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Jennifer Collins Bloomquist, Associate Provost for Faculty Development and Dean of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Programs

Musselman Library
Gettysburg College

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Jennifer Collins Bloomquist, Associate Provost for Faculty Development and Dean of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Programs

Abstract

In this first Next Page column of the new academic year, Jennifer Collins Bloomquist, Associate Provost for Faculty Development and Dean of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Programs, shares what she would ask Zora Neale Hurston if she had the chance, which food-related books she likes to give as gifts, why she can't have anything fun to read at her house when she has a deadline looming, and her go-to campus sources for great recommendations on what to read next.

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Next Page

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August 29, 2018

In this first Next Page column of the new academic year, Jennifer Collins Bloomquist, Associate Provost for Faculty Development and Dean of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Programs, shares what she would ask Zora Neale Hurston if she had the chance, which food-related books she likes to give as gifts, why she can't have anything fun to read at her house when she has a deadline looming, and her go-to campus sources for great recommendations on what to read next.



Jennifer Collins Bloomquist

What's the first thing you read in the morning?

Sadly, my email, and then the news; I usually read articles from [The New York Times](#) and [The Washington Post](#).

What are you reading now (or have read recently) that you would recommend and why?

I've been reading Anthony Bourdain's [Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly](#), probably because (like lots of people) I was stunned by his recent suicide. I always thought that he was a bit arrogant so I never watched his show but the book changed my opinion of him. I worked in restaurants when I was in college and grad school so I really appreciate the "backstage horrors" he details about the industry.

How do you keep track of what you have already read, are reading currently, or want to read in the future?

I actually don't keep track which means that I end up reading books more than once, which isn't a bad thing. There are also books that I make sure to read more than once because I think that you get more out of certain books at different times of your life. For example, I read books like [Native Son](#), [The Bluest Eye](#), [The Catcher in the Rye](#), and [Song of Solomon](#) when I was in high school, college, graduate school, and then when I started teaching and now again when my sons are reading them for school. I understand the stories differently each time and read each through a different lens.

Your research in linguistics focuses on African American Englishes in the regional context and you have a book due out soon on the representation of African American English and its role in the construction of ethnicity in children's animated films. What book/film/article would you recommend for a novice who is interested in learning more?

I'd recommend my book! 😊 Seriously though — for beginning linguists and people who are just interested in language issues in general, I like to recommend [Genie: An Abused Child's Flight from Silence](#) by Russ Rymer and Simon Winchester's [The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary](#). Both are very well researched and written and often inspire deeper interest in linguistics. As far as work on language, race, culture, and the media goes, I highly recommend Henry Giroux and Grace Pollack's [The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence](#).

Who are your favorite linguists writing today?

John Rickford

Geneva Smitherman

Lisa Green

Walt Wolfram

What do you read for fun?

I usually read fiction with relatable female protagonists (books like [Gone Girl](#), [Half of a Yellow Sun](#), [Everything I Never Told You](#), [Big Little Lies](#), [Homegoing](#)), but after my father passed away, I was slightly fixated on end-of-life biographies and autobiographies like [When Breath Becomes](#)

[*Air*](#), [*Being Mortal*](#), [*The Bright Hour*](#), and [*A Happy Marriage*](#). I found those to be beautiful and heartbreaking; they also helped me process some of my grief.

What's your go-to source for reading recommendations?

Janelle Wertzberger. She's an amazing resource (as are all of our librarians) and reads such a great range of books that she almost always has a recommendation off the top of her head. She's never steered me wrong. The same is true of Suzanne Gockowski who always suggests thoughtful and challenging books. Another excellent source of reading recommendations for me has been the members of the housekeeping staff. They've given me suggestions for some of my favorite books.

How have your reading habits changed over time?

I've always loved to read, and like to read actual books in hand; I'm not great with a screen. I have started listening to audiobooks lately though because listening to them makes better use of my commute. One reading habit has been a constant for me ever since college—when I have a big writing project to complete, I can't have anything in the house to read for fun. I just don't have the discipline to avoid fiction when I've got writing to do.

What book or article has inspired you to take action?

I read the book [*Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*](#) years ago, followed by [*The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*](#). Both really changed the way I think about food production and consumption as well as our responsibility as consumers to support and protect local agriculture.

What have you recently recommended to a student to read?

Why?

Unfortunately, linguistics books can be technical and off-putting. If I have a student interested in linguistics, I suggest that they read David Crystal's [*How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Language Live or Die*](#), Ohio University's *Language Files*, or works by Steven Pinker (who is very readable even if I don't agree with some of what he argues). An excellent book on African American English is [*Spoken Soul: The Story of Black English*](#), written by one of the most influential sociolinguists in the world, John Rickford, and his son, Russell who is a journalist.

If you could meet any writer, dead or alive, who would it be?

What would you want to know?

I'd want to meet Zora Neale Hurston. Her fieldwork as a folklorist and the language data she collected on a Guggenheim Fellowship and later as part of the Federal Writer's Project really was the beginning of ethnographic research into African American English. She did research in Jamaica, Haiti, and the American South, collecting language data that she used in constructing characters in her novels. I'd love to know about those experiences.

What is your favorite book to give as a gift?

I love to give books as gifts but they're usually tailored to the individual. I especially like to give people some of the really beautiful and well researched cookbooks that are out now, like Kenji Lopez-Alt's [*The Food Lab: Better Home Cooking Through Science*](#), [*The Flavor Bible*](#) by Karen Page, and [*The Science of Good Cooking*](#) by the Editors of America's Test Kitchen.

Who is your favorite writer of all time?

Toni Morrison

Do you have a favorite book or literary character from your childhood?

I loved The Great Brain series when I was a kid and I also read every Choose Your Own Adventure book.

What are you planning to read next?

I just bought [*The Hate you Give*](#) by Angie Thomas.

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