and Competition**, by Bud Ward
3. **Science Across Borders**, by Mila Rosenthal
4. **U.S.-China Trade Rivalry**, by Jonathan Chanis
5. **NATO's Future**, by Sarwar Kashmeri
6. **Understanding Indonesia**, by Charles Sullivan
7. **High Seas Treaty**, by FPA editors
8. **Pandemic Preparedness**, by Carolyn Reynolds

Class members read a chapter each week; the “presenter” sends out discussion questions, as in other S/DGs. Extra information on the topic is given by the scheduled “presenter” at the beginning, with most of each class devoted to discussion.

8. (DEM) Democracy Awakening: Notes on the State of America



Common Reading:
[Democracy Awakening: Notes on the State of America](#) by
Heather Cox Richardson
(available September 2023)

Historian, professor, and author of the popular daily newsletter *Letters from an American* and six prior books on history and politics, Heather Cox Richardson explains in her new book how America, once a beacon of democracy, now teeters on the brink of autocracy—and how we can change this. She describes how over the decades a small group of wealthy people have made war on American ideals. By weaponizing language and promoting false history, they have led us to authoritarianism, creating a disaffected population and then promising to recreate an imagined past where those people could feel important again. She argues that taking our country back starts by remembering the principles upon which this nation was founded that have enabled us to renew and expand our commitment to democracy. Her command of history allows her to pivot effortlessly from the Founders to the Abolitionists to Reconstruction to Goldwater to McConnell, highlighting the political legacy of the New Deal, the lingering fears of socialism, the death of the liberal consensus and the birth of movement conservatism. She is both realistic and optimistic in discussing what we should pay attention to, what the precedents are, and what potential paths lie ahead.

Presentations could expand on any of the numerous topics in the book, in the Substack of HCR's daily *Letters from an American*, on the trends in both federal and state government and the courts, on current political and social issues, events and groups and much more.



9. ~~(DMB) Democracy Made Better~~

Many people think we should try to become more like Denmark, which has a prosperous economy, high living standard, stable liberal democratic government, good health care, etc. Some attribute these good conditions to the high degree of democratic government in Denmark. But, Singapore, a country of about the same number of people, has had even greater economic success with a high degree of satisfaction with its government, even though it is decidedly less liberal in its form of democracy. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia attempted to switch quite rapidly to a

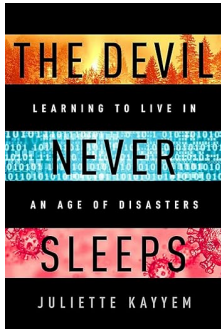
Common Reading: [*Debating Democracy: Do We need More or Less*](#), by Jason Brennan and Helene Landemore (November 2021, paperback)

democracy with a market driven economy and got disastrous results. Russia did not have a history or cultural values that could support an open, win-win type of government and economy. It seems that the extent and type of democracy that is possible depends on social and philosophical factors that not every country has. Does the USA have the best form of democratic government given its history and the rapidly changing demographic conditions? The very low level of trust in the Federal government over the last 50 years suggests we should be discussing possible structural changes. What changes could we make that would improve the quality of our democracy? For example, the US Government would almost surely function better if members of the House of Representatives served 3-year terms rather than 2 years. Raising the minimum voting age to 25 might result in better candidate selection. These are both suggested reductions in our extent of democracy, but are Constitutional issues and are not likely to be adopted. Changing our voting system to avoid such flaws as Gerrymandering and changing our taxation system to bolster our social support programs and eliminate unfair loopholes are possible.

This S/DG will explore the roots of American's dissatisfaction with our governmental system and possible ways of improving it. This will be particularly timely in a presidential election year.

Possible research/presentation topics might include: bringing back party conventions that select candidates; multi-representative Congressional districts; discarding the current plurality form of voting in favor of some form of range voting in which voters may indicate a degree of approval/disapproval for each candidate on the ballot; objection to demographic change as a source of political polarization; increasing the size of the House of Representatives; proportional representation; requiring prospective voters to pass a test similar to that required for new citizens, etc.

~~10. (DVL) The Devil Never Sleeps~~



Common Reading: [*The Devil Never Sleeps: Learning to Live in an Age of Disasters*](#) by Juliette Kayyem (March 29, 2022; 240 pages)

The future may still be unpredictable, but nowadays, disasters are not. We live in a time of constant, consistent catastrophe, where things more often go wrong than they go right. So why do we still fumble when disaster hits? Why are we always one step behind?

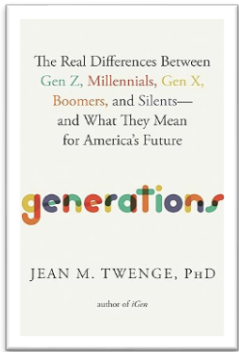
In *The Devil Never Sleeps*, Juliette Kayyem lays the groundwork for a new approach to dealing with disasters. Presenting the basic themes of crisis management, Kayyem amends the principles we rely on far too easily. Instead, she offers us a new framework to anticipate the “devil’s” inevitable return, highlighting the leadership deficiencies we need to overcome and the forward thinking we need to harness. It’s no longer about preventing a disaster from occurring but learning how to use the tools at our disposal to minimize the consequences when it does.

Filled with personal anecdotes and real-life examples from natural disasters like the California wildfires to man-made ones like the Boeing 737 MAX crisis, *The Devil Never Sleeps* is a guide for governments, businesses, and individuals alike on how to alter our thinking so that we can develop effective strategies in the face of perpetual catastrophe.

The author is a former homeland security official.

Presentations can be of events that have occurred since the publication of the book in March 2022, or on a book like Jeff Godell’s *The Heat Will Kill You First*, or on an article like this one from the WP, *The heat index reached 152 degrees in the Middle East — nearly at the limit for human survival*, by Scott Dance

11. (GNC) Generations - In Classroom Only



Common Reading:
[Generations: The Real Differences Between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Si Silents - and What They Mean for America's Future](#), by Jean M. Twenge, PhD, 550 pages, April 2023)

The United States is currently home to six generations of people:

- Silents, born 1925–1945
- Baby Boomers, born 1946–1964
- Gen X, born 1965–1979
- Millennials, born 1980–1994
- Gen Z, born 1995–2012
- and the still-to-be-named cohorts born after 2012

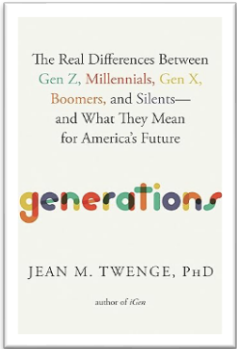
(Some people have also identified a smaller, transitional microgeneration of people born between 1977 and 1983, known as Xennials. They have characteristics of both GenX and Millennials but differ from both.)

The different generations have had vastly different life experiences and thus, one assumes, they must have vastly diverging beliefs and behaviors. But what are those differences, what causes them, and how deep do they actually run?

Professor of psychology and expert on generational change, Jean Twenge, the author of our common reading, does a deep dive into a treasure trove of long-running, government-funded surveys and databases to answer these questions. Are we truly defined by major historical events, such as the Great Depression for the Silents and September 11 for Millennials? Or, as Twenge argues, is it the rapid evolution of technology that differentiates the generations?

With her clear-eyed and insightful voice, Twenge explores what the Silents and Boomers want out of the rest of their lives; how Gen X-ers are facing middle age; the ideals of Millennials as parents and in the workplace; and how Gen Z has been changed by COVID, among other fascinating topics.

Surprising, engaging, and informative, *Generations* will forever change the way you view your parents, peers, coworkers, and children, no matter which generation you call your own. Presentations can address any facet of any of the generations, possibly exploring how we and/or our children and/or our grandchildren conform to the stereotypes or differ from them.



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12. (GNZ) Generations - Zoom/Hybrid

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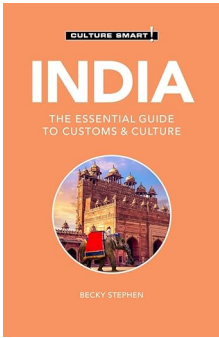
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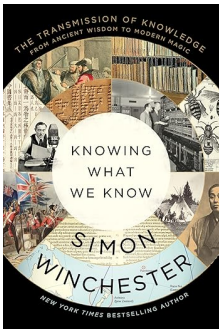


Common Reading: [India – Culture Smart! The Essential Guide to Customs and Culture](#), by Becky Stephan (March 2021, paperback (no hardcover issue))

13. (IND) Learn About India

India now is the most populous country on Earth. It is projected to become the third largest economy (jumping Japan and Germany) by the end of this decade. It has a large, capable military (both land and sea) and it has nuclear weapons. It has a democratic form of government that is considered even messier than that of the USA. It is becoming more interactive with USA though there are serious differences. India is one of the largest sources of immigrants to USA and Indian-Americans are the most educated and most affluent ethnic group in this country. The number of corporate heads, government officials and even presidential candidates with Indian backgrounds is amazing. Few Americans know much of India.

This S/DG will endeavor to increase our knowledge and understanding of India relative to the USA in the world today. Our Common Reading, while written for tourists, is a guide to the Indian culture rather than sights and places. Possible research/presentation topics might include: India’s current political position and how it has changed over the last 50 years; India’s relationship to Russia: the essentials of Hinduism; separation of church and state?; Muslims in India today and in it’s history; important Indian-Americans; etc.



14. (KNW) ~~Knowing What We Know~~

Omnilore has presented several S/DGs based on Simon Winchester’s books. The ones I remember were on the *Pacific*, the *Atlantic*, *The Men Who United the States*, and *The Meaning of Everything*. Each S/DG was well attended and successful, because of the easy and interesting way in which the author presents information.

His latest book, *Knowing What We Know* was published in April.

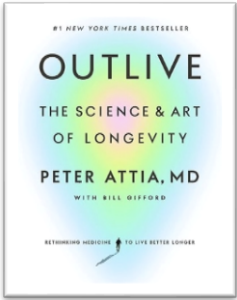
With the advent of the internet, any topic we want to know about is instantly available with the touch of a smartphone button. With so much knowledge

Common Reading: [*Knowing What We Know: The Transmission of Knowledge: From Ancient Wisdom to Modern Magic*](#) by Simon Winchester (April 25, 2023; 380 pages of text)

at our fingertips, what is there left for our brains to do? At a time when we seem to be stripping all value from the idea of knowing things—no need for math, no need for map-reading, no need for memorization—are we risking our ability to think? As we empty our minds, will we one day be incapable of thoughtfulness? Addressing these questions, Simon Winchester explores how humans have attained, stored, and disseminated knowledge. Examining such disciplines as education, journalism, encyclopedia creation, museum curation, photography, and broadcasting, he looks at a whole range of knowledge diffusion—from the cuneiform writings of Babylon to the machine-made genius of artificial intelligence, by way of Gutenberg, Google, and Wikipedia to the huge Victorian assemblage of the Mundaneum, the collection of everything ever known, currently stored in a damp basement in northern Belgium. Any of these subjects can be used as a basis for a presentation. Other presentations can be based on AI, e.g., how chat boxes may replace the human produced information of Wikipedia.

Studded with strange and fascinating details, *Knowing What We Know* is a deep dive into learning and the human mind. Throughout the book, Winchester forces us to ponder what rational humans are becoming. What good is all this knowledge if it leads to lack of thought? What is information without wisdom? Does Rene Descartes’s *Cogito, ergo sum*—“I think therefore I am,” the foundation for human knowledge widely accepted since the Enlightenment—still hold? And what will the world be like if no one in it is wise?

~~15. (LNC) Science and Art of Longevity~~
~~– In Classroom Only~~



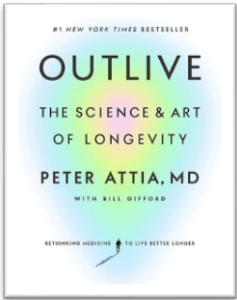
Common Reading: [Outlive: The Science and Art of Longevity](#), by Peter Attia MD with Bill Gifford (March 28, 2023, hardcover)

We all want to live long, healthy, active lives. What can we do to achieve this to the greatest extent possible? Good diet, exercise, enough sleep, avoiding risky behavior, a supporting social life. We know all these. We also know that we will not last forever. That may be the most unique characteristic of humans.

Our Common Reading addresses all these and further makes recommendations for actions we can take and how to better utilize our health care system. This approach aims to proactively prevent the chronic diseases of aging for as long as possible and allows us to maintain better health deeper into old age with rigorous, detailed and personalized monitoring and treatment of our nutrition, sleep, exercise and mental health. For example, he rates exercise as more important than diet although he refers to the Standard American Diet as SAD. We can strive for more preventative actions from our health care providers. There are now new tests for multiple forms of cancer, while still expensive, which may enable us to get a head start on problems we may have.

Research and presentation topics might include: simple forms of exercise that promote balance, e. g., standing on one leg, and how to get up if we do fall; types of meditation that promote calmness and lack of worry; the impact of sleep on mental health; chronic diseases common at end-of-life; what has worked for you, e. g., having a dog.

16. (LNZ) Science and Art of Longevity
- Zoom/Hybrid

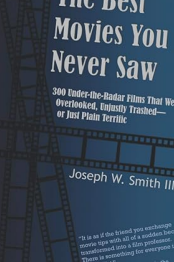


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diseases of aging for as long as possible and allows us to maintain better health deeper into old age with rigorous, detailed and personalized monitoring and treatment of our nutrition, sleep, exercise and mental health. For example, he rates exercise as more important than diet although he refers to the Standard American Diet as SAD. We can strive for more preventative actions from our health care providers. There are now new tests for multiple forms of cancer, while still expensive, which may enable us to get a head start on problems we may have.

Research and presentation topics might include: simple forms of exercise that promote balance, e. g., standing on one leg, and how to get up if we do fall; types of meditation that promote calmness and lack of worry; the impact of sleep on mental health; chronic diseases common at end-of-life; what has worked for you, e. g., having a dog.



The Best Movies You Never Saw

300 Under-the-Radar Films That Were Overlooked, Injustly Traited—or Just Plain Terrible

Joseph W. Smith III

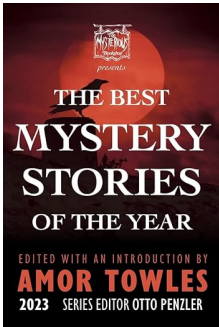
"It is as if our beloved are exchanged words with Jesus, all of a sudden someone says to him, 'I have something to tell you.' That is something you never see in *Heaven's Gate*."

—Young T. Henry Hughes on the movie *Heaven's Gate* and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*

Even if you have watched a lot of movies, there are still many good movies you haven't seen. Author Joseph Smith backs up that claim in his 2020 book: *The Best Movies You Never Saw: 300 Under-the-Radar Films That Were Overlooked, Unjustly Trashed – or Just Plain Terrific*. Smith is a film critic and teacher who clearly loves movies. Actually, you have likely seen a few of the films on his list, but probably not most.

As a class, we might decide to devote a bit of class time to agree or disagree with Smith's choices. But mainly, we will use this book to select the films for our individual presentations and discussions as we have done in previous movie S/DGs. For example, have you ever seen *Ace in the Hole* (1951), *Act of Violence* (1949), *Appaloosa* (2008), *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), *Away We Go* (2009), *Beautiful Girls* (1996), *Belle* (2013), *The Best Man* (1964), *Bobby* (2006), *The Bounty* (1984), *The Bridge at Remagen* (1969), *Brittany Runs a Marathon* (2019), *Broadway Danny Rose* (1984), or *The Buddy Holly Story* (1978)? And those are just some of the titles beginning with A and B.

18. (MYC) Best Mystery Stories of the Year 2023
- In Classroom Only

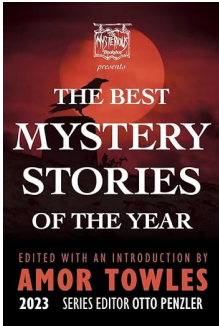


Common Reading: [The Mysterious Bookshop Presents the Best Mystery Stories of the Year 2023](#), by Amor Towles (Editor), Otto Penzler (Series Editor) (Hardcover – September 19, 2023)

Amor Towles selects the best mystery short stories of the year, including tales by Andrew Child, Jeffrey Deaver, and T.C. Boyle.

Under the auspices of New York City's legendary mystery fiction specialty bookstore, The Mysterious Bookshop, and aided by Edgar Award-winning anthologist Otto Penzler, New York Times bestseller Amor Towles has selected the twenty most puzzling, most thrilling, and most mysterious short stories from the past year, collected now in one entertaining volume. The volume also contains a “bonus story” selected from the bookshop’s rare book room, featuring a look into the history of this illustrious genre. Each member of the class will be a story and do a presentation related to the story chosen.

19. ~~(MYZ) Best Mystery Stories of the Year 2023~~
~~--Zoom/Hybrid~~



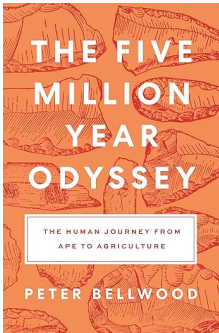
Common Reading: [The](#)

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Under the auspices of New York City's legendary mystery fiction specialty bookstore, The Mysterious Bookshop, and aided by Edgar Award-winning anthologist Otto Penzler, New York Times bestseller Amor Towles has selected the twenty most puzzling, most thrilling, and most mysterious short stories from the past year, collected now in one entertaining volume. The volume also contains a “bonus story” selected from the bookshop’s rare book room, featuring a look into the history of this illustrious genre. Each member of the class will be a story and do a presentation related to the

[Mysterious Bookshop Presents the Best Mystery Stories of the Year 2023](#), by Amor Towles (Editor), Otto Penzler (Series Editor) (Hardcover – September 19, 2023)

story chosen.



Common Reading: [The Five-Million-Year Odyssey: The Human Journey from Ape to Agriculture](#), by Peter Bellwood (Hardcover – August 2, 2022)

20. (ODY) The Five-Million-Year Odyssey - In Classroom Only

The epic story of human evolution, from our primate beginnings more than five million years ago to the agricultural era.

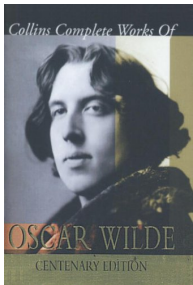
Over the course of five million years, our primate ancestors evolved from a modest population of sub-Saharan apes into the globally dominant species Homo sapiens. Along the way, humans became incredibly diverse in appearance, language, and culture. How did all of this happen? In *The Five-Million-Year Odyssey*, Peter Bellwood synthesizes research from archaeology, biology, anthropology, and linguistics to immerse us in the saga of human evolution, from the earliest traces of our hominin forebears in Africa, through waves of human expansion across the continents, and to the rise of agriculture and explosive demographic growth around the world.

Bellwood presents our modern diversity as a product of both evolution, which led to the emergence of the genus Homo approximately 2.5 million years ago, and migration, which carried humans into new environments. He introduces us to the ancient hominins—including the australopithecines, Homo erectus, the Neanderthals, and others—before turning to the appearance of Homo sapiens circa 300,000 years ago and subsequent human movement into Eurasia, Australia, and the Americas. Bellwood then explores the invention of agriculture, which enabled farmers to disperse to new territories over the last 10,000 years, facilitating the spread of language families and cultural practices. The outcome is now apparent in our vast array of contemporary ethnicities, linguistic systems, and customs.

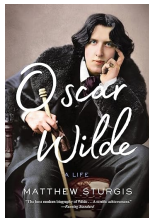
The fascinating origin story of our varied human existence, *The Five-Million-Year Odyssey* underscores the importance of recognizing our

shared genetic heritage to appreciate what makes us so diverse.

Presentations could cover the new results from DNA of which there are many or pick an ancient or modern population and show the influence of evolution on them. That is, the impact of evolution on the Polynesian island hopping, The latest on the Australian indigenous, or how were the Americas populated, another could cover the various breakouts of homin population from Africa, covering when where and why.



Common Reading: [Complete Works of Oscar Wilde \(Collins Classics\)](#) by Oscar Wilde
(August 2003; Kindle version, August 2021)



Supplemental Reading: [Oscar Wilde: A Life](#) (October 2021, Hardcover) by Matthew

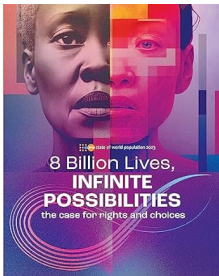
21. (OWI) Oscar Wilde: A Colorful Life

Author Oscar Fingall O'Flahertie Wills Wilde has been described as a born entertainer with a talent for comedy and a need for an audience. Born in Dublin in 1854, he was educated at Trinity College, Dublin and Magdalen College, Oxford where, a disciple of Pater, he founded an aesthetic cult. In 1884 he married Constance Lloyd, and they soon had two sons. And to put it succinctly, he led a unique and dazzling life.

Wilde's novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, and social comedies (Lady Windermere's Fan, A Woman of No Importance, An Ideal Husband, and The Importance of Being Earnest), established his reputation. In 1895, following his libel action against the Marquess of Queensberry, Wilde was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for homosexual conduct, as a result of which he wrote The Ballad of Reading Gaol, and his confessional letter De Profundis. On his release from prison in 1897 he lived in obscurity in Europe, and died in Paris in 1900.

Our S/DG will choose **three (3) novels and several essays and/or short stories (to be selected by the entire class at the Pre-meeting)** to read and discuss, accompanied by presentations to possibly cover: particular periods of his life, comparison to his contemporaries or to modern humorists, how Wilde's works were received critically, what works have been derived from his, life as a gay man in the late 1800s, a reenactment of a poem or short story, or information on people who were friends (or enemies) of Wilde.

Sturgis



Common Reading: [State of World Population 2023: 8 Billion Lives. Infinite Possibilities: The Case for Rights and Choices](#) by United Nations/UNFPA (May 2023)

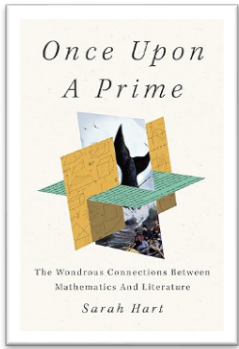
22. (PBB) ~~Population Bomb and Bust~~

In November 2022, world population surpassed 8 billion people. Some of us observed that milestone by wondering how many more humans the planet can tolerate. Others worried because some countries believe they have too few people and are attempting to increase their birthrates to avoid a presumed future of economic and political decline.

In contrast, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) says we should stop trying to manipulate fertility rates, allow migration and repatriation to distribute population to where it is needed, improve gender equality, and give women the freedom and ability to make their own decisions about sex and reproduction.

Our text is *8 Billion Lives, Infinite Possibilities: The Case for Rights and Choices*, AKA *State of World Population 2023*, a 200-page report published in 2023 by UNFPA and freely downloadable here: <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/swop23/SWOP2023-ENGLISH-230329-web.pdf>. It provides a user-friendly history of humanity’s concerns about over- and under-population as well as loads of other population-related information. The report’s recommendations may strike some of us as overly optimistic. But that should spur some lively discussions.

The potential topics for presentation and discussion are endless. Are we really on track to stabilize world population? Is the UNFPA unrealistically downplaying the impact of population on climate change and other environmental harms? Does it make sense to deal with aging work forces by incentivizing a baby boom? Are robots a better solution for dwindling work forces? Are the leaders of aging nations more worried about the optics of a shrinking population than with solving the current problem of too many seniors dependent on too few workers? With demagogues around the world fear-mongering about the great replacement, what are the chances of maintaining let alone increasing migration quotas? The hundreds of references cited in our text should also offer plenty of ideas for good presentation/discussion topics.



Common Reading: [Once Upon a Prime: The Wondrous Connections Between Mathematics and Literature](#), by Sarah Hart (April 2023)

23. (PRM) ~~Once Upon a Prime~~

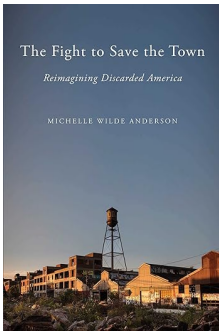
An exploration of the many ways mathematics can transform our understanding of literature and vice versa, by the first woman to hold England's oldest mathematical chair.

We often think of mathematics and literature as polar opposites. But what if, instead, they were fundamentally linked? In her clear, insightful, laugh-out-loud funny debut, *Once Upon a Prime*, Professor Sarah Hart shows us the myriad connections between math and literature, and how understanding those connections can enhance our enjoyment of both.

Did you know, for instance, that Moby-Dick is full of sophisticated geometry? That James Joyce's stream-of-consciousness novels are deliberately checkered with mathematical references? That George Eliot was obsessed with statistics? That Jurassic Park is undergirded by fractal patterns? That Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie wrote mathematician characters? From sonnets to fairytales to experimental French literature, Professor Hart shows how math and literature are complementary parts of the same quest, to understand human life and our place in the universe.

As the first woman to hold England's oldest mathematical chair, Professor Hart is the ideal tour guide, taking us on an unforgettable journey through the books we thought we knew, revealing new layers of beauty and wonder. As she promises, you're going to need a bigger bookcase. "An absolute joy to read!" —Steven Levitt, New York Times bestselling author of *Freakonomics*.

Presentations might cover math used in rhyming limericks or some poems you like. How math is used in novels by James Joyce or *Flatland* by Edwin Abbott, *Last Call* by Tim Powers, or *Cryptonomicon* by Neal Stephenson, or *The Library of Babel* by Jorge Luis Borges. There are many other books that could be chosen for a fun and informative presentation.



Common Reading: [*The Fight to Save the Town: Reimagining Discarded America*](#) by Michelle Wilde Anderson (June 2022; 368 pp)

24. (RDA) ~~Reimagining Discarded America~~

What happens to a town that has experienced a boom and a bust? Why do they tend to devolve into high levels of poverty and violence? Many cities went through municipal bankruptcy or state receivership during the Great Recession. Yet some became places of hope with people were coming together—to train trauma recovery counselors, to rebuild a broken-down library, to make parkland out of industrial wasteland, to stop foreclosures.

This S/DG will examine various cities which experienced such downturns and the actions of the citizenry that made a difference or not! How much does place matter to humans, and what are they willing to do to save a place buffeted by global forces rather than abandon it.

Using the book, *The Fight to Save the Town*, by Michelle Wilde Anderson, the winner of the 2023 Zócalo Public Square Book Prize, the class will discuss the stories of Stockton, California; Josephine County, Oregon; Lawrence, Massachusetts; and Detroit, Michigan. Anderson’s portraits are a stirring antidote to anti-government cynicism and a call to action against wealth inequality and the disinvestment from public goods.

Members research and presentation on other cities and their governing bodies such as Los Angeles or San Diego, the presence of corruption in city management, the work of various non-profits, the impacts of weak educational systems, impacts of police systems and racism as well as federal legislation and voting.

25. (SHK) All the World’s a Stage . . .

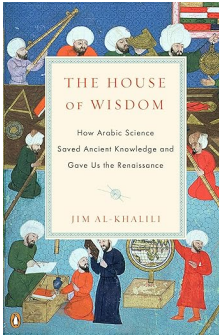
Common Reading: Selected Plays

The Omnilorean New Globe Theater plans a Winter/Spring 2024 season of study, continuing our usual pattern of reading 2 (maybe 3) plays of different genres (*Histories, Comedies, and Tragedies*) – the plays to be chosen during our December pre-meeting (and lead-up email discussions). With players standing (*or Zooming in*) and with a few props, we will do reading walk-throughs of the plays, plus provocative questions about, short presentations on, and discussion of each play and the themes, issues,

motifs, etc. of the play.

In this SDG you will learn how to research all perspectives of Shakespeare’s works — sources of each play upon which the Bard builds rich characters and enhances the plots, how to play each character “in character,” themes, symbols, images, motifs, commentary on issues arising in the day, and all manner of *rhyme and reason*. Class members will each be responsible for a short presentation (*not necessarily computerized*) or questions intended to stimulate discussions based on the research, optionally including short videos, music, webpage visits, etc. For a glimpse of how we live the Bard in this S/DG, check out <https://omnilore.org/members/Curriculum/SDGs/23c-SHK-Shakespeare/> to view a typical past Shakespeare class’s website of links to research/references relevant to our plays.

There are no prerequisites, theatrical or otherwise. You will find that the Bard of Stratford-on-Avon will teach us, just as he’s taught others for four hundred years. With plenty for the novice as well as the veteran, it is a *foregone conclusion* members will leave this class with a fuller understanding of the masterful story construction, realistic characters with depth and humanity, and the rich, evocative language which have earned William Shakespeare the title of greatest writer in the English language.



Common Reading: [The](#)

26. (SIS) Science and Islam

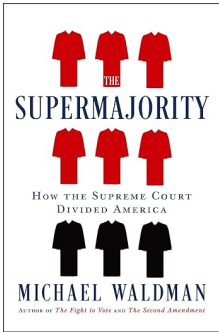
Many of the innovations that we think of as hallmarks of Western science had their roots in the Islamic world of the Middle Ages, a period when much of Europe lay in intellectual darkness. During the Islamic Golden Age, government leaders sponsored scholars from many fields of study, including mathematics, chemistry, physics, and astronomy. Eventually those scholars expanded on the knowledge of ancient Greece and even challenged Greek scientific theory. In many cases, their discoveries were quite astounding. For example, al-Biruni devised a simple method for determining the radius of the Earth that was within 17 km of the true value. Avicenna’s *The Canon of Medicine* (1025) was used as a standard medical

[House of Wisdom: How Arabic Science Saved Ancient Knowledge and Gave Us the Renaissance](#), by Jim Al-Khalili
(March 27, 2012)

textbook until the 18th century.

This S/DG seeks to discuss the reasons for this Golden Age, the range of scientific achievements, and the significance of those accomplishments.

Presentation topics could include the biographies of prominent Islamic scholars of the period (e.g. al-Khwarizmi, Avicenna, Omar Khayyam, and others), the advancements in fields such as astronomy, mathematics, medicine, chemistry, etc., the impact on agriculture, the criticism of Greek scientific theory, the influence of religion, the study of alchemy, sponsorship by the Abbasid rulers, the Indian influence on Islamic science, the impact on the European Renaissance, and the status of science in the Islamic world today.



Common Reading: [The Supermajority: How the Supreme Court Divided America](#) by Michael Waldman
(June 6, 2023, 270 pages plus notes and index)

27. (SUP) The Supermajority

In *The Supermajority*, Michael Waldman explores the tumultuous 2021–2022 Supreme Court term. He draws deeply on history to examine other times the Court veered from the popular will, provoking controversy and backlash. And he analyzes the most important new rulings and their implications for the law and for American society. Waldman asks: What can we do when the Supreme Court challenges the country?

Over three days in June 2022, the conservative supermajority

- overturned the constitutional right to abortion, possibly opening the door to reconsider other major privacy rights;
- limited the authority of the EPA, reducing the prospects for combatting climate change;
- radically loosened curbs on guns amid an epidemic of mass shootings;
- fully embraced legal theories such as “originalism” that will affect thousands of cases throughout the country.

These major decisions—and the next wave to come—will have enormous ramifications for every American.

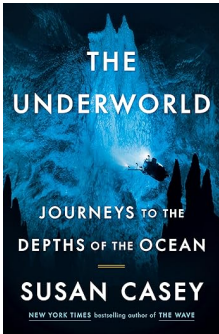
Waldman says, it was the most turbulent term in memory—with

- the leak of the opinion overturning *Roe v. Wade*,
- the first Black woman justice sworn in, and
- the justices turning on each other in public.

Waldman previews the 2022–2023 term and how the brewing fights over the Supreme Court and its role have already begun to reshape politics.

Presentations can be on subjects covered in the book

- or on what is possibly still to come.
- Or the shadow docket.
- Or something on the past history of the court, especially as it relates to or helps to explain the present.
- Or, “should the SC be expanded to more than nine justices?”
- Or should justices be appointed for life, since life spans and thus terms can be so long?



Common Reading: [*The Underworld: Journeys to the Depths of the Ocean*](#) by Susan Casey (August 1, 2023; 288

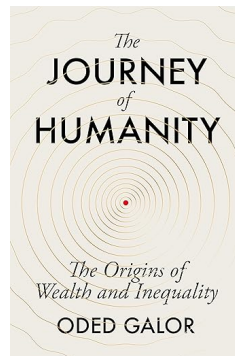
28. (UND) ~~The Underworld~~

Throughout human history, the deep ocean has been a source of wonder and terror, an unknown realm that evoked a singular, compelling question: what is down there? Unable to answer this question for centuries, we are beginning to understand what’s down there: soaring mountains, smoldering volcanoes, valleys where tectonic plates collide and such extraordinary life forms as pink gelatinous predators, shimmering creatures a hundred feet long, ancient animals with glass skeletons, sharks that live for half a millennium and countless other marvels. In *The Underworld*, bestselling author Susan Casey joined scientists and explorers all over the world on dives to the deepest places on earth. Casey interviewed marine geologists, marine biologists and oceanographers in a search for greater knowledge about the deep ocean. Her new book is a fascinating journey through the history of deep-sea exploration from bathyspheres to shipwrecks, with scientists who are just beginning to understand the mind-blowing

pages plus notes, bibliography
& resources)

complexity and ecological importance of the quadrillions of creatures who live in realms long thought to be devoid of life. She explains how vital the deep sea is to the future of the planet and to understanding the increasing threats from climate change, industrial fishing, pollution and the mining companies that are also exploring the deep sea.

Presentations could be on any of the many subjects presented in the book, or a “deeper dive” on the creatures, ecology or geology of the deep ocean, scientific or environmental issues related to the deep ocean, or history or current events involving the deep ocean.



Common Reading: [*The Journey of Humanity: The Origins of Wealth and Inequality*](#), by Oded Galor
(March 2022)

29. (WAI) The Origins of Wealth and Inequality

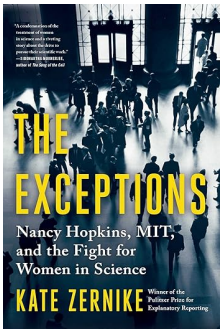
In a captivating journey from the dawn of human existence to the present, world-renowned economist and thinker Oded Galor offers an intriguing solution to two of humanity’s great mysteries.

Why are humans the only species to have escaped - only very recently - the subsistence trap, allowing us to enjoy a standard of living that vastly exceeds all others? And why have we progressed so unequally around the world, resulting in the great disparities between nations that exist today? Immense in scope and packed with astounding connections, Galor's gripping narrative explains how technology, population size, and adaptation led to a stunning “phase change” in the human story a mere two hundred years ago. But by tracing that same journey back in time and peeling away the layers of influence - colonialism, political institutions, societal structure, culture - he arrives also at an explanation of inequality's ultimate causes: those ancestral populations that enjoyed fruitful geographical characteristics and rich diversity were set on the path to prosperity, while those that lacked it were disadvantaged in ways still echoed today.

As we face ecological crisis across the globe, *The Journey of Humanity* is a book of urgent truths and enduring relevance, with lessons that are both hopeful and profound.

Presentations could cover gender equality, how much to invest in education and what types of education, how to balance diversity with social cohesion,

can UBI solve the problem of poverty, the impact of reduced global populations.



Common Reading: [The Exceptions: Nancy Hopkins, MIT, and the Fight for Women in Science](#), by Kate Zernike (424 pages; February 2023)

30. (WSC) ~~The Exceptions: The Fight for Women in Science~~

As late as 1999, women who succeeded in science were called “exceptional” as if it were unusual for them to be so bright. They *were* exceptional, not because they could succeed at science but because of all they accomplished despite the hurdles.

Our common reading tells the story of one such woman, who, although a noted molecular geneticist and cancer researcher at MIT, found herself underpaid and denied the credit and resources given to men of lesser rank. Galvanized by the flagrant favoritism, Hopkins led a group of sixteen women on the faculty in a campaign that prompted MIT to make the historic admission that it had long discriminated against its female scientists. The sixteen women were a formidable group: their work has advanced our understanding of everything from cancer to geology, from fossil fuels to the inner workings of the human brain. And their work to highlight what they called “21st-century discrimination”—a subtle, stubborn, often unconscious bias—set off a national reckoning with the pervasive sexism in science.

From the Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist who broke the story, *The Exceptions* chronicles groundbreaking science and a history-making fight for equal opportunity. It is the “excellent and infuriating” (*The New York Times*) story of how this group of determined, brilliant women used the power of the collective and the tools of science to inspire ongoing radical change. And it offers an intimate look at the passion that drives discovery, and a rare glimpse into the competitive, hierarchical world of elite science—and the women who dared to challenge it.

Presentations can expound on the careers of any of these women (or, for that matter, other successful female scientists) or the obstacles that women face(d) in other professional fields, such as law or medicine.

