

FAQs about the Common Reading

Q: Who can recommend a book?

A: Anyone can. A recommendation request is sent to the campus community, including alumni, to suggest a book for the Common Reading.

Q: Has the committee ever considered anything other than a traditional book such as plays or poetry, visual art, or music?

A: Yes, but we have struggled to find something with the necessary breadth to be applicable across various constituencies, nor have we figured out the faculty and staff development piece. If you have an idea and would like to help shepherd it, please reach out to a member of the Common Reading committee.

Q: Who serves on the Common Reading committee?

A: A diverse group of faculty, staff, and students: The coordinators for COR 110, ENG 110, STS 110; representatives from World Languages and Cultures, Academic Advising, Residence Life, Orientation, and the library; faculty members from departments that have high numbers of first-year students such as REL, BIO and SOC; and two students.

Q: Do I have the opportunity to provide feedback on the selection?

A: Yes, you do. The committee narrows down the recommendation pool to 2 or 3 choices. We then send a survey via facstaff and to faculty teaching in the First-Year Foundations soliciting feedback. Your responses play an important role in the final selection process. We also share excerpts from the 2-3 books with our classes, work study students, advisees, etc. for additional student input.

Q: What are the selection criteria?

A: The committee uses a rubric to select the book. There are many different factors that come into play during the process. These include practical details--cost, length, availability in electronic form and in translation--and content--relevant and accessible to first-year students and can be engaged across disciplinary spaces.

Q: Are there resources available to help faculty and staff prepare to engage the book with each other and our students?

A: Yes. Various experts on our campus and in our community are tapped in the fall to submit discussion and writing prompts, assignment and project ideas, and supplementary podcasts, readings and documentaries. We also ask these experts to help us develop forum opportunities. The entire campus community is invited to two faculty development sessions: one in the spring before the book is launched and the other during Planning Week. Faculty teaching in the First-Year Foundations have an additional development opportunity during the summer retreat.

Q: Do students receive copies of the book?

A: No. They must purchase the book themselves. Because of this, the Elon Core Curriculum Council voted to require faculty to list the Common Reading as a required book on COR 110 syllabi so that students who receive certain types of financial aid can use it to purchase the text.

Q: Can I expect all of my students to have read the book over the summer?

A: No. Our research shows while many students read some of the book at some point during the summer, other students wait to see if the book will be required or if there will be an assignment related to the book in their class. Despite our hope that students will be intrinsically motivated to read a book assigned to all of their peers, students are motivated differently. We're working on helping our incoming students understand the need to read, but while we do, you'll have to let students know if and how you plan to work with the book in your classes.

Q: What if I don't like the book or it doesn't fit my course theme?

A: It is impossible to select a book that will satisfy everyone. Instead, please consider a few points: a) the Common Reading aligns with the university mission and carries significant financial and labor costs; b) it is a university requirement that incoming students purchase and read the text; c) the committee of peers would never select a text that our faculty and staff can't engage and that our students can't learn from; d) *engaging* the text does not mean it must be intensive or drawn out and there are resources in place to help; e) there is intellectual value in discussing things we may not like or find intrinsically interesting.

Q: If I require the book on my syllabus, does that mean I have to "teach" the entire book?

A: No. You can choose how the book or themes from the book best match your pedagogical goals and methods. Some faculty choose to teach the entire book and spend time helping students learn to manage the demands of a long text with multiple themes. Other faculty, however, choose to offer excerpts for students (and themselves) to read outside--or, together, during--class. Some faculty may offer the book as an optional text for students to use as a research source or starting point for class projects. There are many ways to "use" the Common Reading, and we think the diversity of activities and projects that faculty offer related to it is a strength of the program.