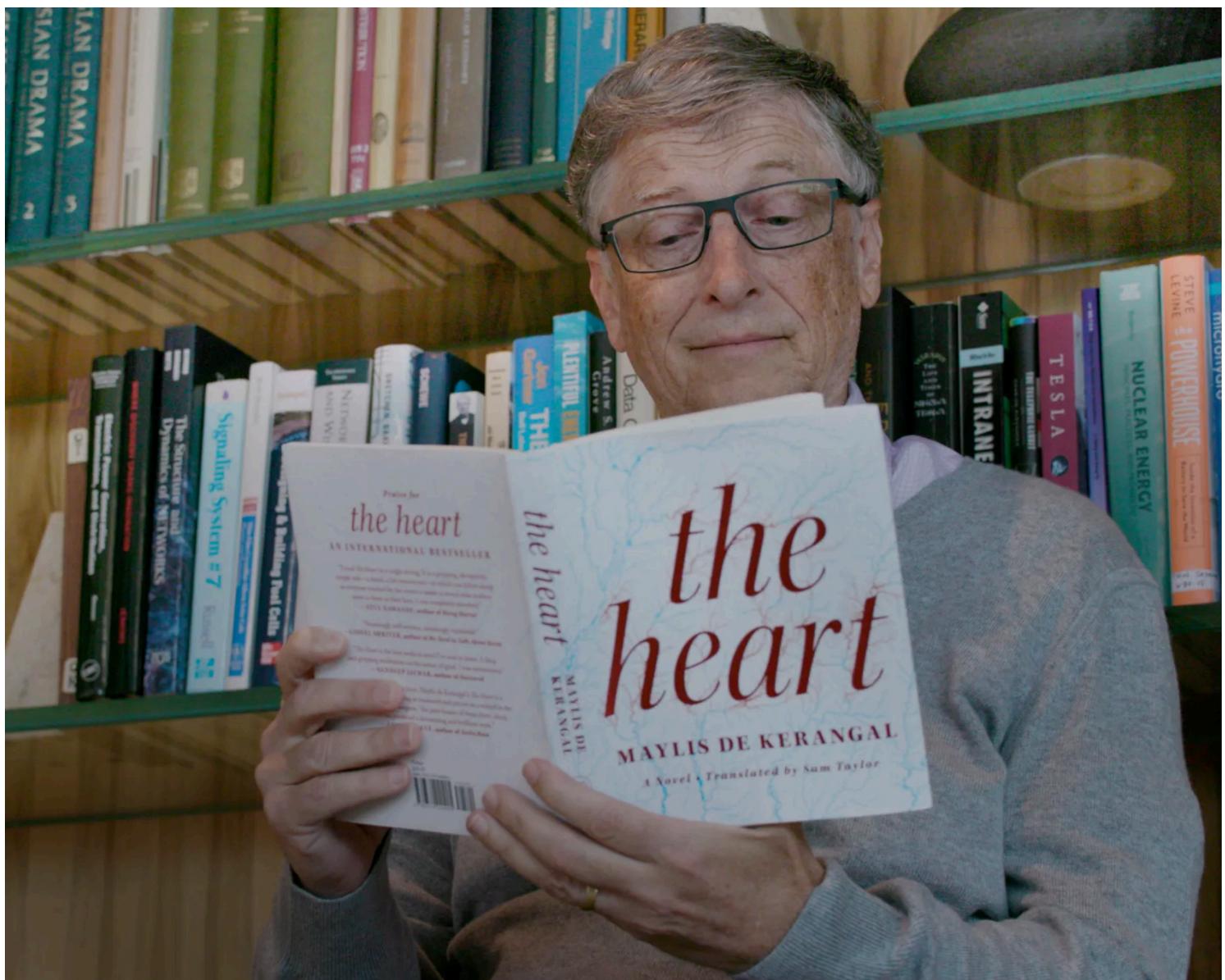




IDEAS • BOOKS

Bill Gates Discusses His Lifelong Love for Books and Reading

6 MINUTE READ



The Gates Notes, LLC

BY CLAIRE HOWORTH AND SAM JACOBS MAY 22, 2017 1:00 PM EDT

 IDEAS

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In a new interview with TIME, Bill Gates discusses his new list of recommended summer reading, his voracious appetite for the written word and the books that have influenced his life and mind.

1. What book do you **most often recommend**? Who is your **most trusted book recommender**?

I read Stephen Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature* a few years ago and got to **talk** to him about it after, which was a lot of fun. I **reviewed** it for my blog, **Gates Notes**, because I wanted other people to read it, love it, and hopefully learn from it the way I did. It's probably my favorite book and the one I recommend most often.

I always trust Melinda's recommendations, even if they seem like unlikely choices for me at the start. ***The Rosie Project*** is a great example of that. My kids are old enough now that their taste in books sometimes crosses over with mine. **My son** is really into history and policy and has suggested lots of great books that I might have missed.

2. What 1-3 books changed your life?

Back to Pinker's ***Better Angels***. It changed the way I think about the world. He argues that violence in human society is decreasing at a rapid rate, and our tolerance of violence is decreasing even faster. The idea at the center of his book—that the world is getting better in lots of ways—is part of the motivation for the work Melinda and I do with our foundation. Obviously, people can't ignore things like war and terrorism and violence, but we can be hopeful and inspired to keep making progress.

Warren Buffett loaned me his copy of *Business Adventures* by John Brooks many years ago. It's still the best business book I've ever read. It's a collection of Brooks's *New Yorker* essays about why various companies succeeded or failed. The essay titled "Xerox Xerox Xerox Xerox" should win an award for most clever chapter name, and the lessons inside the book are even better. I took inspiration from it while running Microsoft.

Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, which like a lot of people I first read as a teenager, is special to me in a different way. Melinda and I both love the book, and it's the novel that I reread the most. This line is one of our favorites: "His dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it."

3. What's your favorite book from childhood?

It's hard to pick a favorite, since books (especially nonfiction) were a big part of my childhood. I read the whole set of World Book encyclopedias when I was a kid. My elementary school librarian, **Mrs. Blanche Caffiere** at Seattle's View Ridge Elementary School, introduced me to biographies of famous figures throughout history.

MORE: Bill Gates: Your Summer Reading List Should Include These 5 Books

4. Have you ever pretended to read a book that you haven't read?

I don't think I've ever done that. The biggest problem I have is that I refuse to stop reading a book in the middle, even if I don't like it. And the more I dislike a book, the more time I take to write margin notes. That means I sometimes spend more time reading a book that I can't stand than a book that I love.

5. Where do you read? And how? E-book? On a plane?

I keep thinking I should go digital sometime, but I still like to read the old-fashioned way since I write a lot of notes in the margins. I always take a big canvas tote-bag of books when I go on vacation. I have a bad habit of staying up really late if I'm in the middle of a book that I love.

6. Why do you incorporate fiction into your mostly nonfiction diet?

A lot of the reading I do is so I can keep learning about the world. But I love the way good fiction can take you out of your own thoughts and into someone else's. I used to read a lot of science fiction when I was younger, and then I got out of the habit until I read *Seveneves* by Neal Stephenson. The detailed world that he created just blew me away. And most of the science holds up! I have another novel on my summer books list this year, *The Heart* by a French author, Maylis de Kerangal. It's incredibly well-written and made me tear up at times. She really makes you care about the characters – the young man whose heart is being transplanted into another patient, their families, and all the emotions that situation creates.

7. Do you think reading has been essential to your success, and is it to others'?

Absolutely. You don't really start getting old until you stop learning. Every book teaches me something new or helps me see things differently. I was lucky to have parents who encouraged me to read. Reading fuels a sense of curiosity about the world, which I think helped drive me forward in my career and in the work that I do now with my foundation.

8. If you could have a conversation with any author in the world, dead or living, who would it be?

I'm lucky that I get to have conversations with a lot of authors whose work I love. You can find videos of some of those conversations on Gates Notes. One person I'm sorry I never got to meet is the physicist *Richard Feynman*. He had a brilliant mind and was a phenomenal teacher. His two memoirs, *Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!* and *What Do You Care What Other People Think?*, are wonderful for anyone who loves science or entertaining stories about playing bongos and cracking safes.

MORE MUST-READS FROM TIME

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- How **Trump 2.0** Is Already Sowing Confusion
- **Bad Bunny** On Heartbreak and New Album
- How to Get Better at **Doing Things Alone**
- We're Lucky to Have Been Alive in the **Age of David Lynch**
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