



The Best American Nonrequired Reading 2017

(The Best American Series ®)

Sarah Vowell (Editor)

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“A gift . . . One wonders how the world might be different if works in *The Best American Nonrequired Reading* were indeed required.” —*USA Today*

Sarah Vowell, author of *Lafayette in the Somewhat United States* and other best-selling titles “gilded with snark, buoyant on charm” (NPR), worked with the students of the 826 Valencia writing lab to edit this year’s anthology. They compiled new fiction, nonfiction, poetry, comics, and the category-defying gems that have become one of the hallmarks of this lively collection.

The Best American Nonrequired Reading 2017 (The Best American Series ®) Details

Date : Published October 3rd 2017 by Mariner Books (first published 2017)

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Author : Sarah Vowell (Editor)

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Genre : Writing, Essays, Fiction, Anthologies, Short Stories



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Stuart Lutzenhiser says

Another great edition. My two favorites are "The gulag diaries" and the fictional tweets of Werner Herzog, which are a scream. 30 or so stories ranging from short fiction, to poetry, music from Hamilton, and some insightful non-fiction on the end of Obama and the dawn of Trump.

Madison says

I usually struggle with anthologies but I couldn't put this one down. A relevant and poignant ode to 2017, this book wasn't blatantly political but was gently so. What struck me the most was an excerpt from an interview with Ella Ferrante where she explains how she is a reader who forgets: "I forget especially the books I've loved very much. I have an impression of them, I have a feeling for them, but to discuss them I would have to reread them." I relate to this as a reader and as someone who is developing her sense of morality and self within the confines of the 2017 climate. I may forget the specifics of this book and this year, but I will remember the way that made me feel. Disheartened yet optimistic, eager to learn, and aware of my responsibilities.

Jessica says

Best for me were "Lucky Dragon" by Viet Dinh, the interview with Elena Ferrante, "One Person Means Alone" by Elizabeth Lindsey Rogers, and the George Saunders essay on Trump supporters (which I had read before).

Jason Robinson says

Another satisfying and timely read from "The Best American" series of anthologies.

Cheyenne says

This has become a yearly tradition for me - although I usually try to round out my year in books with it, I was a little late in 2017. While not my favorite edition, this year's gave me a lot to think about from the start. In *Fable*, there is a relatively harmless monster, who only grows larger and more powerful the more people talk about him. How's that for topical? I've lost count of how many of these monsters live among us. *I Used to be a Human Being* pointed the spotlight at my own ever increasing dependency on technology and media to entertain me and fill up my days. I'm inspired to take a step back and take the time to look up everyone in a while. "You are where your attention is."

Many other stories captured my attention or allowed me to look at the world from a new perspective. The

BANR is an asset specifically for this reason. All the pieces fit seamlessly together, while also being unquestionably different from one another.

The juxtaposition of Ta-Nehisi Coates's *My President Was Black* and George Saunders's *Who Are All These Trump Supporters?* made my heart hurt. I read through the first with fondness in my soul and the latter with despair.

Who knows what the coming year will bring.

"We compose stories knowing very well that we are the last to arrive. And yet every time it seems to us that we are returning to the moment when the first human being, with nothing but the truth of his experience and the urge to reinvent it at every step, began to tell a story." - Sheila Heti

Michele Kaplan-Green says

I found most of the authors very interesting and I gained from reading their work. That said, I found the introduction disappointing as it spoke more of Vowell's thoughts on the presidential election and outcome rather than on the process and the goal for putting together the volume. Clearly, Vowell was chosen to edit for a reason. While I appreciate that, I wonder how much more the students; and then the readers; could have gained in the reading, discussion and selection process if they were guided by a teacher who allowed them to form their own ideas.

Margaret Sankey says

This year's anthology is quirked up by guest editor Sarah Vowell, who includes a panorama of pieces--from cartoon panels to Masha Gessen's rules for surviving autocracy to a piece which starts off like an Atlantic non-fiction account of the experiences of survivors of atomic testing and only slowly reveals that the crew of the affected fishing boat have...turned into kaiju.

Ted Hunt says

This book sounded interesting simply because one of my favorite writers, Sarah Vowell, is the editor. And, not surprisingly, her introduction was very well written and very funny. Unfortunately, as is true of any anthology, the quality of the selections varied quite a bit. The premise of the book is intriguing- giving a bunch of high school students the opportunity to put together a collection of pieces of written work that reflects what their view of the world is, circa 2017. But the students seem to all be from the Bay Area and the editor is the left-leaning (or more accurately, left tumbling) Sarah Vowell, so the pieces tend to fall into a discernible ideological genre. There are some great pieces of work in this collection, but as it turns out I had already read a lot of the quality essays, as they were taken from sources like the New Yorker, the Atlantic Monthly, and the New York Review of Books. I am not really an aficionado of modern short fiction, so I was left scratching my head after reading some of the selections. I was also disappointed that some of the selections seemed, to me, to have been chosen simply for their esoteric appeal. The anthology included the music and lyrics of one of the songs from Lin Manuel Miranda's "Hamilton." But why? I am a history teacher who regularly uses songs from "Hamilton" in my history classes, but I would have much rather read an essay from Miranda about the immigrant experience or the art of creating a musical. There was the dissent opinion on a recent Supreme Court decision written by Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Again, why? I would have

preferred an essay about her judicial philosophy. Why did I need to wade through a series of "tweets" from Werner Herzog? Or the 1930's diary of a Soviet Gulag guard? I just have the feeling that in fifteen years, some of the high school kids involved in this project will look back on it and ask themselves "why did I pick THAT?"

Liz says

I love this series. The editors cull the best of the best - poems, short stories, collections of tweets, articles, etc. etc. - from everywhere and put them into a collection that's hard to put down. This edition had a particularly good article by Ta-Nehisi Coates, *My President Was Black*.

Maggie says

4.5 stars. I've read most of these anthologies, and this was the strongest one yet.

Highlights included "One Person Means Alone" by Elizabeth Perkins, "I Used to Be a Human Being" by Andrew Sullivan, "Autocracy: Rules For Survival" by Marsha Gessen, "Tattoo" by Melissa Ragsly (which shook me so much, I had to google everything about her in the middle of the night), and the poem "Woman Fries and Eats Pet Goldfish After Fight With Husband" by Christine Rhein.

The book also features great pieces by Louise Erdrich, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and George Saunders that I had read before.

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Also I am now worried about my child, who picked up this book today, pointed at the cover and said, "We live there."

I said, "That house is on fire."

And he said, "Yes."

Ashley Beane says

The Rockefeller Family Fund Takes on ExxonMobil (David Kaiser and Lee Wasserman) - DNF

Selected Tweets from @Wernertwertzog (William Pannapacker) - 3 stars

You'll Be Back (Lin-Manuel Miranda) - 2 stars

Excerpt from Utah, Petitioner v. Edward Joseph Strieff, Jr. (Justice Sonia Sotomayor) - 4 stars

"Woman Fries and Eats Pet Goldfish After Fight with Husband" (Christine Rhein) - 4 stars

An Oral History of Gabriel Depiero (Casey Jarman) - 4.5 stars

I Am Reminded Via Email To Submit My Preferences for the Schedule (Chen Chen) - 2 stars

Who Are All These Trump Supporters? (George Saunders) - 3.5 stars

Ron says

I'd say I enjoyed two out of five stories / essays in this collection of ephemera from 2017, hence my star rating. Didn't expect quite so much would be focused on The Dotard, but I guess that's 2017 for you. I have been working hard to filter out repetitive, speculative writing about the SCROTUS, and drifted away after I realized that was a lot of the focus. (That said, the short story "Fable" by Teju Cole is excellent.)

Philip says

Did you guys know Trump got elected president?

Nicole says

Great collection, as always. My favorite pieces this year:

- "Fable" by Teju Cole -- As the title says, a fable. One which is very relevant to America right now.
- "Peace Shall Destroy Many" by Miriam Toews -- An essay on the conflict-averse customs of North American Mennonites, and how avoiding public conflicts can lead to internal conflicts and barely suppressed unrest.
- "I am reminded via email to submit my preferences for the schedule" by Chen Chen -- A poem that reflects how I often feel when I'm asked to choose a preference for work.
- "My President Was Black" by Ta-Nehisi Coates -- A longform essay about Barack Obama's presidency. I also just finished a collection of Coates' essays. He's one of the most gifted writers of our time, and while I sometimes disagree with him, I always learn something while reading his work.
- "Tattoo" by Melissa Ragsly -- A short story about a young girl in (I think) a cult, and what happens when she gets close enough to truly see her god.
- "The Most Terrible Time of My Life" by Sonny Liew -- An excerpt from *The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye*, a graphic novel about a comic book artist in Singapore. Looking into getting the whole book, as it looks interesting both as a fictionalized biography and a period piece about Singapore's political turmoil.

Hillary says

This is a fantastic compilation of eclectic fiction and nonfiction & as the back cover touts, DEFINITELY NOT BORING!...I was concerned that the many pieces focusing on Obama's legacy & Trump's rise would prove depressing and enraging as I find so much news today; although, it is difficult NOT to be enraging by anything cataloguing Trump's actions and words, these pieces were NOT depressing...they were not only informative, but offered reflection that sometimes showed hope, or, if not, at least a perspective that I could relate to and which better informed my own.

