

## **GHP's 10 best climate books since the last conference in May 2014 (in the order I recommend reading them):**

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- 1. Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (2014, 466pp)**

Unfortunately, this book is probably too long (and too “political?”) to be part of most secondary curricula, but quotable excerpts abound throughout: “We are stuck because the actions that would give us the best chance of averting catastrophe – and would benefit the vast majority – are extremely threatening to an elite minority that has a stranglehold over our economy, political process, and most of our major media outlets.” It is not simply a diatribe against the status quo, however, as Klein introduces “The New Climate Warriors” through a series of case studies in the last third of the book. Avi Lewis’s 89-min documentary with the same title is an engaging visual summary of the book, which has become a prized resource in my classes, both to introduce many of the major voices in the debate and to provoke discussion and further reflection.
- 2. George Marshall, *Don’t Even Think About It: Why Our Brains are Wired to Ignore Climate Change* (2014, 246pp)**

This insightful and readable study of the psychology of climate change denial by a British expert on climate communication reminds us that it is more than just a scientific issue, and also just how high the stakes have become: “A survey of five hundred American preteens found that more than half felt the world was in decline and a third believed it would not exist when they grew up.” Yet he remains hopeful: “The real battle for mass action will not be won through enemy narratives . . . we need to find narratives based on cooperation, mutual interests, and our common humanity.”
- 3. Elizabeth Kolbert, *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change* (Updated with new material 2015, 286pp)**

Kolbert has added three new chapters at the end of her 2006 classic, which widen her sphere of concern to include ocean acidification, the Alberta tar sands, and renewable energy.
- 4. Andrew J. Hoffman, *How Culture Shapes the Climate Change Debate* (2015, 90pp)**

From the Preface of this worthy addition to the Stanford Briefs series: “My first goal was to build an edifice from the large and growing body of research in sociology, psychology, and other social sciences about why people accept or reject the science of climate change.” He concludes, “It is important then to move beyond language that is polarizing, judgmental, and condescending. . . . Engagement must be done with a recognition that the issue represents a deep cultural shift, one that threatens people’s belief systems.”
- 5. Gernot Wagner and Martin L. Wietzman, *Climate Shock: The Economic Consequences of a Hotter Planet* (2015, 152pp)**

I chose this over William Nordhaus’s *The Climate Casino: Risk, Uncertainty, and Economics in a Warming World* (2013, 326pp) because it is shorter and more recent. Both are cogent and accessible analyses of the economic dimensions of climate.
- 6. Chantal Biodeau, *Sila* (2015, play script 105pp)**

The first of eight plays in the Arctic Cycle, each set in one of the eight countries of the Arctic, *Sila* takes us to the Canadian Arctic, where (from the playwright’s notes) “There are two distinct Arctics: the Arctic of the Inuit and the Arctic of the Southerners.” There are also two polar bears, portrayed by large mobile puppets, which “were a portal through which we humans are able to access the grief

of our changing climate in surprising, profound ways.” (Megan Sandberg-Zakian) The title is an Inuktitut word roughly translated as “the breath that circulates into every living thing.”

**7. Diane Ackerman, *The Human Age: The World Shaped by Us* (2014, 310pp)**

Ackerman’s incisive and poetic style goes quickly to the heart of the matter: “As we’re redefining our perception of the world surrounding us, and the world inside of us, we’re revising our fundamental ideas about exactly what it means to be human, and also what we deem ‘natural.’” Fortunately, her take on the Anthropocene is not all gloom-and-doom: “Our mistakes are legion, but our talent is immeasurable.”

**8. Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2014, 268pp)**

Kolbert’s lucid journalistic style is fully in evidence here, as she turns our attention to the human impact on the rest of the biosphere. She concludes with the same haunting urgency as in her *Field Notes*: “Obviously, the fate of our own species concerns us disproportionately. But at the risk of sounding anti-human . . . I will say that it is not, in the end what’s most worth attending to. Right now, in the amazing moment that to us counts as the present, we are deciding, without quite meaning to, which evolutionary pathways will remain open and which will forever be closed. No other creature has ever managed this, and it will, unfortunately, be our most enduring legacy.”

**9. Saci Lloyd, *The Carbon Diaries 2015* (2008, 330pp)**

The author is a London-based high school teacher who conjures up a near future in which Great Britain has just initiated mandatory carbon rationing. We learn how this world impacts 16-year-old Laura Brown and her family through Laura’s diary, as the typical pursuits of an upper middle class teenager – school, relationships, her rock band – are mitigated by new circumstances: “Jan. 1: Exhausted. The whole family looks like death after an all-day meeting. Dad muttered that we shouldn’t just focus on it being difficult, but think up a New Year’s wish list.”

**10. Seth B. Darling and Douglas L. Sisterson, *How to Change Minds about Our Changing Climate: Let Science do the Talking the Next Time Someone Tries to Tell You* (2014, 187pp)**

Two working scientists respond definitively and convincingly to the most common arguments against climate change that have been absorbed and repeated in our mass culture.