



HONEYBEE CAPITAL FOUNDATION

SUMMER BOOK LIST 2021

I find wisdom and comfort and courage - and yes, escape - in books. And woah, all of these have been needed lately! I'm happy to publish this late-summer reading list, with some new entries plus a few old favorites – shared with all best wishes, and with great hopes for the future.

*If you have a garden and a library,
you have everything you need.
- Cicero*

BOOKS THAT HELP US TO CONSIDER



[COMPLEXITY ECONOMICS: PROCEEDINGS OF THE SANTA FE INSTITUTE'S 2019 FALL SYMPOSIUM,](#)

by Brian Arthur, Eric Beinhocker, and Allison Stanger

Part of the allure of in-person gatherings is the way that conversations can take unexpected twists and turns, threads through ideas weaving together in new ways, the energy in a room alchemizing new insights and experiences... and this is exactly the downside as well. If we miss that real live moment, it is often lost forever. In recent years, [SFI](#) has been documenting more of the proceedings from their terrific brainy gatherings, a great service to us all. If “complexity economics” does not have intuitive meaning to you, all the more reason to dive right in! This conference explored some of the most essential blind spots of neoclassical economics, and charts a path toward frameworks that get us closer to understanding the awesome messy alive-ness of our world.



[ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: A GUIDE FOR THINKING HUMANS,](#)

by Melanie Mitchell

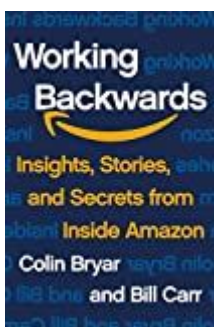
I've been lucky to learn from Melanie Mitchell through her work with the Santa Fe Institute, and this latest publication illuminates her gift for distilling complicated topics in a way that preserves their nuance. As the title implies, Mitchell takes a decidedly human approach to this vital subject, a perspective that is especially valuable in a time when many accounts of AI are either technical engineering discussions or over-generalized philosophical declarations. We can all benefit from Mitchell's candor, clarity, and expertise.



[THE TYRRANY OF MERIT,](#)

by **Michael Sandel**

I can tell this is an important book because it has inspired some very strong reactions. We (mostly) want to believe in meritocracy, the idea that hard work matters and that rewards are earned through both talent and effort. Sandel explores the possibility that our concepts of merit are meaningfully misplaced, that a lot of what we call merit is often luck, or privilege, or bias. If this is even a little bit true, it implies that the especially strong spirit of individualism in the United States might have some pernicious consequences. There are big questions here, and they hit a tender spot, which is exactly why they are worthy of consideration. If Sandel's style is too philosophical or appears moralizing to you, some similar ideas are explored in a different way in Michael Mauboussin's [The Success Equation](#), which examines the roles of luck and skill in sports, investing, and business. Yes, skill and effort matter a lot. So does luck. So does the way we set the rules of the game.



[WORKING BACKWARDS: INSIGHTS, STORIES, AND SECRETS FROM INSIDE AMAZON,](#)

by **Colin Bryar and Bill Carr**

When a company is as successful as Amazon, lots of folks have opinions about how the success came about. Bill and Colin actually *know*, because there were there, contributing directly to the stunning growth of the company over many years as senior executives. This book is part how-to manual and part corporate history, with plenty of process-oriented wisdom to inspire managers of enterprises big and small.



[W.E.B. DU BOIS'S DATA PORTRAITS,](#)

ed **Whitney Battle-Baptiste and Britt Rusert**

I was alerted to this curious volume through the terrific team at [Brookline Booksmith](#), and as usual their insights were right on point. These infographics were presented at the 1900 Paris Exposition by Du Bois and team. The first thing you will notice is their aesthetic appeal: a bar chart with a scale too big for the page becomes a big swooping spiral of data, a presentation so arresting that the reader is pulled into even closer examination of the information at hand. This presentation laid some of the groundwork for Du Bois' most widely read publication, [The Souls of Black Folk](#), published in 1903, with its especially enduring concept of two-ness, an understanding of identity that foretold our explorations of intersectionality, a whole century later.



[IMPACT: RESHAPING CAPITALISM TO DRIVE REAL CHANGE,](#)

by **Sir Ronald Cohen**

Like many developing fields, sustainable investing, ESG analysis, and impact investing have created an insiders' language all their own, and the accelerating machinery of reporting and regulation threaten to squash the original intentions of practitioners. In this book, Sir Ronnie provides a helpful tour of the broader landscape, reviewing the potential for entrepreneurs, governments, investors, and citizens to accelerate positive impact within our work – not as an adjunct activity or as a luxurious benevolence, but at the heart of our endeavors. Given his

own history as a venture capital and private equity leader (Cohen founded Apax partners), the perspectives here have a fluency that moves between system-level analysis and operational-level observation with ease, making the book both aspirational and practical. If you are looking for a clear-eyed view of what is emerging “beyond ESG,” this book is a useful reference.

BOOKS THAT HELP US TO CONNECT

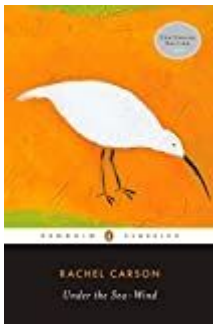
One reason I love compiling these book lists is that they reveal patterns in my own life... turns out that this past year, the combination of covid + climate has pulled me toward a huge stack of books about our natural world – some deeply personal, some science-first, some a combination of both. In a time of disconnection, these books have helped me to stay rooted.



[FINDING THE MOTHER TREE,](#)

by **Suzanne Simard**

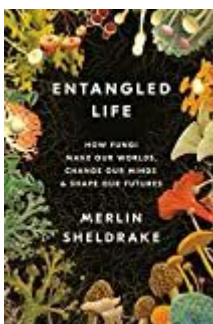
I have been eagerly following Suzanne Simard’s work on forest networks since first hearing of the “wood-wide web” that she has researched for decades. This new publication is part autobiography, part history of science, part research report, and part love letter to the forest. Just as interesting as the summary of the long arc of Simard’s research is the personal story that runs alongside it, with lots of twists and turns and ample evidence of the challenges of being a different kind of person asking a different kind of question. Like Carson’s *Sea-Wind*, Simard’s *Mother Tree* has been critiqued for personifying the forest relationships she studies. But the storytelling helps us to better grasp the science, and if we are going to create metaphors to understand the natural world, it is probably a good idea for the scientists to be part of the creation.



[UNDER THE SEA-WIND,](#)

by **Rachel Carson**

Many know Carson’s *Silent Spring*, but *Under the Sea-Wind* is her own self-described favorite, a scientific work disguised as an oceanic novel (or vice versa), and the first of her “sea trilogy.” The creatures in Carson’s descriptions are imbued with *life*, as she describes their seasons and interactions and homes. Yes, perhaps it personifies a fish to give him a name and inner thoughts, but it also makes us love him, and it helps us to appreciate the science that’s conveyed... all in all, a wonderful combination.



[ENTANGLED LIFE: HOW FUNGI MAKE OUR WORLDS, CHANGE OUR MINDS, AND SHAPE OUR FUTURES,](#)

by **Merlin Sheldrake**

I recently viewed a video where Merlin Sheldrake was cooking up a dish of mushrooms that had sprouted from the pages of his own book (intentionally seeded), so that he could “eat my own words.” Maybe this is all the recommendation needed for this glorious book! One of my favorite themes is, “fungi will save us all,” and this book explores some of the reasons why, from their vital roles in ecosystems to medicines to building materials.

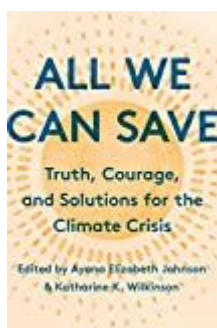
There is so much to learn from the world just under our feet, and who better to learn it from than a man named Merlin Sheldrake? This book is well matched with the movie [Fantastic Fungi](#), from the incredible Louie Schwartzberg.



[WORLD OF WONDERS: IN PRAISE OF FIREFLIES, WHALE SHARKS, AND OTHER ASTONISHMENTS,](#)

by Aimee Nezhukumatathil

Aimee is a self-described nature nerd and a poet, and her relationships with the natural world shine through each of her observations. Part memoir, part naturalist essays, entirely delightful.



[ALL WE CAN SAVE,](#)

by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katharine K. Wilkinson (Eds.)

This is the book to turn to when you have just finished reading the IPCC report on climate change or scrolling through social media views of fires and floods or fighting with a bureaucrat who wants to reduce the world's biggest and most interesting issues to a series of check-boxes. Wisdom from women who are leading climate solutions all over the world is gathered here, reminding us of all that is possible.



[BRAIDING SWEETGRASS,](#)

Robin Wall Kimmerer

“Despite our fears of falling, the gifts of the world stand by to catch us.” This book is science, and also poetry, so it could be placed in almost any category I invent. Robin Kimmerer is a professor of environmental biology and an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, and a combination of science, indigenous wisdom, and sheer love of our natural world shines through on every page. Whether you swim in a sea of digital data or in a pond hidden deep in the woods, you will find beauty and wisdom here. (Note: for video, see Robin’s [Bioneers](#) talk. For Audio, listen to the terrific conversation with Krista Tippett at [OnBeing](#).)

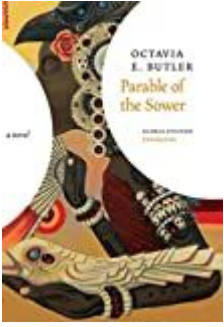
BOOKS THAT HELP US TO IMAGINE



[ROADSIDE PICNIC,](#)

by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky

Recently I was part of the [Alien Crash Site podcast](#) from the Santa Fe Institute, which employs *Roadside Picnic* as a foundation for far-ranging and creative conversations. Though I was familiar with the basic premise of this story before reading it, I was not prepared for the way that I was dragged straight into the Zone, leaving me at the end of the story with the feeling that I had traveled to a very strange place, under very strange circumstances. Indeed, some small part of me is there still.



PARABLE OF THE SOWER and PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

by Octavia Butler

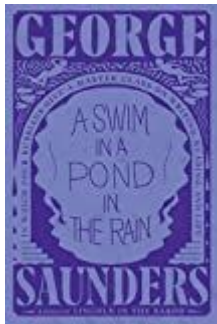
I admit that it was LeVar Burton's [podcast](#) that drew me to read more Octavia Butler (his deep breath before each story is an incredible meditative practice all by itself). The best futuristic writing is just close enough to current reality that it's easy to imagine – just one slippery step or two, and there we land. In this regard, and in these times, Butler can be a little hard to read, since her future is in some ways a little too close to our present ... which is all the more reason to visit.



TRANSCENDENT KINGDOM,

by Yaa Gyasi

Gyasi's latest novel is like a beautiful, finely finished cake. The story has an elegant and straightforward narrative structure on the surface, and also contains layers and layers of complexity within. Every few pages there is a phrase that stops me in my tracks, like, "I'd once been like that, so lonely that I craved further loneliness" or, "I saw my church, and I couldn't unsee." This is the story of a woman finding her way through science and faith and family and life and loss and love and solitude and connection - singular and universal.



A SWIM IN A POND IN THE RAIN,

by George Saunders

What could be better than a guided tour of some of the greatest short fiction ever written? A guided tour from a terrifically talented writer and a gifted teacher! The stories featured here, by Chekhov, Turgenev, and Gogol, are by turns delightful and mesmerizing, and Saunders' commentary allows us to see the "how" of the writing even as we are dazzled by the "what." Sometimes this kind of analysis detracts from the joy of great art, but Saunders infects us with his own fervor and expertise, leaving us both better informed and more enthusiastic readers.



JACOB LAWRENCE: THE AMERICAN STRUGGLE,

by Bailly Turner

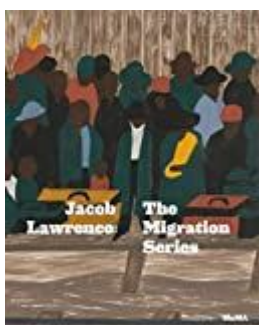
JACOB LAWRENCE: THE MIGRATION SERIES,

by Elizabeth Alexander

I was first introduced to the striking work of Jacob Lawrence by my economist brother, who studies labor migration. The connection he made has stuck with me ever since - the recognition that all of those charts and graphs and statistics in labor force databases represent real live people, people who are moving and adjusting and suffering and thriving, sometimes all at once. There is no better way to convey these many layers of adaptation and evolution than through images like Lawrence's, and this new volume is a welcome extension of earlier, smaller publications of his work.

Though the 2020 Lawrence exhibit at the PEM was sadly curtailed by covid, you can see a terrific virtual view of the show here:

<https://www.pem.org/exhibitions/jacob-lawrence-the-american-struggle>





THE MEMORY POLICE,

by Yoko Ogawa

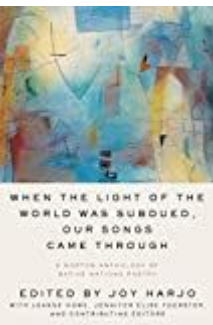
Oh my, this is a haunting and beautiful tale! Imagine a world where, bit by bit, things are disappeared, deleted – not just forbidden, but erased altogether, even from stories and memories. What lives on beyond the physical? Where is the edge of life? Weeks later, this story is still curling through my thoughts and dreams.



THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS AN EASY JOB,

by Kikuo Tsumura

Many of us have felt a little wander-y at times, unsure of whether we've found our like's work, or even a fitting occupation. Tsumura takes this exploration a bit further, following a seeker from one slightly spooky temp assignment to the next, highlighting the thin veneer between the mundane and the metaphysical. This book would be terrifically paired with [Convenience Store Woman](#), by Sayaka Murata, or anything by Murakami.



WHEN THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD WAS SUBDUED, OUR SONGS CAME THROUGH: A NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF NATIVE NATIONS POETRY,

by Joy Harjo (ed)

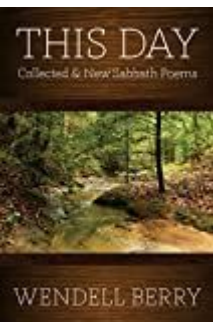
A good anthology creates a whole that is even more than the sum of its parts. This incredible volume contains the works of 160 poets, representing nearly 600 indigenous tribal nations. Some of the poems are presented with side-by-side original language text next to the English translations, and extra context is provided in the essays that introduce each region and in the short biographies of each poet. The poems range across centuries and forms, each rooting deep in power and place. If I start quoting from individual entries I will never stop, so instead I will just say, buy this book. It should be on every nightstand and in every classroom and in every library, each page well-worn by attention and appreciation.



AN AMERICAN SUNRISE,

Joy Harjo

Joy Harjo is US Poet Laureate, the first Native American poet to hold this position. These verses are simultaneously intensely personal and universal in their pain and joy and connection through space and time, as Harjo travels to her family's lands, the places from which the Mvskoke people were forcibly removed in the 1800's. Poetry and prose intermingle in this volume in a stunning way. "The Old Ones will always tell you, your ancestors keep watch over you. Listen to them."



THIS DAY: COLLECTED & NEW SABBATH POEMS,

by Wendell Berry

Perhaps all we need to know about this book is in the title – it is a collection of Wendell Berry's Sunday poems, written with the inspiration of "outdoor church" (he has often reported that he is mainly a bad-weather churchgoer, preferring to reflect outdoors whenever conditions permit). Berry notes of his writing process, "The poems come incidentally or they do not come at all. If the Muse leaves me alone, I leave her alone. To be quiet, even wordless, in a good place is a better gift than poetry."

...AND OUR OWN SMALL CONTRIBUTION!



MONTH OF SUNDAYS.

by Katherine Collins with Shalon Ironroad and Christa Alexandra Designs

Month of Sundays invites us to reflect, restore, and revive, offering a pocket of calm in our buzzing, anxious world. All profits from this publication are dedicated to support of organizations that provide essential wisdom and service, addressing some of our greatest needs. Organizations supported include:

- *Omega Institute*
- *Santa Fe Institute*
- *Equal Justice Initiative*
- *Last Mile Health*

A NOTE ON BOOKSELLERS

Alert readers may have noticed that many of our links connect you with a Very Large Online Retailer, and indeed, we appreciate that this retailer provides terrific customer service and helpful product detail. We are also loyal patrons of local booksellers, of course. In fact, one of my favorite ways to get to know a place is to seek out its bookstore. The IndieBound organization can help you find these local booksellers wherever you may be (including my personal favorite, Brookline Booksmith) – and if you are an e-loving person, they have handy online functions too.

<http://Brooklinebooksmith.com>

<http://www.indiebound.org>

STAYING IN TOUCH

If you'd like to stay in touch, we publish our short Sunday Best reflections every week. Just go to HoneybeeCapital.org and look for "subscribe" - it's a grey arrow on the right side of the screen for larger devices, and an orange banner at the bottom of the screen for smaller devices.

Beware the person of one book.

- Thomas Aquinas