



## *Pushing the Limits: Change* Suggested Questions and Readings

### *Pushing the Limits: Change* Discussion Questions

- What surprised you about this story?
- What elements of Bren’s story remind you of things happening here in our community?
- Bren’s oyster farm was wiped out twice, in Hurricanes Irene and Sandy. It took his extremely resilient nature to bounce back.
  - What types of economic impacts might we see in our community, caused by extreme weather, and particularly due to climate change?
  - What industries are at risk?
  - In what ways might they be able to bounce back?
- Bren decided to start an entirely new business after losing his oyster farm.
  - What new types of businesses or industries might be developing in our community, as a response to extreme weather events?
  - Do these new endeavors fundamentally change some conventional ways of doing business? If so, in what ways?
- What do you want to learn more about?

### Recommended Books and Discussion Questions

***Climate Changed: A Personal Journey through the Science*** by Philippe Squarzoni (nonfiction, graphic novel)

“What are the causes and consequences of climate change? When the scale is so big, can an individual make any difference? ... This up-to-date look at our planet and how we live on it explains what global warming is all about... *Climate Changed* weaves together scientific research, extensive interviews with experts, and a call for action.” (*Amazon Books.* Accessed Nov. 15, 2016.

[https://www.amazon.com/Climate-Changed-Personal-Journey-through/dp/1419712551/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1479250694&sr=1-1&keywords=Climate+Changed%3A+A+Personal+Journey+through+the+Science.\)](https://www.amazon.com/Climate-Changed-Personal-Journey-through/dp/1419712551/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1479250694&sr=1-1&keywords=Climate+Changed%3A+A+Personal+Journey+through+the+Science.)

- What single phenomenon threatens agricultural production, coral reefs, and sixteen of the world’s twenty largest cities?
- Provide an example of a “feedback loop.”
- The author writes that “humanity is caught between two threats.” What are they?
- According to the author, how does media coverage of climate change, including its current consequences, hamper the ability of societies to take necessary steps?





***Memory of Water*** by Emmi Itäranta (fiction)

“Global warming has changed the world’s geography and its politics. Wars are waged over water, and China rules Europe... In this far north place, seventeen-year-old Noria Kaitio is learning to become a tea master like her father, a position that holds great responsibility and great secrets. Tea masters alone know the location of hidden water sources... But secrets do not stay hidden forever, and after her father’s death the army starts watching their town - and Noria. And as water becomes even scarcer, Noria must choose between safety and striking out, between knowledge and kinship.”  
(“Amazon Books.” Accessed Nov. 15, 2016. [https://www.amazon.com/Memory-Water-Novel-Emmi-Itäranta-ebook/dp/B00FJ3CHU4/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1479254914&sr=8-1&keywords=Memory+of+Water%C2%A0by+Emmi+Itäranta+%28fiction%29.\)](https://www.amazon.com/Memory-Water-Novel-Emmi-Itäranta-ebook/dp/B00FJ3CHU4/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1479254914&sr=8-1&keywords=Memory+of+Water%C2%A0by+Emmi+Itäranta+%28fiction%29.)))

- Who owns water?
- Is water a human right?
- When you think of Earth 100 years from now, what comes to your mind?
- Is it important to live your life with the future generations in mind?
- Do you think people have had a net positive or net negative impact on Earth?
- What are some of the water metaphors used in this book?
- Does this book remind you of any other books you’ve read or television shows or movies you’ve seen?
- What emotional tone does the prologue set?
- In Chapter 2, what is the significance of the door with the blue circle?
- How is it possible to help those who have limited access to resources?
- What is significant about the past-world stories Noria is beginning to uncover in Chapter Ten?
- To what risk would you go to help a friend?
- How do you decide when to take a risk for someone else?
- How do you decide when you have to make a difficult choice?
- At the end, Noria indicates that she needs to tell her own story. Why is this important to her?

***Odds Against Tomorrow*** by Nathaniel Rich (fiction)

“At once an all-too-plausible literary thriller, an unexpected love story, and a philosophically searching inquiry into the nature of fear, Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow* poses the ultimate questions of imagination and civilization. The future is not quite what it used to be.”  
(“Amazon Books.” Accessed Nov. 15, 2016. [https://www.amazon.com/Odds-Against-Tomorrow-Nathaniel-Rich/dp/1250043646/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1479255267&sr=8-1&keywords=Odds+Against+Tomorrow%C2%A0by+Nathaniel+Rich+%28fiction%29.\)](https://www.amazon.com/Odds-Against-Tomorrow-Nathaniel-Rich/dp/1250043646/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1479255267&sr=8-1&keywords=Odds+Against+Tomorrow%C2%A0by+Nathaniel+Rich+%28fiction%29.)))

- How did this novel comment on our country's disaster recovery capabilities?
- Why do you think FutureWorld became such a successful company?
- Is there a company today like FutureWorld that similarly preys on fear to make money?
- What does this novel say about our society's attitude toward disasters?
- How is this attitude different from how we feel about other threats such as terrorism or economic collapse?
- What does the Psycho Canoe evoke or symbolize?



- Some of the most harrowing parts of the novel take place in a canoe. What did those moments evoke in you?
- How did you react to the similarity between the floods Rich described and the destruction Hurricane Sandy caused?
- How does the novel suggest how we can continue being human in an age of algorithmic prediction?
- How are agency and responsibility for the future framed in this story?
- Which real world disasters does Hurricane Tammy in the novel most strongly evoke?
- Can literature deal with the challenges of slow catastrophe?
- How is Elsa Bruner important to the book beyond the way Mitchell chases her?
- What do you think of Mitchell's final decision in the end?
- If you were in Mitchell's shoes, would you rejoin society or not?

***The Water Knife* by Paolo Bacigalupi (fiction)**

“In a future hammered by climate change and drought, mountain snows have turned to rain, and rain evaporates before it hits the ground. ... it is the Las Vegas water knives - assassins, terrorists and spies - who are legendary for protecting Las Vegas' water supplies, and for ensuring Phoenix's ruin. When rumours of a game-changing water source surface, Las Vegas dispatches elite water knife Angel Velasquez to Phoenix to investigate. There, he discovers hardened journalist Lucy Monroe, who holds the secret to the water source Angel seeks. But Angel isn't the only one hunting for water, Lucy is no pushover, and the death of a despised water knife is a small price to pay in return for the life-giving flow of a river.” (*Fantastic Fiction.* Accessed Nov 15, 2016.

<https://www.fantasticfiction.com/b/paolo-bacigalupi/water-knife.htm>.)

- Throughout the novel, several of the characters refer to the past, citing some variation of “It wasn’t always like this.” Does there seem to be any benefit to reflecting on the past or does looking back hinder the characters in some way?
- In chapter 16, Angel tells Lucy about a specific ritual of the tamarisk hunters. Why do you think that he chooses to share this story with Lucy? Why do the hunters share water when they meet each other at the Colorado? How does this ritual correspond to the relationship between the characters in *The Water Knife*? What do you think this reveals about the storyteller, Angel? Does the story seem to elicit the response that Angel was hoping for from Lucy?
- In chapter 7, Angel indicates that he “had always liked the desert for its lack of illusions”. What do you think he means by this? Evaluate the theme of truth in the novel. Are the characters able to see the truth of what is going on around them and the truth about themselves, or are they in denial? What allows them to see the truth, or otherwise prevents them from being able to see it?
- Examine the treatment of the theme of allegiance within the story. How does allegiance seem to be defined within this novel? To what do the characters show allegiance? Do the characters remain steadfast in their allegiance or do their allegiances shift throughout? If they shift, what seems to motivate these changes?
- In chapter 28, we learn that Angel blends in with the group of people he is among. What is it that allows him to blend in? What does he have in common with all of the others in the group? What major theme or themes does this seem to reveal or support?
- Toomie says, “We’re all each other’s people”. What does he mean by this? Do the other characters seem to share this notion? Toomie also says that an Indian man once told him that



he believed that the people of India could survive an apocalypse while Americans could not. Why does the Indian man believe this? Do you agree? Does the novel seem to confirm or refute that idea? Are there any examples of solidarity in the book? What does Angel seem to think about cooperation and survival?

***Zeitoun*** by David Eggers (nonfiction)

“When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, Abdulrahman Zeitoun, a prosperous Syrian-American and father of four, chose to stay through the storm to protect his house and contracting business. In the days after the storm, he traveled the flooded streets in a secondhand canoe, passing on supplies and helping those he could. A week later, on September 6, 2005, Zeitoun abruptly disappeared. Eggers’s riveting nonfiction book, three years in the making, explores Zeitoun’s roots in Syria, his marriage to Kathy - an American who converted to Islam - and their children, and the surreal atmosphere (in New Orleans and the United States generally) in which what happened to Abdulrahman Zeitoun was possible.” (“*Goodreads*.” Accessed Nov. 15, 2016.

[https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6512154-zeitoun?from\\_search=true](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6512154-zeitoun?from_search=true).)

- Eggers dwells on Zeitoun's daily ritual of feeding his neighbor's dogs. Why might this be significant?
- Many nonfiction writers feel the need to simplify their material. Why does Eggers introduce so many of the Zeitouns' family friends, many of whom do not play an important role in the story?
- “*Zeitoun* is a more powerful indictment of America’s dystopia in the Bush era than any number of well-written polemics” (Timothy Egan, New York Times, August 13, 2009). Would you agree with this statement? Can *Zeitoun* be read as a contribution to the history of hurricane Katrina and the failure of government to handle the disaster effectively?
- Do Abdulrahman, Kathy and their children make up an unusual American family, or not? How would you describe the relationship between Zeitoun and Kathy, in marriage and in business? What effect does their religion have on the way others in the community see them?
- While Zeitoun helps the animals and people trapped in the flood, how does he feel about what he is doing? How does he think about these days after he has been imprisoned?
- Describe the relationship between Zeitoun and Kathy, in marriage and in business. How do they “work” together before and after the storm?
- While Zeitoun helps the animals and people trapped in the flood, how does he feel about what he is doing? How does he think about these days after he has been imprisoned?
- For those of us who did not live in the areas affected by Hurricane Katrina and therefore did not experience its impact firsthand, we likely received most of our information and formed most of our opinions about the various issues surrounding Katrina by watching or reading the news. Now having read the book, do you think that the information you heard or read was accurate? How has your view of the event and its issues been affected?
- What is Zeitoun’s feeling now about what happened? How does he move forward into the future, as expressed in the book’s closing pages?
- A major turning point in the book is when Zeitoun and his friends are arrested. How did your impression of what the story is about change after this point?
- Do you think Zeitoun put the interests of his business and property in front of his family? Was he justified in staying behind in New Orleans? How did you feel when he ignored his chances to evacuate?





- What kinds of messages does Eggers send about human beings' drive to help one another and take advantage of one another in times of crisis?
- Do you think Zeitoun should have left the city when Kathy asked him to, or did he have a valid reason for staying? What motivated him to stay?
- How did the experiences Zeitoun had in the flooded city reinforce his decision to stay?
- A lot of people decided to stay in the city, even after a mandatory evacuation was declared. Why do people resist evacuating in a situation like this?
- One of the recurring issues in this book is the carelessness or deliberate indifference of people in position of authority. In this final section, for example, the nurse who lost his paperwork requesting a doctor. Then, when he's finally interviewed by Homeland Security officials, they seem brisk and businesslike and apologize to Zeitoun after asking a few questions. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt trapped in a bureaucracy, unable to get simple questions answered or get a problem solved? What does this suggest about how individuals should act in an official capacity – the relationship between the individual and the role they play in a workplace or organization?

## Additional Recommended Readings

### ***The Day the Tide Kept Rising*** by Greg Jefferys (fiction)

“A thrilling tale filled with action, adventure, intrigue and a pleasant pinch of romance the book... follows the lives of four different people in their struggles to survive after a huge tsunami... sweeps across the Pacific. The tsunami leaves a trail of death and destruction after which the water levels of Earth's oceans begin to rise rapidly causing cataclysmic disaster... As cities and nations are flooded, the fabric of civilisation is torn as groups and individuals struggle for survival in a terrifying new world.” (“*Amazon Books.*” Accessed Nov. 15, 2016. [https://www.amazon.com/Day-Tide-Kept-Rising-ebook/dp/B00SWIQRZY/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1479250967&sr=1-1&keywords=The+Day+the+Tide+Kept+Rising.](https://www.amazon.com/Day-Tide-Kept-Rising-ebook/dp/B00SWIQRZY/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1479250967&sr=1-1&keywords=The+Day+the+Tide+Kept+Rising.))

### ***Heat*** by Arthur Herzog (fiction),

“Lawrence Pick, engineer, gathers startling evidence that the world's weather may be rapidly changing... In a secret underground laboratory, he and a team of equally skilled scientists learn that the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere... will ascend to the point where no living thing can survive. Pick's predictions become a reality as freakish weather conditions prevail... but still neither the U.S. Government nor the people will listen. Too late, the result of man's indifference is everywhere... with only one hope for survival.” (“*Amazon Books.*” Accessed Nov. 15, 2016. [https://www.amazon.com/HEAT-Arthur-Herzog-III/dp/0595271499/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1479252557&sr=1-1&keywords=Heat%C2%A0by+Arthur+Herzog.](https://www.amazon.com/HEAT-Arthur-Herzog-III/dp/0595271499/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1479252557&sr=1-1&keywords=Heat%C2%A0by+Arthur+Herzog.))

### ***Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*** by Eric Klineberg (non-fiction)

“On Thursday, July 13, 1995, Chicagoans awoke to a blistering day in which the temperature would reach 106 degrees... When the heat wave broke a week later... over seven hundred people had perished... in the great Chicago heat wave, one of the deadliest in American history... Klineberg uncovers how a number of surprising and unsettling forms of social breakdown—including the literal and social isolation of seniors, the institutional abandonment of poor neighborhoods, and the retrenchment of public assistance programs—contributed to the high fatality rates.” (“*Amazon*



Books.” Accessed Nov. 15, 2016. [https://www.amazon.com/Heat-Wave-Autopsy-Disaster-Chicago/dp/022627618X/ref=sr\\_1\\_fkmr0\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1479252765&sr=1-1-fkmr0&keywords=Heat+Wave+by+Eric+Klineberg.](https://www.amazon.com/Heat-Wave-Autopsy-Disaster-Chicago/dp/022627618X/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1479252765&sr=1-1-fkmr0&keywords=Heat+Wave+by+Eric+Klineberg.))

***The Stone Gate*** by Mark Mann (fiction)

“A strange rock in the forest. A mysterious crystal. A full moon. An ancient secret. How do you find your way home when you've never left? When Jack and Kaya see a dazzling white light shining from a giant rock in the forest, it takes them on an adventure to a place both familiar and yet like nowhere they know. But where exactly are they? And can they find their way back in time? *The Stone Gate* is a young adult fantasy adventure that explores the issue of climate change in a unique and exciting way.” (“*Amazon Books.*” Accessed Nov. 15, 2016.

[https://www.amazon.com/Stone-Gate-Mark-Mann-ebook/dp/B00MF0XOKQ/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1479256332&sr=8-1&keywords=The+Stone+Gate+by+Mark+Mann.](https://www.amazon.com/Stone-Gate-Mark-Mann-ebook/dp/B00MF0XOKQ/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1479256332&sr=8-1&keywords=The+Stone+Gate+by+Mark+Mann.))

***Sudden Sea: The Great Hurricane of 1938*** by R.A. Scotti (nonfiction)

“In the tradition of “The Perfect Storm”, “Sudden Sea” harkens back to a natural disaster that struck terror in the hearts of many. In this narrative, readers experience The Great Hurricane of 1938, the most financially destructive storm on record.” (“*Amazon Books.*” Accessed Nov. 15, 2016.

[https://www.amazon.com/Sudden-Sea-Great-Hurricane-1938/dp/0316832111/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1479255692&sr=8-1&keywords=Sudden+Sea+by+R.A.+Scotti.](https://www.amazon.com/Sudden-Sea-Great-Hurricane-1938/dp/0316832111/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1479255692&sr=8-1&keywords=Sudden+Sea+by+R.A.+Scotti.))