

EAST OREGONIAN OPINION

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OUR VIEW

What books to read this summer

On today's front page, we discussed ways that schools are trying to keep students engaged with reading during the long, languid Eastern Oregon summer. Literacy is a key skill that helps students succeed in their schooling and in their career. But becoming a good reader, capable of gleaning important information, takes practice.

That practice doesn't have to be a pain. Reading can be wonderfully pleasant, relaxing, invigorating, confusing, funny, absurd, heartbreaking and on down the line. Accessing those emotions through literature has reliably shown to be one of the best ways to increase kindness, and find empathy with those in a different situation than you find yourself in.

Therefore it's not just important for students to keep up their literary chops. Reading should be a lifelong love affair, though some of us get sidetracked into endlessly unfulfilling scrolls down Facebook timelines and Reddit threads. Break out of that habit with a few great summer reads, which are sure to spark you back into the joys of a good book. Here are a few ideas from *East Oregonian* staff.

"The Jump-Off Creek" and "The Hearts of Horses," Molly Gloss
These two books by Oregon author Molly Gloss are set in remote Eastern Oregon and tell the stories of the men and especially the women who made lives for themselves in this rugged country in the 1890s and 1910s. These wonderful novels are both funny and sad, and will likely make you appreciate the hardships experienced by the generations before us.
— Kathryn Brown, *EO Media Group*

"Moneyball," Michael Lewis (2003)
The battle between conventional wisdom and actual data is applicable in all walks of life. It's particularly intriguing in baseball, where more than a century of storied careers, legendary tales and accepted truisms can cloud the senses about the way the game really works.
— Renee Struthers, *records editor*

Lewis explains the disparity through dynamic characters and in simple terms, proving there's nothing scary about using sabermetrics to understand a player's value beyond flashy skills. There's a lot of heart, too, and the book shows the love of the game comes in many forms.
— Daniel Wattenburger, *managing editor*

"Pachinko," Min Jin Lee (2017)
Korean-American author Min Jin Lee spins an absolute epic with her recent bestselling novel, which follows generations of a Korean family living as immigrants in Japan. It is devastating in its directness, unsparing in its plotting. Yet "Pachinko" is imbued with a weighty appreciation for the decisions — both made by characters and forced upon them — that come to constitute a life. It is a significant work that confronts tradition and history. Read it to remind yourself that a whole world can be packed between the covers of a book, just waiting for you to step inside.
— Tim Trainor, *opinion page editor*

"Fire at Eden's Gate: Tom McCall and the Oregon Story," Brent Walth (1995)
A beautifully written biography of Oregon Governor Tom McCall, woven with a sweeping history of the state of Oregon. It explores how McCall's time as a reporter shaped his life in politics, and honestly deals with his failings as a politician and person, while still giving him the credit I think he deserves. There are also plenty of potshots at California in the first chapter.
— Jayati Ramakrishan, *reporter*

"Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression — and the Unexpected Solutions," Johann Hari (2018)
A great book about why so many people are depressed, and the solutions to the disconnects that are causing the problem (and no, it's not antidepressants).
— Renee Struthers, *records editor*



Submitted photo

"The Murder of the Century: The Gilded Age Crime that Scandalized a City and Sparked the Tabloid Wars," Paul Collins (2011)
This riveting true-crime tale takes readers to the hot New York City summer of 1897, when a group of children found a headless torso floating in the East River. The resulting hunt for the killer — and the rest of the corpse — gripped the city all summer as newspaper giants Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst battled for scoops that often had their reporters working two steps ahead of the local police.

At a time when journalism itself is often in the news, "The Murder of the Century" serves not only as an entertaining murder mystery, but provides perspective on a pivotal moment in journalism's history.
— Jade McDowell, *reporter and editor*

"News of the Universe: Poems of Twofold Consciousness," Robert Bly (1980)
I've had my copy of Robert Bly's anthology since my days as an undergrad English major, and I'm giving my daughter her own copy of the book as a high school graduation gift. The book is a little world of poetry, the kind of work you return to over and over, like the old friend who speaks truth to you one moment and consoles you the next.

You can read the book the way Bly intended — an argument on how we disconnected from nature, lost part of what it means to be human, and have been trying to regain that. But you also

can just relish the multitude of poems collected here, so many ripe for reading aloud on a summer evening. You just can't read Randall Jarrell's "Bats" in your head, or Gary Snyder's "This Poem is for Bear."

Open a page in this book, let the poems lead you, take a look at what you find there. Repeat.
— Phil Wright, *reporter*

"Batgirl Vol. 1: Batgirl of Burnside" Brendan Fletcher, Cameron Stewart, Babs Tarr (2014)

Given how hot comic book properties are right now, it's a bit surprising how little material deals with what it means to be a hero in the digital age.

That's one of the central themes writers Brendan Fletcher and Cameron Stewart tackle in "Batgirl of Burnside," a collection of six Batgirl comics from 2014.

In the storyline, Barbara Gordon moves from Gotham's gloomy confines to the trendy Burnside neighborhood (an obvious stand-in for Brooklyn) as she tries to balance graduate school, her personal life and vigilante crime fighting.

It's not exactly groundbreaking material, but Fletcher and Stewart spin a frothy adventure that sees Batgirl deal with social media, fake news and identity theft.

The lighter tone is brought to life by artist Babs Tarr, who imbues her work in this series with the types of colors and lines that are perfect for a story about a young, idealistic girl striking it out on her own.

— Antonio Sierra, *reporter*

OTHER VIEWS

Trump-Russia: The bank shot investigation

On May 22, a man named Evgeny Freidman, the owner of more than 800 taxi licenses in New York City, pleaded guilty to "failure to remit to the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance \$5 million in 50-cent (Metropolitan Transportation Authority) surcharges between 2012 and 2015," according to a press release from the state attorney general.

The guilty plea topped national newscasts and was discussed for days, which is a little unusual for a case in which a fairly small-time businessman — even one known around New York as the "taxi king" — admitted to pocketing a local tax on cab rides.

So why was it big news? Because Trump. "More breaking news tonight," CNN reported. "This, on President Trump's fixer, Michael Cohen. One of Cohen's business partners, a Russian immigrant known as the taxi king, has quietly agreed to assist federal investigators as part of a plea deal."

The idea was that, as part of his cooperation, Freidman would dish on Cohen, which would increase pressure on Cohen to dish on Trump with Trump-Russia special counsel Robert Mueller, and the end result would be ... well, that was unspecified, but it clearly involved expectations of some sort of wrongdoing on the president's part.

Lest anyone forget, Mueller is authorized to investigate "any links and/or coordination

between the Russian government and individuals associated with the campaign of President Donald Trump; and any matters that arose or may arise directly from the investigation," plus any obstruction of the probe. (A more detailed version of Mueller's assignment is still secret.)

Going after the taxi king in hopes of proving collusion in the 2016 presidential race is a bank shot.

But other parts of Mueller's investigation are bank shots, too.

This month a man named Jeffrey Yohai, who at one time was married to former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort's daughter, pleaded guilty to "conspiracy charges ... relating to real-estate loans on properties in New York and California," as well as to misrepresenting his income to obtain an American Express "Black Card," according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

Yohai's case also topped some national newscasts. "Breaking news," CNN reported on May 17. "Paul Manafort's former son-in-law reaching a plea deal. What does this mean for Manafort and the Russia investigation?"

The idea was that, as part of his cooperation, Yohai would dish on Manafort, which would increase pressure on Manafort to plead guilty and dish on Trump, and the end result would be ... well, that was unspecified,

BYRON YORK
Comment

but it clearly involved expectations of some sort of yet-to-be-exposed wrongdoing on the president's part.

Even the case of Manafort himself, the highest-ranking Trump campaign official to be charged in the Russia investigation, is a bank shot. Manafort faces a long, multi-count indictment focusing on financial crimes he allegedly committed years before and apart from his work on the Trump campaign. The idea is to put so much pressure on Manafort with unrelated charges that he will eventually give up, plead guilty and dish on Trump.

That is what Rick Gates, Manafort's partner and the Trump campaign's deputy manager, has already done: plead guilty to crimes committed years before and apart from his work on the Trump campaign. Gates is now cooperating with Mueller, although it is not known what information, if any, he has provided about Trump.

The two other campaign figures who have pleaded guilty, Michael Flynn and George Papadopoulos, both admitted lying about Trump campaign-related matters, but not to any crime involving collusion, or conspiracy, or coordination, between the Trump campaign and Russia to fix the 2016 election.

Put it all together, and the impression left by the public parts of the Mueller probe is that

Mueller has spent more than a year circling around the basic question of his investigation — Was there collusion? — but not answering it. He has liberally employed the prosecutor's technique of using unrelated charges to pressure targets in hopes of getting damning information on the real issue.

The only straight, direct charges are against a group of Russians who operated a content factory in the 2016 race. They're not expected ever to stand trial.

It should be said that all this is just the public part of the Mueller investigation. He might have some blockbuster charges in the works that no one outside his office knows about. Mueller has been consistently ahead of the reporting about his investigation.

But the fact that he has investigated and charged four figures from the Trump campaign — Manafort, Gates, Flynn and Papadopoulos — and not charged any with crimes involving collusion appears to be significant. If there were in fact a Trump-Russia collusion scheme, they would likely have been involved. If not them, who?

So now prosecutors, and the press, are looking farther and farther afield in hopes of uncovering the collusion conspiracy they believe exists but so far can't find.

Byron York is a correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.