What We’re Reading

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v.3, no.1 (October 2016)

With the semester well under way and the smell of fall in the air, consider embarking on a new adventure or exploring a new world — all from the comfort of your reading chair. Select one of the titles reviewed here, or choose from thousands of fiction and non-fiction books in Schmidt Library’s print and electronic collections. Happy reading!


The 50th anniversary of the Chinese Cultural Revolution coincides with the publication of eminent China scholar Frank Dikotter’s outstanding new book on that tragic event. Unlike other prominent works on the Cultural Revolution that often focus on elite politics, this book focuses on “people’s history” during that catastrophic yet elusive era. Dikotter offers gripping and fascinating details of events that were often overlooked and neglected by others, such as cannibalistic practices, the existence of 600,000 Mao statues in just one city, as well as people’s remarkable resilience and resistance. If you want to know what China was really like when Nixon visited the Middle Kingdom or the tragic fate of so many city cats and dogs during that dark era, read this book. It is the author’s latest volume in his well-known trilogy on the People’s Republic of China. All three titles are available at Schmidt Library! ~ Zehao Zhou


This is a study of how people die. It is written by a surgeon whose previous books include “The Checklist Manifesto.” This is an eye-opening set of real-life stories of how some terminally ill people choose to fight death to the last second while others maximize the quality of the remaining life. One of the stories is about Gawande’s own father. Gawande favors maximizing the quality of life at the expense of its duration, but the book has lessons for readers on both sides of this issue. ~ Ilya Yakovlev

The Boys in the Boat by Daniel James Brown (2014)

A nonfiction account of the 1936 USA men’s eight-oar Olympic rowing team, this book is an incredible telling of strength, determination, failure, and victory in the context of the Great Depression and the rise of the Third Reich in Germany. Mr. Brown highlights the value of hard work and pure grit, both physical and mental. If you listen to the audio book, don’t be surprised if you raise your fist in celebration as you cruise down I-83 feeling like you can accomplish the impossible. ~ Jackie Rebok
Before the Fall by Noah Hawley (2016)

This summer I took a chance on first time novelist Noah Hawley. While this is Hawley’s first novel, he writes for TV, most recently Fargo, and that ability to plot out suspense and create quirky characters serves him well in this story about what happens after a private plane goes down in the ocean. The two survivors, strangers to each other, are a recovering alcoholic painter and a little boy who is now the heir to a huge fortune. These damaged people form a bond while chapters go back in time to examine their lives and unravel the mystery of the crash. It’s rare to come across a book that’s so well written and so engrossing. I didn’t want it to end, and can only hope Hawley will write a series based on it. ~ Suzanne Delle

CQ Press Electronic Library

Looking for reliable information on U.S. politics? This resource might fill the bill. It contains CQ Magazine (formerly CQ Weekly), a nonpartisan news outlet for U.S. Congressional activities, including status of bills, behind-the-scenes maneuvering, debates, and floor votes back to 1983. It also includes CQ Researcher, which provides in-depth analysis of the most important current issues. Full-length articles, which are researched and fact-checked by experts, include an overview, historical background, pro/con feature, and resources for additional research. Shorter articles offer introductions to hot topics such as police conduct, climate change, gun control, and terrorism. Finally, this electronic library includes CQ Historic Documents. Published since 1972, each edition contains primary sources covering the most significant events of the year, including presidential speeches, Supreme Court decisions, U.S. government reports, scientific findings, and cultural discussions.

Questions? Ask the Library Research team at research@ycp.edu or 717-815-1356.

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The next What We’re Reading will be published in February. Submit your book reviews of 100 words or less as a Word file to bjacoby@ycp.edu.