

TOPICS OFFERED FOR FALL 2014

Please note that the books listed for each course are only possible candidates. Do not buy any until the pre-meeting and a decision on the common reading is made.

***Classes start September 1st and end December 31st.
Holiday periods are adapted to by individual class voting.***

1. (ASA) ASIA'S CAULDRON: THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

When Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 disappeared on March 8th, most Americans were unaware of the complicated relationships among the countries surrounding the South China Sea, including China, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. Fortunately, noted author Robert Kaplan has just published a book about the area. Kaplan, who has been named one of the world's Top 100 Thinkers by *Foreign Policy* magazine, describes the various nations, the conflicts brewing in the region, and their implications for global peace and security. He describes how the region's geography fosters the growth of navies yet impedes aggression and draws parallels between China's increasingly aggressive behavior and the United States' imperialism in the late 19th century. S/DG members can prepare presentations on any of the countries involved, or describe historical relationships.

Common Reading: *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific*, by Robert D. Kaplan (March 2014)

2. (AWW) AFTERMATH OF WORLD WAR II

The end of the Second World War in Europe is one of the twentieth century's most iconic moments remembered fondly as a time when cheering crowds celebrated in the streets. These images of victory contrast with the anarchy and civil war that followed across the European continent. With entire cities razed and more than thirty million people killed, the social institutions - such as the police, the media, transport, local and national government - were either entirely absent or hopelessly compromised. Crime rates were soaring, economies collapsing, and the European population was hovering on the brink of starvation. The Second World War might have officially ended in May 1945, but in reality it rumbled on for another ten years. Keith Lowe's book, *Savage Continent*, serves as a background describing a continent racked by violence, where vengeance, old tribal rivalries, and harsh realities face large sections of the population.

Possible presentations could be the following:

- Obligations of the victors
- Humanitarian efforts
- Situation of a city or country pre- and post-war

- Individuals and statesmen involved in post-war clean up
- U.S., Britain, and Russia's recovery as the "allies" vs. the other countries
- Economic results and recovery industries/jobs

Common Reading: *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II* by Keith Lowe (July 2012)

3. (CAN) CANYON OF DREAMS: THE MAGIC AND THE MUSIC OF LAUREL CANYON

From the days of Valentino and Errol Flynn right up through rockers Guns and Roses, Laurel Canyon has been home to the famous and the flamboyant of all stripes. This class, a mixture of biography, pop culture, and social history, will revel in 80 years' worth of Canyon music and celebrity. Our suggested reading is chock full of facts and first-person interviews that evoke the creative musical buzz of the decades it covers.

Possible presentation topics:

- Laurel Canyon personalities such as Sonny & Cher, The Doors, The Turtles, Canned Heat, The Monkees, The Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, Joni Mitchell, Jackson Browne; Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young; The Eagles, and Carole King.
- The famous Sunset Strip clubs
- The connection between music and current events
- Drugs and the music culture

Suggested Common Readings:

Canyon of Dreams: The Magic and the Music of Laurel Canyon, by Harvey Kubernik (2009)

Laurel Canyon: The Inside Story of Rock-and-Roll's Legendary Neighborhood, by Michael Walker (May 2007)

4. (CON) AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION: HOW AND WHY WE SHOULD CHANGE

The United States Constitution is perhaps the greatest political document in history, yet our nation is not the same as it was when the Constitution was ratified in 1781. Our Founders could not have imagined a nation of more than 300 million people, nor could they anticipate technological advancements such as cell phones and semi-automatic weapons when they constructed the Bill of Rights.

The process of amending the Constitution is difficult, and it has only been successful 27 times. But if you had the chance, what changes would you make? This S/DG will provide you an opportunity to explore the possibilities.

In our common reading, retired Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, John Paul Stevens, proposes six such changes, including gerrymandering, campaign finance, the death penalty, and gun control. Our discussions of the common reading will discuss the pros and cons of Stevens' proposals. Presentations can address other possible changes to the Constitution, or the history of prior (successful and unsuccessful) attempts at amending the Constitution, or the process for doing so.

Common Reading: *Six Amendments: How and Why We Should Change the Constitution*, by John Paul Stevens (April 2014)

5. (EAE) ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT: EXPLORING PATHS TOWARD A CLEANER FUTURE

To frack or not to frack? Is clean coal an oxymoron? Nuclear energy—a cleaner choice or a catastrophe waiting to happen? These are central questions to the great energy debate that rages in our country. In this course, we'll study the historical and economic events that frame the current energy debate. We'll learn about the scientific basis for the most controversial forms of energy generation, and we'll examine the environmental impacts of these processes. The end goal is to become informed citizens so we can participate in the debate with full knowledge of all the complexities involved. Presentation topics: fracking, clean coal, nuclear energy, wind energy, solar energy, and biogas.

Common Reading: *The Quest: Energy, Security, and the Remaking of the Modern World*, by Daniel Yergin ((ISBN 978-0143121947, September 2012)

6. (EIN) EINSTEIN'S LEGACY: BLACK HOLES AND TIME WARPS

Ever since Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity burst upon the world in 1915, some of the most brilliant minds have sought to decipher the mysteries bequeathed by that theory.

Black holes, down which anything can fall but from which nothing can return; wormholes, short spacwarps connecting regions of the cosmos; singularities, where space and time are so violently warped that time ceases to exist and space becomes a kind of foam; gravitational waves, which carry symphonic accounts of collisions of black holes billions of years ago and evidence of inflation in the first trillionth of a trillionth of a trillionth of a second after the Big Bang.

Our text is a masterfully written and brilliantly informed work of scientific history and explanation, Kip Thorne, the Feynman Professor of Theoretical Physics at Caltech, leads us through an elegant, always human, tapestry of interlocking themes, coming finally to a uniquely informed answer to the great question: what principles control our universe and why do physicists think they know the things they think they know?

Most presentations will focus on the relevant portions of our text, though presenters have the option of biographical, scientific, or any other relevant presentation as well.

Common Reading: *Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy* by Kip Thorne & Stephen Hawking (January 1995)

7. (ERR) TO ERR IS HUMAN?

To err is human, yet most of us go through life assuming (and sometimes insisting) that we are right about nearly everything, from the origins of the universe to how to load a dishwasher. In this course we will be guided by journalist Kathryn Schultz in an exploration of why we find it so gratifying to be right and so maddening to be mistaken. Drawing on thinkers as varied as Augustine, Freud, Greenspan and Groucho Marx, Schultz demonstrates that error is both a given and a gift—one that can transform our worldviews, our relationships and ourselves.

Our common reading will be *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error* by Kathryn Schulz. Harvard President Drew Gilpin Faust, when asked earlier this year if there is a book she would recommend to all incoming freshman at Harvard, recommended *Being Wrong*, saying the book advocates doubt as a skill and praises error as the foundation of wisdom. President Bill Clinton recommends the book “if you want to feel better about not being perfect and see the potential upside of your errors.”

Common Reading: *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error* by Kathryn Schulz (2010)

8. (EUR) LA BELLE ÉPOQUE 1900-1914: FIFTEEN EUPHORIC YEARS OF EUROPEAN HISTORY

It was a period characterized by optimism, peace at home and in Europe. On a poster symbolizing the times three women appear; one holding an electric battery, the second holds a cornucopia and the third an olive branch. In the background are smoking chimneys of the Second Industrial Revolution, which gave rise to the Parisian bourgeoisie, the nouveau-riches. Entertainment for this new class was provided by cabarets, bistros and music halls such as the Moulin Rouge and the Folies Bergere.

The Arts flourished. Impressionism gained popularity. There were large exhibits in which Cubism and Abstraction appeared. Art Nouveau emerged. Gauguin, Matisse, Bonnard, Rousseau, Toulouse-Lautrec and Picasso were some of the prominent artists then in Paris. Modern forms of sculpture were represented in the work of Auguste Rodin. Among the composers of the era were Satie, Debussy, Massenet, Sain-Saens and Ravel. Authors such as Guy de Maupassant and Emile Zola represented a major transformation to literary realism and naturalism.

There were great technological and scientific advancements. Technological developments in: the automobile and products such as the pneumatic tire; electricity that enabled Wirephoto and neon lights; cinema technology; aviation technology allowed France to assume leadership in the latter two fields. In Science there was the discovery of radioactivity, and the germ theory of disease that led to the establishment of the field of bacteriology. Louis Pasteur worked in antibiotics and a rabies vaccine.

It was an age influenced by and characterized by developments in electricity, architecture, the image of Woman, the decorative Arts, Great Exhibitions, the cult of speed in communications and transportation. - all enabled by this short period of peace and stability. Class members should have no problem finding a fascinating topic for a presentation.

Possible Common Reading:

Twilight of the Belle Epoque: The Paris of Picasso, Stravinsky, Proust, Renault, Marie Curie, Gertrude Stein, and Their Friends through the Great War, by Mary McAuliffe (March 2014)

9. (EXT) THE SONG OF THE DODO - AN ISLAND BIOGEOGRAPHY IN AN AGE OF EXTINCTIONS

We live in an age when all of Earth's landscapes are being chopped into island-like fragments by human activity. David Quammen's book, *The Song of the Dodo*, is a brilliant, stirring work, breathtaking in its scope, far-reaching in its message. In a wonderful weave of science, metaphor, and prose, David Quammen, applies the lessons of island biogeography - the study of the distribution of species on islands and island like patches of landscape - to modern ecosystem decay, offering us insight into the origin and extinction of species, our relationship to nature, and the future of our world.

The scientific journalism is first-rate, with the extremely technical field of island biogeography made fully accessible. We learn how the discipline developed and how it has changed conservation biology. And we learn just how critical this field is in the face of massive habitat destruction. The book is also a splendid example of natural history writing, for which Quammen traveled extensively. The Channel Islands off California and the Madagascan lemurs are captivatingly portrayed. Equally impressive are the character studies of the scientists who have been at the forefront of island biogeography. From his extended historical analysis of the journeys and insights of 19th-century biologist Alfred Russell Wallace to his field and laboratory interviews with many of the men and women who have followed in Wallace's intellectual wake, Quammen delightfully adds the human dimension to his discussion of science and natural history. Using a canvas as large as the world, he masterfully melds anecdotes about swimming elephants, collecting fresh feces from arboreal primates in Brazil and searching for the greater bird of paradise on the tiny island of Aru into an irreverent masterpiece. That a book on so technical a subject could be so enlightening, humorous and engaging is an

extraordinary achievement. While the book requires careful reading presentations can add to our analysis of island biogeography and its implications for our own continent.

Common Reading: *The Song of the Dodo - Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinctions*, by David Quammen (April 1997)

10. (FSS) FILM OR SHORT STORY: WHICH IS BETTER?

Two of Omnilore's most popular kinds of classes are those dealing with short stories and those discussing movies. In this S/DG, you'll have the best of both worlds! Did you know that some of our favorite films actually began life as a short story? This S/DG gives you the opportunity to experience both and decide for yourself which works better. You'll read the original story and watch the film adaptation at home, then join in a discussion comparing and contrasting the two. Are the story lines, settings and characters the same or are they different? Did the transition from written page to theatrical experience alter what you felt? Did one turn out to be more effective and/or more entertaining than the other, or were both equally good in their own right? Voice and share your opinions with others, and plan to make it a lively discussion.

Our text will be *Adaptations: From Short Story to Big Screen, 35 Great Stories that Have Inspired Great Films*, edited by Stephanie Harrison. Each class member will pick one of the 35 and lead the discussion for that story/film. (Not all films will be covered this trimester.) Some of the films are well-known, others may be unfamiliar to you. Some are recent, while others are classic. There are a variety of genres from which to choose, including science-fiction, family, westerns, horror, comedy, and drama. Some of the titles with which you may be familiar are *Field of Dreams*, *Rear Window*, *Blow Up*, and *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Common Reading: *Adaptations: From Short Story to Big Screen, 35 Great Stories that Have Inspired Great Films*, edited by Stephanie Harrison (April 2005)

11. (INC) WEALTH AND INCOME INEQUALITY IN AMERICA

Income inequality moved with astonishing speed from the boring backwaters of economic studies to "the defining challenge of our time." Numerous recent articles have addressed the struggle of the lower economic classes, the increases in wealth and income for the "one per cent" and the financial hollowing out of the middle classes. What are the real statistics and the real reasons behind this spreading of the income distribution? And is it wrong - or is it required to foster hard work and entrepreneurs? This class will look for the best data available and explore implications of increasing inequality for the future. Possible presentations include rising compensation for chief executives, inequality in other countries, the effect of death transfers on wealth inequality, the

superrich and how long they stay in the top 400 taxpayers, etc. The proposed text is a best seller written by a French economist that proposes an approach to reducing inequality: a global progressive tax on wealth and higher marginal rates for many.

Other references and sources for presentation topics include

<http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/23/opinion/sutter-99-inequality-must-read/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/23/upshot/the-american-middle-class-is-no-longer-the-worlds-richest.html?hp>

Common Reading: *Capital in the Twenty First Century*, by Thomas Piketty & Arthur Goldhammer (March 2014)

12. (LEO) THE ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF LEONARDO DA VINCI

This SDG will attempt to recreate the life and Renaissance world of Leonardo da Vinci. We will delve deeply into art historical criticism (analysis of the meaning, proposed dating, and the interrelatedness) of each work within Leonardo's oeuvre, and the individuality and impact of this work on artists of his time. We will examine the latest research findings and explore works such as the recently discovered *La bella Princepessa* and *Salvator Mundi*, paying particular attention to the attribution process and the latest scientific analysis techniques utilized to verify authorship. As Leonardo painted only 15 fully authenticated paintings, this book is just the right size to provide all the visual information any reasonable art-afficionardo needs to have at his/her fingertips.

Common Reading: *Leonardo da Vinci: A Life through Paintings*, by Massimiliano Capati (ISBN 978-8874611119; April 2009)

13. (MCR) DEADLY COMPANIONS: HOW MICROBES SHAPED OUR HISTORY

We are surrounded by billions of bacteria. Most of those that we breathe in with air and ingest in food and water are harmless. Those that dwell within our bodies provide protection against invaders. Bacteria can turn against us when our resistance is diminished, however, causing diseases such as diphtheria, whooping cough and pneumonia. Those like cholera or plague bacilli can spread rapidly among the adult population, leading to global epidemics and economic disasters.

Amazingly, bacteria were not identified and their effects recognized until the 19th century. Since then major improvements have occurred in environmental hygiene and the preparation of protective antibacterial vaccines. Presentations can address specific bacterial-caused diseases, the efficacy of antibiotics, or any current research in this area. Our common reading will be the highly accessible *Deadly Companions: How Microbes Shaped Our History* by Dorothy H. Crawford

and become better acquainted with disease-causing bacteria and their role in human lives.

Common Reading: *Deadly Companions: How Microbes Shaped Our History* by Dorothy H. Crawford (February 2009)

14. THE SCIENTIFIC QUEST TO UNDERSTAND, ENHANCE, AND EMPOWER THE MIND

“In this expansive, illuminating journey through the mind theoretical physicist Michio Kaku (Physics of the Future) explores fantastical realms of science fiction that may soon become our reality. His futuristic framework merges physics with neuroscience...applied to demonstrations that 'show proof-of-principle' in accomplishing what was previously fictional: that minds can be read, memories can be digitally stored, and intelligences can be improved to great extents. The discussion, while engaging, clear, and replete with cinematic references...These new frontiers make for captivating reading.” --Publishers Weekly”

“Mind-bending...Kaku has a gift for explaining incredibly complex concepts, on subjects as far-ranging as nanotechnology and space travel, in language the lay reader can grasp....engrossing.”--San Francisco Chronicle

This Study and discussion group will focus on the late research advances and discoveries about the human brain and all its complexity. Many presentation topics are related: telepathy, altered memories, increasing intelligence, electrical stimulation, comatose patients, depression and the brain, Post Traumatic Stress, Syndrome, the new born brain, and the aging brain, to name just a few.

Reading and discussing this “book could be a seriously mind-opening experience.”

--Booklist

Common Reading: *The Future of the Mind: The Scientific Quest to Understand, Enhance, and Empower the Mind* by Michio Kaku (February 2014)

15. (NET) HOW THE INTERNET IS CHANGING OUR LIVES

The Internet has been publicly available for only twenty years, yet it is the catalyst of the widest and fastest technological revolution in history. Its effects have touched practically every citizen in the world. Its mass adoption has been swifter than that of any technology in history. It's impossible today to imagine the world without the Internet: it enables us to do things which only a few years ago would have been unthinkable, and impinges on every sphere of our lives.

Join us as we delve into a series of essays recently published by MIT, authored by experts from around the world, which discuss how the Internet affects education, politics, business, language, music, culture and more. Certain to be fascinating!

Suggested Reading: *Change: 19 Key Essays on How the Internet Is Changing Our Lives* (available in Kindle, EPub, and PDF formats via https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/book/19-key-essays-on-how-internet-is-changing-our-lives/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=techreview&utm_content=&utm_campaign=MITchange)

Essay Titles Include:

- The Internet of Things: Outlook and Challenges
- The Internet and Business
- The Music Industry in an Age of Digital Distribution
- The Way of the Dodo
- The Impact of the Internet on Society: A Global Perspective
- How the Internet Has Changed Everyday Life
- Knowledge Banking for a Hyperconnected Society
- Who Owns Big Data?
- The Internet, Politics and the Politics of Internet Debate

16. (NYR) COVERING THE NEW YORKER

Many Omniforeans enjoy reading The New Yorker magazine...whether it is the articles, essays or cartoons! Topics include the arts, politics, culture, short story fiction and even poetry. This S/DG will examine the contents of the current issue through participants who have volunteered to become “watchers” of a magazine section ranging from the cover through to movie reviews.

This will be followed at each session by an in depth discussion of a previously assigned article from a past issue that all participants have read and led by the volunteer who selected the article.

No Common Reading: Weekly issues of *The New Yorker* magazine obtained through subscription, newsstand purchase or local library reading room.

17. (PHL) BRUSH UP ON YOUR PHILOSOPHY

If you're like most of us, Zeno, Socrates, Hume, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche sound only vaguely familiar and we wish we had the time, to acquire a basic familiarity with the history of philosophy. *A Passion for Wisdom* is a lively, accessible, and highly enjoyable tour of the world's great ideas. Our text tells the story of philosophy's development with great clarity and refreshing wit. We'll explore all the major categories of philosophy, from metaphysics and ethics to politics and logic. We'll talk about the intellectual tradition stretching back over three thousand years. Some suggestions for research presentation: philosophers and their lives, philosophies and their arguments, periods and

regions, pertinence to our lives today, etc. There will be ample opportunity to explore some subjects (your favorite?) more deeply for group presentations and discussions.

Common Reading: *A Passion for Wisdom*, by Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (1999)

18. (POR) THE WORLD'S POOR

Today 865 million people are living on less than \$1 per day. It is hard for us to imagine such an existence, yet nearly a sixth of the world's population lives on this meager sum. In this study group we will explore the issue of global poverty. Our primary guides will be Abhijit Banerjee and Ester Dufflo, authors of the highly acclaimed book *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*.

The authors have spent 15 years working with the poor in dozens of countries spanning five continents, trying to understand the specific problems that come with poverty and to find proven solutions. Their book is radical in its rethinking of the economics of poverty but also entirely practical in the suggestions it offers. Through a careful analysis of a very rich body of evidence, they show why the poor, despite having the same desires and abilities as anyone else, end up with entirely different lives. The study group will help us understand why this is the case and what the authors believe can be done to win the battle against poverty. Bill Gates praises the authors' "rigorous and insightful" work for illuminating the complexities of poor peoples' lives. Join us as we take a new perspective on a complex problem.

Presentations can address the work of other economists such as Jeffrey Sachs and William Easterly, ongoing efforts to address the problem by the Clinton Global Initiative and others, the impact of globalization, or any other related topic.

Common Reading: *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*, by Abhijit Banerjee and Ester Dufflo (March 2012)

19. (PRK) AMERICA'S BEST IDEA: THE NATIONAL PARKS

America's national parks spring from an idea as radical as the Declaration of Independence: that the nation's most magnificent and sacred places should be preserved, not for royalty or the rich, but for everyone. This S/DG will delve into the history of the park idea, from the first sighting by white men in 1851 of the valley that would become Yosemite and the creation of the world's first national park at Yellowstone in 1872, through the most recent additions to a system that now encompasses nearly four hundred sites and 84 million acres.

Master filmmaker Ken Burns has created a 6 part series delving into the history of the National Park System from 1851 to 1980. We will watch each episode at

home and one member will lead the discussion of the episode. Additionally, each member will research and present on a relevant topic. It can be more detailed information about the formation of the system or a selection of a specific national park and talk about the history of its region and its significance. This is not a class to show “family vacation” pictures but rather an intellectual pursuit of the information around our National Parks System.

Common Reading: *The National Parks: America’s Best Idea*, 6 episodes, by Ken Burns (September 2009)

20. (SHK) SHAKESPEARE: ALL THE WORLD’S A STAGE ...

The Omnilorean New Globe Theater plans a September-December season, breaking our usual pattern and reading two of the Bard’s Tragedies and one History play. With players standing and with a few props, we propose to do reading walk-throughs of **Titus Andronicus**, **Henry IV Part 1**, and all-time favorite **Hamlet**.

In this S/DG 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 of the day, and all manner of *rhyme and reason*. Class members each serve on one play’s Board of Directors, responsible for casting roles for the repertory and leading discussions based on the research — optionally adding videos, music, and costumes. For a glimpse of how we live the Bard in this S/DG, check out <http://omnilore.org/members/Curriculum/SDGs/14a-SHK-Shakespeare> to view the past Spring Shakespeare class’s website of links to references relevant to our plays and downloadable organizing artifacts.

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: Selected Plays

21. (SSS) SOUTHERN SHORT STORIES

What makes the literature of the South so distinct? Who are the best known authors and what is it about their work that brands it Southern? The literature of the modern South reflects a once-rural society’s storytelling tradition and the painful contradictions and cultural clashes brought about by rapid change. This excellent collection includes works by Truman Capote, James Agee, William Faulkner, Flannery O’Connor, Anne Tyler, Reynolds Price, and many others.

Common Reading: *Stories of the Modern South: Revised Edition* (August 1995)

22. (SUP) TODAY'S SUPREME COURT

This course will explore the major cases and decisions made by the Supreme Court during the first Obama Administration. The constitutional, legal, historical, political and personal background issues that make these decisions so important will be discussed, along with the Justices who most influence the outcomes, along with the legal trends, potential political outcome, and personalities of today's court.

Common Reading: *The Oath: The Obama White House and the Supreme Court* by Jeffrey Toobin (June 2013)

23. (TED) TED TALKS: IDEAS WORTH SPREADING

A click on www.ted.com will take you to an unusual and fascinating website – TED talks. TED is a nonprofit organization devoted to Ideas Worth Spreading. It started out (in 1984) as a conference bringing together people from three worlds: Technology, Entertainment, and Design. Since then its scope has become ever broader, adding people from the worlds of Arts, Business, Culture, Science, and Global Issues. The annual TED Conference has been held in Long Beach, California although it is moving next year. Other TED conferences are held in other locations and sometimes address a specific topic like medicine. At all these conferences TED brings together some of the world's most fascinating thinkers and doers, who are challenged to give the talk of their lives (in 18 minutes). These are, for the most part, riveting talks by remarkable people made available free to the world online.

Omnilore S/DG participants click on ted.com, select a talk and do research on the subject and/or the speaker. The talk will serve as a nucleus for the presentation. At the meeting before the presentation the presenter provides the group with a handout announcing the talk chosen and questions or ideas for consideration leading to discussion. Group members watch the talk on their computer at home and come prepared for informed discussion

This S/DG has been offered several times previously, the last time in Fall 2012. With more than 450 talks now available and more added each week there are plenty of talks that have not been subjects of the earlier classes.

No Common Reading.

24. (USA) MEN WHO UNITED THE STATES

The U.S. was settled by a diverse population across a vast and varied landscape. What held it together and provided the foundation for its growth? Follow in the footsteps of America's most essential and eccentric explorers, thinkers, and innovators, such as Lewis and Clark and the leaders of the Great Surveys; the builders of the first transcontinental telegraph and the powerful civil engineer behind the Interstate Highway System to look at the links and threads that pulled the country into a cohesive unity, then held it together. Simon Winchester's book *"The Men Who United the States: America's Explorers, Inventors, Eccentrics and Mavericks, and the Creation of One Nation, Indivisible"* covers and illuminates the background of those who toiled fearlessly to discover, connect, and bond the citizenry and geography of the U.S.A. from its beginnings. S/DG presentations could cover a range of topics: specific individuals in more detail; technologies that evolved to make it possible; economic winners/losers; natural resources gained/lost.

Common Reading: *The Men Who United the States: America's Explorers, Inventors, Eccentrics and Mavericks, and the Creation of One Nation, Indivisible*, by Simon Winchester (October 2013)

25. (WIN) WINSTON CHURCHILL – HIS LIFE AND LEGACY

Soldier, parliamentarian, prime minister, orator, painter, writer, husband, and leader – all of these facets combined to make Winston Churchill one of the most complex and fascinating personalities in history.

Consider the various phases of his career – from his adventures as a young cavalry officer in the service of the empire to his role as an elder statesman prophesying the advent of the cold war. These show how Churchill's immense adaptability and innate pugnacity made him a formidable leader for the better part of a century. The man's humor, resilience, courage, and eccentricity led to some amazing accomplishments. Some historians have asserted that Winston Churchill (1874–1965) was the 20th century's most valuable figure. No man did more to preserve freedom and democracy.

An ambitious, world-traveling soldier and bestselling author, Churchill was already famous upon entering Parliament in 1899 and within a decade was working with Lloyd George to pass the great reforms of 1908–1911.

Accounts prevail of Churchill's prescient denunciations of Hitler and heroics during the early days of WWII. Some conclude that Churchill was a thoroughly likable great man with many irritating flaws but no nasty ones: he lacked malice, avoided grudges, vendettas and blame shifting, and quickly replaced enmity with friendship. The assigned text will be supplemented by presentations on various aspects of his life so that we may appreciate the interplay between the man and the period. Topics for presentations might include his young life and heritage, his failures and recovery, his successes and disasters, his profound prophecies, his supreme power and frustrations, and his later life.

Common Reading: *Churchill*, by Paul Johnson (November 2009)

