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The Best American Nonrequired Reading 2015



Synopsis

For the past year, a group of high school students met at a publishing house in San Francisco every Monday night to read literary magazines, chapbooks, graphic novels, and countless articles. This committee was assisted by a group of students that met in the basement of a robot shop in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Together, and under the guidance of guest editor Adam Johnson, these high schoolers selected the contents of *The Best American Nonrequired Reading 2015*. The writing in this book is very essential, if not required, like visiting the Louvre if you're in Paris. In any case, nothing in this book takes place in Paris, as far as we can recall, but it does feature an elephant hunt, the fall of a reality-TV star, a walk through Ethiopia, and much more of what Johnson calls "the most important examinations in life."

The Best American Nonrequired Reading 2015 includes LESLEY NNEKA ARIMAH, DANIEL ALARCÓN, BOX BROWN, REBECCA CURTIS, VICTOR LODATO, CLAUDIA RANKINE, PAUL SALOPEK, PAUL TOUGH, WELLS TOWER and others. Adam Johnson, guest editor, teaches creative writing at Stanford University. He is the author of *Fortune Smiles*, *Emporium*, *Parasites Like Us*, and *The Orphan Master's Son*, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in fiction. He has received a Whiting Writers' Award and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation. His work has appeared in *Esquire*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Playboy*, *GQ*, *the Paris Review*, *Granta*, *Tin House*, *the New York Times*, and *The Best American Short Stories*.

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Customer Reviews

Adam Johnson takes the helm from Dave Eggers for one of the best installments of this series for a while, and gets away from the flailing, see-what-sticks approach of the last several years. The gimmicks are gone, as is the front section, and the sure-why-not material (the Iraqi constitution, i.e.), as Johnson sticks with mostly News Stories Done Artfully, focusing on nonfiction reportage and immersion journalism, with some stories thrown in. The best pieces focus on understanding something unknown or unpleasant, the authors going out of their way to truly learn something they might not like. They belong to Wells Tower, who reports on killing elephants for sport (as a conscientious objector), Daniel Alarc n, who writes about a game show contestant in Peru who reveals too much of her personal life, the essay ending up a crime story, and Sarah Marshall, who polemically but intriguingly presents a case for Tonya Harding (and against Nancy Kerrigan), an essential Everything You Know Is Wrong piece. Paul Tough reports on a lobsterman who gets thrown overboard and fights to survive, and Paul Salopek writes about his own megatransect across the world. There is some straight reportage from the three Americans held hostage on the Pakistani border, which reads like fine memoir. The nonfiction dominates. Second are the comics, which are very good this time around, one a subtly insidious horror story about a frightening neighbor, the other an engaging biography of Andre the Giant. Both very readable and enjoyable. The fiction is where the collection falters, but not always. Victor Lodato does the impossible by writing a compelling story about a druggie describing a drug trip, which is usually the absolute dregs of Creative Writing 101.

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