the college
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

The Professors' Bookshelf

Submitted by: Kelsey Reid, Class of 2015

The ultimate reading list: Professors share the books that had the greatest influence on them.

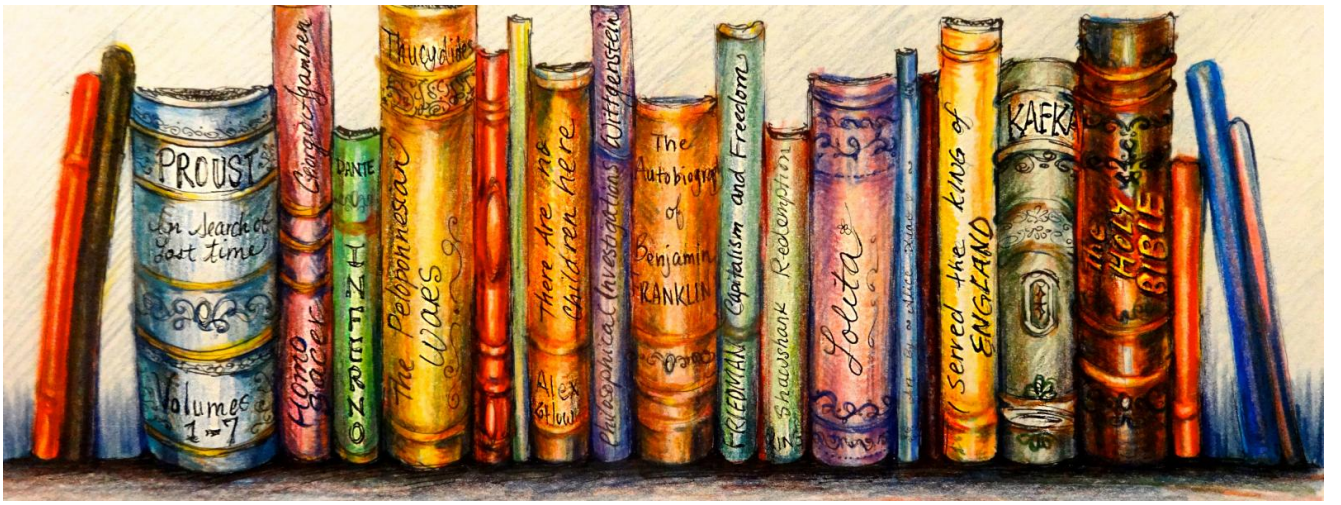

Photo by: Alice Xiao, Illustrator, Class of 2017

In a few weeks classes will resume on campus and students will receive their syllabi and reading lists for autumn quarter. But we've created the ultimate reading list, based on the works that most profoundly impacted UChicago faculty members.

Tamar Abramov, Humanities

- The novel that made me switch from philosophy to literature was Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*.
- The book that helped me focus my dissertation work was Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*.
- The book I most enjoy teaching is Dante's *Inferno*.

John W. Boyer, Dean of the College
Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian Wars*. I first read Thucydides in college, but never really understood its power and influence until I had to teach it as a young instructor in the first quarter of the History of Western Civilization course at Chicago in the 1970s. This quarter began with the polis of Classical Athens and worked up to the world of the late Roman Empire. I firmly believe that historians of modern Europe must have a sound and comprehensive knowledge of ancient history in order to make sense of the long civilizational tradition which they seek to understand and interpret. Thucydides stands at the beginning of

that tradition.

Chad Broughton, Public Policy Studies
There are No Children Here by Alex Kotlowitz is the story of two boys growing up in the old Henry Horner Homes in Chicago. It's a beautiful work of narrative journalism, and it had a profound impact on me in graduate school as I thought about the kind of sociologist I wanted to become. Kotlowitz weaves poignant stories from the boys' lives with historical context, sociological insight, and a deft understanding of the role social policy plays in their distressed near West Side neighborhood. Sociology sometimes get distant and, in my view, too abstracted from the everyday lives of real people. I still think of *There are No Children Here* as the gold standard for what a fine-grained, humanistic sociology—that also countenances the broader contours of social life—can look like.

Constantin Fasolt, History
Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, because they taught me how to look at the past without wearing the metaphysical blinkers worn BOTH by "positivist" or "conservative" or "mainstream" historians convinced that we can know "the facts" about the past AND by "literary" or "structuralist" or "post-structuralist" or "postmodern" critics convinced that our knowledge of the past is merely a certain kind of fiction.

Ralph Lerner, Social Thought
I would not say that this book had the greatest influence on my career. There are too many contenders for that honor. But it was the book that taught me the most with the least pain—and that must be worth something in this world.

If you are not satisfied to take your bearings by the judgments of Max Weber or D. H. Lawrence, you remain free to look for yourself in considering *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. It really helps if you have a sense of humor or at least an awareness that somebody may be pulling your leg. Be prepared to be surprised, because Ben is not simply one of those remote fellows decorating our national currency. He is very smart, an acute student of human foibles, and an enemy to extremism of every kind. He teaches moderation and good sense and respect for one another, not by wagging his finger and reading sermons, but by edging you gently toward looking at the world through his sober eyes. If you don't smile and even chuckle out loud in your reading, I'm sorry: you probably missed the point. Do yourself a favor and go back to the beginning!

Allen R. Sanderson, Economics
The quick, easy answer is *Capitalism and Freedom* by Milton Friedman, someone I later had the honor of studying under and became lifelong friends with. For his argumentation, logic, take-no-prisoners attitude, and willingness to tackle tough issues and take unpopular stands.

But I think an equally big influence on me – in my (un)popular writing, public addresses, and in the classroom – is the horror, science fiction writer Stephen King. I view him as the contemporary equivalent to Mary Shelley or Edgar Allen Poe. It's not that I use his novels in class, though occasionally I get a very good exam question from them, but rather he excels in telling a good story, maintaining suspense, and is, no pun intended, horribly creative. From *Carrie* to *The Shining*, *Misery*, *Shawshank Redemption*, *The Green Mile* (written in serial format to honor Dickens), *Under The Dome*, and *11/22/63*, King is a master craftsman at work and at the top of his profession. Not a bad role model. (And, yes, I've seen his Victorian-style home in Bangor, Maine, with its tall wrought-iron fencing laced with bats, certainly an emotional challenge for any trick-or-treater at Halloween.)

Malynne Sternstein, Slavic Studies

- *Lolita*—the novel taught me how to read anew. And it does so every time I read it. I have read Nabokov's novel at least 9 times. First when I was 14, and most recently at 47.
- *I Served the King of England*—Bohumil Hrabal's novel is irredeemably beautiful. With it I realized that sadness can be overwhelmingly gorgeous and actively generous.

- Kafka's tiny stories, his anti-parables. I've never been so happily frustrated with a text as when I am reading "Digging the Pit of Babel." Kafka made me realize that reading is not interpretation, and interpretation is not necessary.

Russell Tuttle, Anthropology
The Bible, especially the New Testament, as a guide to how to approach the wonderful variety of people, while remaining centered in the face of myriad professional challenges. *National Geographic* magazines in grandfather's home certainly played a role also.

Posted on: Sunday, September 14, 2014 - 6:45am

Harper Memorial Library
1116 E 59th St.
Chicago, IL 60637
773.702.1234