



Smithsonian Institution

MUSEUM on Main Street

The Way We Worked **Adult Reading List**

The following information will assist you in developing local exhibitions and public humanities programs around the themes of The Way We Worked. Work with your local library and/or bookstore to develop reading programs and learning opportunities for adults such as hosting book club meetings focusing on books about work in America and/or setting up a work-themed exploration station at the local library, displaying books on the subject.

Note: The publishers provided are current, while the dates are of original publication.

FICTION

Kesey, Ken. *Sometimes a Great Notion*. Penguin Classics, 1964. 736 pages.

This novel tells the story of the Stammers, a family of loggers who oppose a strike by unionized workers in the fictional town of Wakonda, Oregon. Considered by many to be Kesey's best work, he explores American literary themes including sibling rivalry, family loyalty, and western individualism versus eastern intellectualism.

Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick*. Barnes & Noble, 1851. 752 pages.

Crewman Ishmael narrates Captain Ahab's quest for vengeance against the elusive white whale of the title, who ripped off the captain's leg during a previous voyage. This allegorical adventure story is also a vivid documentary of life aboard a 19th-century whaler, a virtual encyclopedia of whales and whaling replete with facts, legends, and trivia.

Norris, Frank. *The Octopus: A Story of California*. Wilder Publications, 1903. 388 pages.

Based on the 1880 Mussel Slough tragedy involving ranchers and the Southern Pacific Railroad, this novel depicts the control that powerful forces such as wheat production and the railroads have over individual lives. In the novel, a corrupt railroad company attempts to take possession of land that wheat growers in California's San Joaquin Valley have been improving for years and had hoped to purchase for themselves.

Richter, Conrad. *The Sea of Grass*. Ohio University Press, 1936. 150 pages.

Set in the American Southwest in the late 19th century, this epic novel about the end of the cowboy era depicts the clash between rich ranchers, whose cattle graze freely on the range, and the farmers or "nesters" who build fences and turn the sod. Narrated by the young nephew of the story's central figure, *The Sea of Grass* is near the top of most lists ranking the greatest westerns.

Rolvaag, Ole Edvart. *Giants in the Earth: A Saga of the Prairie*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1927. 560 pages.



This is the classic story of a Norwegian pioneer family's struggles with the land and elements of the Dakota plains in the 1870s. As they try to make a new life in America, they also face poverty, hunger, loneliness, longing for the old country, and the difficulty of fitting into a new culture.

Russo, Richard. *Empire Falls*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2001. 496 pages.

This Pulitzer-Prize winner follows the plight of the working class in the decaying blue-collar mill town of Empire Falls, Maine. The story of the town and its residents, once dominated by a thriving textile mill and shirt-manufacturing factory, is at once sweeping in scope and intensely personal.

Sinclair, Upton. *The Jungle*. Barnes & Noble. 1906. 414 pages.

In his muckraking masterpiece, Sinclair highlights the plight of the working class and corruption of the American meatpacking industry in the early 20th century. The novel depicts the poverty, absence of social programs, unpleasant living and working conditions, and hopelessness of the working-class protagonists. It remains a relevant portrait of capitalism at its worst and of the human spirit facing nearly insurmountable challenges.

Steinbeck, John. *In Dubious Battle*. Penguin Group, 1936. 304 pages.

This novel tells the story of a young man drawn into labor disputes between migrant workers and apple orchard landowners in California, which are both aided and damaged by the help of "the Party." The first in Steinbeck's Dustbowl trilogy, this work offers many of the same societal questions and criticisms he explores in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Stockett, Kathryn. *The Help*. Penguin Group, 2009. 451 pages.

This novel is set in segregated Jackson, Mississippi during the nascent civil rights movement of the early 1960s, when black maids ran households and raised white children, but were paid poorly and even had to use separate toilets from the family. Against this backdrop, three women start a movement of their own, forever changing a town and the way its women interact with one another.

Wilson, Sloan. *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*. Da Capo Press, 1955. 288 pages.

This novel, which examines the search for individual purpose in a world dominated by business, captured the mood of a generation and has become part of America's cultural vocabulary. A World War II veteran leaves his nonprofit job to be a well-paid public relations executive and climb the corporate ladder, but a series of personal crises force him to reexamine his priorities.

NONFICTION

Ambrose, Stephen. *Citizen Soldiers: The U. S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany*. Simon & Schuster, 1997. Nonfiction, 528 pages.

Ambrose interviewed hundreds of German and American military personnel, from the high command down to the ordinary soldier, who served in Europe from the day after D-Day to the end of World War II. His focus, however, is on the enlisted men and junior officers, and he argues that it was not technology



but the character and bravery of the young American and European GIs that were ultimately the deciding factors in the war.

Also by Ambrose: *Nothing Like It In the World: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad, 1863-1869.* Simon & Schuster, 2000. 432 pages.

Ambrose recounts the story of those who undertook an unprecedented feat of engineering and courage to build the transcontinental railroad, including the investors and politicians; the engineers and surveyors who risked their lives living off the land while they charted the route; and the Irish and Chinese immigrants, defeated Confederate soldiers, and other laborers who did the backbreaking and dangerous work on the tracks. At its peak, the work force approached the size of Civil War armies, with as many as 15,000 workers on each line.

Carlton, David. *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920.* Louisiana State University Press, 1982. 328 pages.

Using several towns as examples, Carlton explores the social and political ramifications of industrial development in rural South Carolina. He illustrates how rural whites who came to labor in the textile mills and live in the company-owned towns bristled against the social, educational, and economic controls instituted by mill owners, as well as against the disdain of the middle-class townsfolk who looked down on their customs.

Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America.* Holt Paperbacks, 2001. 240 pages.

Ehrenreich goes “undercover” from 1998 through 2000 to investigate the impact of welfare reform on the working poor in the United States. She highlights the difficulties of working jobs that pay low wages, and how many recipients of government or charitable services like welfare, food, and healthcare only apply for help as a last resort.

Also by Ehrenreich: *Bait and Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream.* Holt Paperbacks, 2005. 272 pages.

The follow-up to her blue-collar exposé explores economic insecurity where we least expect it, among workers who have college degrees, developed marketable skills, and built up résumés. But as today’s corporations shed “surplus” and full-time employees, these white-collar workers are repeatedly vulnerable to financial disaster, with few social supports available.

Fuller, Tom and Art Ayre. *Oregon at Work: 1859-2009.* Ooligan Press, 2009. 160 pages.

The authors combine the personal histories and photographs of twenty pioneer families with historical research and economic statistics to provide an overview of Oregon’s labor force over the last 150 years. Readers get a sense of what it was like for a range of workers, including Native Americans and minorities, to work in Oregon in the 1850s, the 1900s, the 1950s, and today.

Hickham, Homer. *Rocket Boys: A Memoir.* Random House Publishing Group, 2000. 384 pages.

This uniquely American memoir is the powerful coming-of-age story of NASA engineer Homer Hickam, who paints a vivid portrait of the dying West Virginia mining town of his 1960s youth. Struggling against



the community's sense of itself to forge his own identity, Hickham made his dreams of launching rockets into outer space come true. His story came to life in the 1999 film *October Sky*.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell and Anne Machung. *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. Penguin Group, 1989. 352 pages.

Based on a series of interviews with fifty working families in the San Francisco Bay area over the course of several years, sociologist Arlie Hochschild was one of the first to talk about what really happens in dual-career households. As the majority of women join the workforce, they still do the majority of childcare and housework during their “second shift.”

Also by Hochschild: *The Time Bind*. Holt, Henry, & Company, Inc., 1997. 336 pages.

In another landmark study, Hochschild spent three summers at a Fortune 500 company interviewing top executives, secretaries, and factory hands alike, and found that the roles of home and work had reversed: work was offering stimulation and a sense of belonging, while home had become the place where there was too much to do in too little time.

Iverson, Peter. *When Indians Became Cowboys: Native Peoples and Cattle Ranching in the American West*. **University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. 288 pages.**

Iverson explores a way of life that has been both economically viable and culturally rewarding for Native Americans in the northern plains and Southwest, despite changing federal Indian policies. He describes the Indian Bureau's inability to recognize that most 19th-century reservations were better suited to ranching than farming and asserts that 20th-century policies have limited the long-term economic success of Native ranching.

Leidner, Robin. *Fast Food, Fast Talk: Service Work and the Routinization of Everyday Life*. University of California Press, 1993. 278 pages.

In observing how McDonalds trains its managers to standardize every aspect of service and product, and in learning what to say and how to say it in order to sell life insurance at a large mid-western firm, Leidner uncovers the consequences of regulating workers' appearances, language, and attitudes. Her study reveals the complex, diverse, and often unexpected results that come with the “routinization” of service work.

Lindgren, H. Elaine. *Land in Her Own Name: Women As Homesteaders in North Dakota*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1996. 320 pages.

Lindgren explores the lives of unmarried female homesteaders in North Dakota in the late 19th and early 20th centuries through land records, letters, diaries, and interviews with surviving homesteaders and their families and friends. They recount stories of locating claims, erecting shelters, and living on the prairie, and their ethnic backgrounds range from Scandinavian, German, Russian, Jewish, and Lebanese to Yankee and African-American.

Maclean, Norman. *Young Men and Fire*. University of Chicago Press, 1992. 301 pages.

Maclean's account of the 1949 Mann Gulch Fire is at once a fascinating primer on fires and firefighting, a forensic reconstruction of the tragedy that killed thirteen firefighters, and a meditation on grief and



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human character. Maclean attempts to decipher the official U.S. Forest Service report through the testimony of four survivors, along with other eyewitness accounts and statistics.

McCullough, David. *The Great Bridge: The Epic Story of the Building of the Brooklyn Bridge*. Simon & Schuster, 1983. 562 pages.

During the late 19th century's Age of Optimism, the Brooklyn Bridge was viewed as the greatest engineering feat of mankind. John Roebling and his son Washington toiled for decades and at various times fought competitors, corrupt politicians, and the general public to fabricate the bridge in a dangerous project that injured, maimed, or killed dozens of workers.

Murolo, Priscilla and A.B. Chitty. *From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: A Short, Illustrated History of Labor in the United States*. New Press, 2001. 384 pages.

In this popular history covering U.S. labor from pre-colonial times to the late 1960s, the authors explore the complex historical relationships between work, gender, ethnicity, race, and immigration. From African indentured servants forced into slavery to the discontented working people who sparked the American Revolution, and including Chinese railroad laborers, the Wobblies, steel-mill workers, and domestics, they put a human face on the places, events, and social conditions that shaped the evolution of organized labor.

Schor, Juliet. *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*. Basic Books, 1993. 247 pages.

Over the past twenty years the working hours of men and women, white- and blue-collar workers alike, have increased by one month per year. Schor's groundbreaking book attempts to explain why Americans, unlike people from every other industrialized Western nation, repeatedly "choose" money over time, and what can we do to get off the treadmill.

Terkel, Studs. *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*. The New Press, 1974. 640 pages.

The noted oral historian and radio broadcaster explores what makes work meaningful for people in all walks of life, from the waitress to the firefighter to the business executive. Divided into nine "books," each of which contains wide-ranging accounts of working people's jobs and lives, the narratives move constantly between mundane details, emotional truths, and existential questioning.