

Eight books to add to your summer 2024 reading list



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Photo by Jason Smith

Summer means it's time to break out the sunscreen, the beach towel, and a good book (or ten). But how to find one?

You can get some help from faculty members from the University of Chicago. Below, the 2024 winners of UChicago's annual Quantrell and PhD Teaching awards share books that left an impression on them.

***The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher*, by Lewis Thomas**

"I first read this series of essays in college, and it has stayed with me. I thought they were beautifully written pieces that somehow, as a whole, gave me a sense of where we exist in the universe."

—Prof. Sidney Nagel

***Disability Worlds*, by Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp**

"*Disability Worlds* is by two veteran anthropologists with disabled children who explore the work of parent advocacy and endeavors to build new academic and artistic worlds for disabled kids, mostly in New York City. The book is also a tribute—and a love letter of sorts—to the flourishing NYC disability arts scene."

—Prof. Michele Friedner

***Disabled Ecologies: Lessons from a Wounded Desert*, by Sunaura Taylor**

"*Disabled Ecologies* considers what it means to think about land and environment as disabled; it explores intersections between environmental and disability activism in Tuscon, Arizona where the main aquifer water has been polluted. Taylor is also an artist and in the book, she includes painted and drawn images of how she imagines the (disabled) aquifer looks. I will never think of the desert in the same way again."

—Prof. Michele Friedner

***Independent People*, by Halldor Laxness**

"A father, a daughter, lots of sheep. Grass and rock, wind and rain, snow and ice. Self-reliance and self-delusion, ignorance and insight. Work and gain, exploitation and loss. And finally, heartbreakingly, back to the father and the daughter."

—Prof. Chris Kennedy

***The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer*, by Siddhartha Mukherjee**

Marcus Clark describes this history of cancer and its treatment as a story of scientific humility. For decades, radical mastectomy was considered the only option for breast cancer treatment, and scientists agreed because it made common sense—until new discoveries and treatments proved them wrong. “That struck me as a real cautionary tale of science that I try to impart to others. Just because something makes sense and it’s an attractive model, doesn’t mean it’s correct,” he said.

—*Prof. Marcus Clark*

***Thirty Million Words*, by Dana Suskind**

“Apropos the Quantrell Award, I met Dana at the Honorands Reception for my award and picked up her book right afterwards. Although things have evolved a bit since the book’s writing, the story is quite inspirational in terms of how her core work in cochlear implants led her to a broader, impactful effort for social good.”

—*Prof. Fred Chong*

***The Latehomecomer: A Hmong family memoir*, by Kao Kalia Yang**

“I have appreciated how this firsthand account that is centered on the lived experiences of Yang’s grandmother reveals the resilience and determination of a family and culture that perseveres and rises up through sufferings of war, poverty, prejudice, distance, separation and relocation. Interwoven in the narrative, you come to see how culture, history, and family is the cornerstone to their strength and resilience which is beautifully depicted through the voices of this Hmong immigrant family.”

—*Assoc. Prof. Miwa Yasui*

***The World-Ending Fire: The Essential Wendell Berry*, by Wendell Berry & Paul Kingsnorth**

“This collection of essays awakens us to the hope, value and meaning that is found in the simple things of life—caring, serving, and loving our neighbors, our land, our community, and slowing down to enjoying these gifts that are given. The essays illustrate that it is precisely in the ordinariness of life—its connection to our history, heritage, society, and nature that gives purpose and depth of meaning, and contrasts this to the constant call for progress and advancement that dominates our modern day society. In the fast paced world we live in that calls for constant change, Berry’s vision can give us a grounding we need to focus and cherish the life we have been given.”

—*Assoc. Prof. Miwa Yasui*