

Favorite Books X

Reading suggestions by Wisconsin legislators & legislative staff, May 2011

www.legis.wisconsin.gov/lrb/pubs/tapthepower.htm

The following titles and book reviews were gathered as an activity for National Library Week 2011. Submitted by legislators and legislative staff, the reviews were not altered except to edit for length or to correct typographical errors. Web sites of interest to book club groups, and to readers in general, are also included. Many more reading suggestions can be found in the previous nine issues of *Favorite Books*. All of the previous issues are listed on the Tap the Power Web page.

Fiction

***Berlin: a Novel* / Pierre Frei (translated from the German by Anthea Bell) Grove Press, 2005.** Attractive, young women are brutally killed in the American sector of Berlin in 1945. Is the murderer American or German and has he (or she) struck before? A translation of the German novel "Onkel Toms Hütte, Berlin," it's a murder mystery as well as a peek at life in and around Berlin around the time of World War II. The murders take place in 1945 but each victim has her own story, like having several short stories set in the larger novel. Very satisfying and recommended for anyone who likes historical fiction.

***Driftless* / David Rhodes, Milkweed Editions, 2008.** The author explores questions of faith, spirituality, and human connections through the lives of the residents of the fictional small town Words, Wisconsin. Located in the Driftless region of the state, the story has a strong sense of place and the characters feel like real people. The understated humor of the book and the multifaceted characters are what really drew me into the story, however the underlying themes of the story are what will stick with me. This book is a sequel to a much earlier work by the same author, titled *Rock Island Line*.

***How to Talk to a Widower* / Jonathan Tropper, Delacorte Press, 2007.** Doug Parker is a widower at age 29, and in his quiet suburban town, that makes him something of a celebrity – the object of sympathy, curiosity, and, in some cases, unbridled desire. But Doug has other things on his mind. First there's his 16 year-old stepson, Russ: a once-sweet kid who now is getting into increasingly serious trouble on a daily basis. Then there are Doug's sisters: his bossy twin, Claire, who's just left her husband and moved in with Doug, determined to rouse him from his grieving stupor. Heartfelt and funny.

***The Power of One* / Bryce Courtenay, Delacorte Press, [2005].** Follows Peekay, a white British boy in South Africa during World War II, between the ages of five and eleven, as he survives an abusive boarding school and goes on to succeed in life and the boxing

ring, with help from a chicken, a boxer, a pianist, black African prisoners, and many others.

***Sarah's Key* / Tatiana de Rosnay, St. Martin's Press, 2007.** This fiction book describes a modern day writers journey as she discovers the tragedy of Velodrome d'Hiver, a WWII summer round up in occupied Paris of French families by the French military in cooperation with the Nazis. The writer moves her family into the apartment previously owned by a V'd Hiver family. In 1942, Sarah and her family are rounded up; the book describes Sarah's frantic journey home.

***Siddhartha* / Hermann Hesse, Plaza & Janes, 1993.** I've read this book many times and enjoy it a different way with every reading. Born into wealth and privilege, Siddhartha renounces his place among India's nobility to wander the countryside in search of meaning. He learns suffering and self-denial among a group of ascetics before meeting the Buddha and coming to realize that true peace cannot be taught: it must be experienced. Changing his path yet again, Siddhartha reenters human society and earns a great fortune. Yet over time this life leaves Siddhartha restless and empty. He achieves enlightenment only when he stops searching and surrenders to the oneness of all.

***The Windup Girl* / Paolo Bacigalupi, Night Shade Books, 2009.** This book is set in the not-too-distant future, in a time after The Great Contraction, when oil has run out, genetically engineered foods and animals have brought about plagues that have decimated the population of the earth, and "calorie companies" exert almost total control over the world's food supply. The story takes place in Bangkok, Thailand, whose government has done its best to shut out foreign interests in hopes of maintaining a degree of independence from calorie companies and protecting its people from the diseases that crop up faster than cures can be found. The Windup Girl of the title is a genetically engineered human, created by the Japanese and referred to there as "new people." The story follows her, a calorie man (an employee of a calorie company based in Des Moines), a Chinese immigrant, and a member of the government's Environment Ministry as they each pursue their own ambitions. ⇒

Legislative Reference Bureau

Library Circulation Desk: (608) 266-7040
LRB.Library@legis.state.wi.us
Research Questions: (608) 266-0341
One East Main Street, Suite 200
Madison, WI 53703



We bring knowledge to you

The Legislative Reference Bureau invites legislators to suggest topics for future annotated bibliographies.

Favorite Books X Continued

Biography/Autobiography

***Let's Take the Long Way Home: A Memoir of Friendship* / Gail Caldwell, Random House, 2010.** In this gorgeous, moving memoir, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Caldwell reflects on her own coming-of-age in midlife, as she learns to open herself to the power and healing of sharing her life with a best friend and the grieving process after losing someone. The two women share many interests and life lessons including swimming, rowing, dogs, and alcoholism.

***Mornings on Horseback: The Story of an Extraordinary Family, a Vanished Way of Life and the Unique Child Who Became Theodore Roosevelt* / David McCullough, Simon & Schuster, 1981.** This book shows the childhood of Teddy Roosevelt by examining his family as well as his childhood battle with asthma. It is amazing to me that a President long thought of as one of the strongest with the most zeal for life started off as an asthmatic child who had to fight for every breath he took.

***A Trapper's Legacy* / Carl Schels, Stackpole Books, 1984.** Carl Schels was laid off from his job in a Chicago factory in 1930. This book is a first-person account of his subsequent attempt to live by his wits and off the land in northern Wisconsin and Minnesota. The narrative takes Schels from odd agricultural jobs, to work as a fishing guide, a logger, and, ultimately, as a full-time trapper, before, during, and after the legal trapping season. Spending weeks in the wilderness of Minnesota's boundary waters, Schels battled cold, hunger, and black bears to return to civilization with enough beaver pelts to make it through another year.

Nonfiction

***Easier Than You Think (Because Life Doesn't Have To Be So Hard)* / Richard Carlson, Ph.D, HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.** Dr. Carlson is author of the bestselling *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff* books. This book follows those with short stories that teach a lesson and help you overcome a challenge you might be facing in your daily life. I really liked the layout of the book because you can easily read a chapter in 10 minutes and have time to think about the lesson and how you can apply it in your life. The chapters include examples of the lessons that Dr. Carlson is trying to teach from "count your blessings" to "listen without interrupting." This is a winner of a book!

***On Writing* / Stephen King, Scribner, 2000.** For aspiring writers, those interested in the writing "process," and/or interested in Stephen King's life. Part informative writing guide and part engaging and vivid autobiography. Interesting fact: King was an alcoholic and has little to no memory of writing *Cujo*.

***Team of Rivals* / Doris Kearns Goodwin, 2005.** Abraham Lincoln assumed the presidency 150 years ago with a cabinet made up of the men he had defeated for the Republican nomination, including a couple that had designs on being the real power behind the throne. This book tells how Lincoln managed and led this team of difficult, capable, colorful men in holding the North together and winning the Civil War. This is an informative, intelligent and readable portrait not only of Lincoln, but of Seward, Chase, Stanton, and the rest of the cabinet members and an excellent lesson in practical politics.

***Unfamiliar Fishes* / Sarah Vowell, Riverhead Books, 2011.** "An examination of Hawaii, the place where Manifest Destiny got a sunburn. With her trademark smart-alecky insights and reporting, Vowell lights out to discover the emblematic and exceptional history of the 50th state, and in so doing finds America, warts and all."

Related Web Sites

American Library Association: www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/library/libraryfactsheet/alalibraryfactsheet23.cfm "Recommended Reading."

Book Group Buzz: <http://bookgroupbuzz.booklistonline.com> "A Booklist Blog. Book group tips, reading lists, & lively talk of literary news from the experts at Booklist Online."

TheCapitol.net: www.thecapitol.net/Recommended/bookspolit.htm "Political and Government Classics."

Go Big Read – U.W.-Madison Common Reading Program: <http://www.gobigread.wisc.edu/> "Our long-term goal for Go Big Read is to continue to provoke questions and stimulate debate on issues of relevance. In this way, we hope to instill in our community a lifelong love of learning and a commitment to the continuous 'sifting and winnowing' . . . character of this great university."

GoodReads: www.goodreads.com and **Shelfari:** www.shelfari.com Two (unrelated) social networking sites for book lovers. Share your reading lists and reviews with online friends.

Government Book Talk: <http://govbooktalk.gpo.gov> Government Printing Office blog about new books and other documents published by federal government agencies.

The New York Times – Books: www.nytimes.com/pages/books Link to best sellers, Sunday book reviews, "Paper Cuts: A Blog About Books," and much more.

ReadingGroupGuides.com: www.readinggroupguides.com The online community for reading groups.

Wisconsin Library Association: www.wla.lib.wi.us/readers/WLAC/lac.html Wisconsin Literary Awards.
