

GENERAL SCIENCE

The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2006. Edited by Brian Greene. 2006. Houghton Mifflin Company (ISBN 061872222X). 320 pp. Paperback. \$14.00.

The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2006, edited by Brian Greene, is an extraordinary anthology consisting of articles by renowned journalists and scientists that will pique the interest of the reader. This concise anthology of scientific editorials and articles enables the reader to develop the understanding of a lifetime and yet relate to real scientific information. The material, expert input, and scientific data, presented in a broad spectrum of styles, promotes interest in science and mathematics. In addition, the articles help the reader realize that advances in technology affect nearly all aspects of their daily life, thereby demanding a higher level of scientific literacy by all members of our society.

This provocative collection provides unlimited opportunities for research papers, debates, and seminars for high school and college students. As a result, students will have a platform to develop subjective and objective reasoning while developing critical thinking skills. The articles bring to the forefront a broad and realistic view of human endeavors. For instance, "The Dover Monkey Trial" by Chris Mooney and "Conservation Refugees" by Mark Dowie afford readers an opportunity to travel, relive history, and make predictions for the future. For facilitators, this collection can serve as an indispensable tool to help students become well-informed and productive citizens. With this compact collection at their fingertips, students can be introduced to a variety of careers in science and mathematics.

This collection includes: "Contributors' Notes", "Other Notable Science and Nature Writing of 2005" and a list of "The Best American Series", to further help readers extend their interest and background. Without a doubt, this collection is an invaluable prize for students and adults who are interested in staying abreast of issues that affect humanity.



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ENVIRONMENT

An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It. By Al Gore. 2006. Rodale Publishing (ISBN 1594865671). 325 pp. Paperback. \$21.95.

In the face of mounting concern about global warming, **An Inconvenient Truth** is a rigorous, current (many images and references are from 2006!), yet approachable assessment of the situation. Covering hurricanes, sinking pipelines, drowning polar bears, stranded fishing fleets, emerging diseases, and dying coral reefs, Gore approaches this topic from a wide variety of angles with a global focus. Excellent time-lapse images drive home long-term changes: the disappearance of Lake Chad (formerly the sixth largest lake in the world) over forty years, the recession of many glaciers over various time spans, and computer simulations of the predicted changes if rising atmospheric carbon dioxide affects the acidity of the ocean. Gore's writing style is approachable to the general public (a 10th grader could understand the entire book), but he does not bore or seem overly simplistic to scientists.

The book intersperses personal anecdotes from Gore's life with scientific points. Usually these anecdotes play as a logical lead-in to an interesting data set, although at times their relevance can seem a stretch. However, at no point does it seem that Gore is exaggerating or using these situations merely for self-promotion. In addition to maintaining interest in the scientific issues at hand, these anecdotes also provide revealing insight into the background, personality, and motivation of a public figure and national leader.

When I first received the book, I was shocked to find that it superficially resembled a coffee table book more than a scientific discourse. However, reading through the pages, I was impressed by the style. Rather than adding fluff eye-candy, the pictures are carefully chosen to drive home poignant points. The graphs and figures clearly convey meaning while losing none of the message or scientific rigor (axes are labeled, units and time scales are provided), with text leading up to and explaining what is demonstrated. Many of the figures would be good prompts for class writing assignments followed by discussion (e.g., if rising global temperatures thaw the permafrost in these areas and create structurally unsound buildings/roads, what countries will suffer most, how will the lives of the people living in these areas and in adjacent areas be affected, what possible remediation efforts

could be conducted?). The bright colors and crisp images are sure to catch the attention of students, and the surrounding text provides the specifics necessary to conduct an informed discussion—an (unfortunately) unusual mixture.

After a departmental lecture on global warming last year, one of my (sheltered) students said it was interesting, but not personal. This book makes the situation personal, at times frighteningly so, and at the same time immense. Images of the flooded New Orleans Superdome post-Hurricane Katrina (complete with flooded cars and a drowned girl), computer simulations of predictions of what will happen if Greenland melts and raises world sea level by 20 feet, a six-month time-lapse satellite view of the world at night with electricity, cooking fires, and oil field fires glowing brightly, and the stark contrast between deforested Haiti and the lush tree growth of the Dominican Republic at their shared border, all make you realize what is happening in your own backyard, your own country, and your own planet.

If anyone should be cynical and disillusioned about the state of our government's environmental policies and the possibility that America will act soon and decisively to stem the problems associated with global warming, it is Gore. However, his optimism is inspiring, and the factual and photographic evidence he provides are compelling. Unfortunately, what individuals can do to reduce their contribution to global warming does not come until page 305 and is a scant 16 pages long, with some of the densest text in the book. While that makes these pages easier to photocopy for your class, it also means that readers suddenly sense a shift in the tone of the book and lose some of the fascinating images that kept them glued to the page for the preceding 300 pages. However, at least there is a section on "what you personally can do to help solve the climate crisis" and it is full of practical, realistic suggestions. It includes a Web link to calculate your own production of greenhouse gases, and suggests alterations to your home, office, and driving that can lessen your impact. Overall, after reading this book, I have decided to assign it as a required text for my ecology course next semester and will scan in many of the figures to incorporate into all my classes.



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