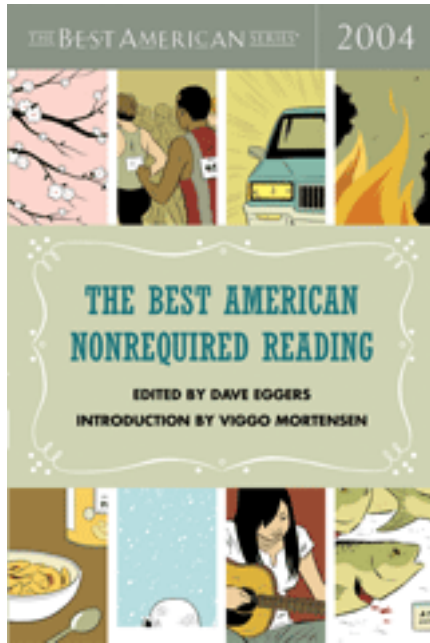


Press Release



The Best American Nonrequired Reading 2004

edited by [Dave Eggers](#)

introduction by [Viggo Mortensen](#)

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About the Book

With returning editor Dave Eggers and his troop of writing workshop students from 826 Valencia at the helm, *The Best American Nonrequired Reading 2004* (Houghton Mifflin; publication date: October 14, 2004) is in its third year of publication. This year's contributors present work ranging from the hilarious to the macabre, from the journalistic essay to the graphic one-frame story.

Daniel Alarcón leads us through a maze of psychologically riveting events following the death of a young reporter's philandering father in Lima in "City of Clowns." The narrator, refusing to display any emotion about his father's death, disappears deep into the swirling city on the hunt for a story that will allow him distance from his own life.

In a brilliant take on ghost stories, Gina Ochsner's "Hidden Lives of Lakes" bridges the world between human and spirit when two couples discover their dead neighbors and relatives living full, new lives under the thick ice of a frozen winter lake.

Back in the real world, Michelle Tea contributes a sharp, moving, and important piece of journalism reporting on Camp Trans, a transgendered/transsexual protest camp set up outside the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival after transgendered attendees learned of the festival's policy to exclude them. While Tea never loses sight of her main agenda, she fills out the report with fascinating interviews, detailed accounts of camp life and politics, and a consistently empathetic portrayal of all the parties involved.

Perhaps the most eye-catching pages in the book belong to the contributions of Eve Englezos and Joshua Moutray's "Vickie, Lacey, Ray, Sharon, Corey, Derek, Carol, and Dave" and Sammy Harkham's "Poor Sailor." Both pieces are offspring of graphic storytelling:

Englezos and Moutray create single-frame stories that present characters through brief excerpts of one-sided phone conversations. "Poor Sailor" redefines the epic adventure, relaying one man's journey through pictures and words. Both contributions refute the assumption that the proper vehicle for storytelling is language alone.

Also included in this collection are several stories relating to war, including "Half of a Yellow Sun" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (winner of the 2004 Orange Prize for Fiction) and "Running for His Life" by Michael Hall. David Mamet's essay on nicknames and language and Robert Kelly's "How They Took My Body Apart and Made Another Me" both exemplify this collection's theme of examining and questioning convention. Satirical comments on modern life are well represented, including "What You Eat" by Ben Ehrenreich, "We Have a Pope!" by Christopher Buckley, and "Sixteen Jackies" by Lance Olsen. Longtime favorite David Sedaris is also included.

To children, the idea of required reading could turn the stomach of even the most voracious reader. Well into adulthood, one is told that there is a formula that can be used to determine the worth of a poem, a story, or an essay. There are many forces that conspire to measure the weight of a piece of writing long before the reader has turned even the first page.

In the introduction, the author and actor Viggo Mortensen recounts the terrible loss of his writing notebooks during a move. These journals, filled with poetry and memories, were "irreplaceable," and the missing work sent Mortensen into a frenzied depression, a search that became all-consuming. To the reading community, habitually presented with formulaic and predictable literature, it often seems that something important has been lost as well. Between the covers of this year's *Best American Nonrequired Reading*, some of these missing words may be found.

About the Editors

Dave Eggers is the author of *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, *You Shall Know Our Velocity!*, and *How We Are Hungry*.

Viggo Mortensen is a film actor and artist/poet who has published five books of art and photography, including *Recent Forgeries*, *SignLanguage*, and *Miyelo*.

Adrian Tomine (cover art) is the author of the *Optic Nerve* series, *Summer Blonde*, and most recently *Scrapbook*. His work has also appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Details*, and *Rolling Stone*.