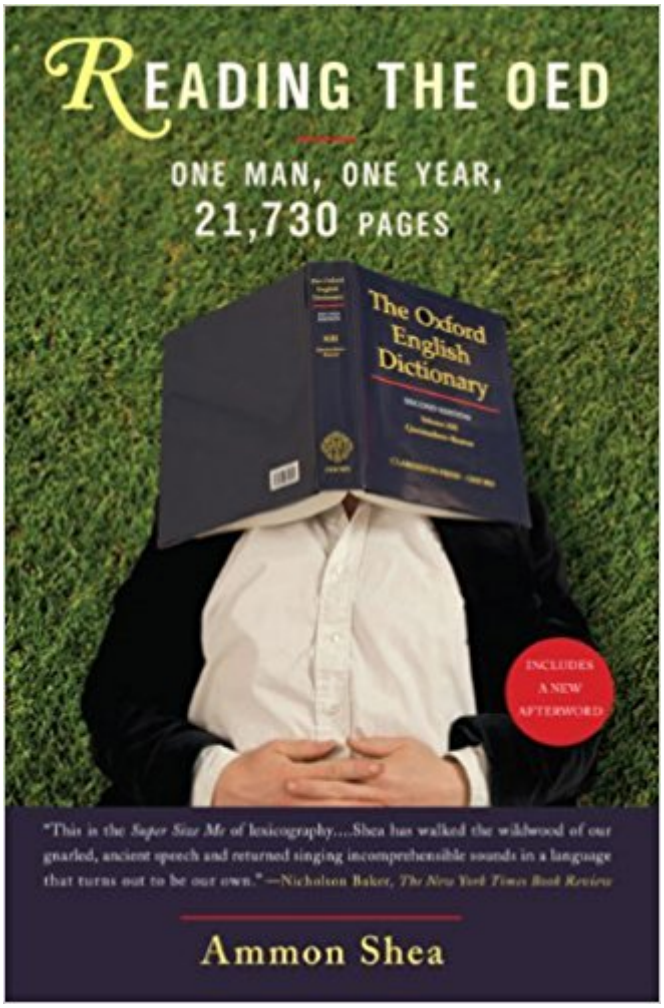
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Reading The OED: One Man, One Year, 21,730 Pages



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Synopsis

An obsessive word lover’s account of reading the entire Oxford English Dictionary, hailed as "the Super Size Me of lexicography.""I’m reading the OED so you don’t have to," says Ammon Shea on his slightly masochistic journey to scale the word lover’s Mount Everest: the Oxford English Dictionary. In 26 chapters filled with sharp wit, sheer delight, and a documentarian’s keen eye, Shea shares his year inside the OED, delivering a hair-pulling, eye-crossing account of reading every word.

Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: TarcherPerigee; Reprint edition (May 5, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0399535055

ISBN-13: 978-0399535055

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.7 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 65 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #692,260 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #66 inÃ Â Books > Reference > Encyclopedias & Subject Guides > Humor #72 inÃ Â Books > Humor & Entertainment > Humor > Language #789 inÃ Â Books > Reference > Words, Language & Grammar > Reference

Customer Reviews

SheaÃ¢â ¬â„¢sÃ Â engougement (Ã¢â ¬Å“irrational fondnessÃ¢â ¬Â•) for dictionaries led him to spend a year reading through all 20 volumes of the Oxford English Dictionary, and he describes this account as Ã¢â ¬Å“the thinking manÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Cliff Notes to the greatest dictionary in the world.Ã¢â ¬Â• For each letter of the alphabet heÃ Â provides a handful of his favorite words and his own humorous glosses, along withÃ Â musings onÃ Â the history of the OED, dictionaries in general, and hisÃ Â reading life. (He does most of his OED reading at the Hunter College Library and finds himself turning into one of those Ã¢â ¬Å“Library PeopleÃ¢â ¬Â• as the year goes by.)Ã Â He shares a number of words that, though they have fallen out of the common vocabulary,Ã Â could be put to excellent use today: empleomania: Ã¢â ¬Å“a manic compulsion to hold public officeÃ¢â ¬Â•; zabernism: Ã¢â ¬Å“a misuse of military authority.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã Â The book will happify (Ã¢â ¬Å“make happyÃ¢â ¬Â•) word and dictionary lovers, who will be able toÃ Â read it in an hour or two, much less time than it takes to read the OED. --Mary Ellen Quinn --This text

refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Oddly inspiring...Shea has walked the wildwood of our gnarled, ancient speech and returned singing incomprehensible sounds in a language that turns out to be our own." -Nicholson Baker, New York Times Book Review "Delicious...a lively lexicon." -O, The Oprah Magazine "Readworthy." -William Safire, The New York Times Magazine

If you count browsing through word books among your favorite time-killers ... If you watch "My Fair Lady" more for Rex Harrison’s role than Audrey Hepburn’s ... If, when culling your shelves to make room for more books, it’s the word books that are the last to go ... if you think Ammon Shea’s idea of spending a whole year reading the Oxford English Dictionary--all 21,730 pages and "fifty-nine million words of it, give or take a few thousand" and then writing a book about it was a truly inspired idea, this is probably your kind of book. So what’s in it for you? Shea’s answer: "all the words from the OED that I think people would like to know about, if only they didn’t have to read the whole damn dictionary in order to find them."Here are a few from Shea’s collection:Gobemouche (n.) One who believes anything, no matter how absurdHansardize (v.) To show that a person has previously espoused opinions differing from the ones he or she now holds.Mawworm (n.) A hypocrite with pretensions of sanctityPhilodox (n.) A person in love with his own opinionPsittacism (n.) The meaningless or mechanical repetition of words or phrasesSomnificator (n) One who induces sleep in others.Unasinous (adj.) Being equal to another in stupidity

I purchased this book with the intoxicating title for a friend. Thankfully, before I wrapped it, I perused it and then just sat down and read and became infatuated with the concept, the delivery, and with the mirth I experienced. So I purchased an additional three books, keeping one for myself, and the other two for my daughters. If you like words, not just for what they convey, but for their revelations of the intricacies of the English language and for the amazing breadth of meanings and innuendos, this book is for you. If you like sitting with a book in one hand and a paper and pencil at the ready, this book is for you. If you have friends or relatives who will put up with your trying out obtuse and long-dead words on them, this is for you.The introductions to all the chapters are fascinating and telling "essays" of their own. Under R you will be introduced to the esoteric world of lexicographers. Chapter E contains an overview of dictionaries.... In the meantime you are amassing a precious list of words that you intend to work into your writing, if not your daily speech. (When you use the "dead" word within your writing, you can asterisk it and give an explanation at the bottom of your

letter.)Shea has provided us with a tantalizing journey. Wonderful, and jocoserious.Celia L. TippitAstoria, OR

A fun way to learn new words specially chosen by the man who made it his project to browse the dictionary for a year. It’s greatly enjoyable.

Ammon Shea chronicles his year-long reading of the Oxford English Dictionary. All 20 volumes. Even the bibliography. That’s 59 million words, give or take a few thousand, in one year. Along the way, he talks about some of the more interesting words he encounters, a different section for each letter of the alphabet. Who knew that someone who loves to read dictionaries could be so interesting? Give this book a try. You won’t be disappointed. It’s one of the funniest, most-entertaining reads ever.

A book about reading a book? Not just any book but a dictionary, and not just any dictionary but a huge multi-volume one.. Before you write this one off as the most boring topic for a book ever, which it may be in the running for, be intrigued. If you are interested in words, in the history of the English language, if you are annoyed by grammar nazis and those who tell you such and such a word is not a word... Read this and his other book "Bad English". Think a New York furniture mover, coffee addict and dictionary fanatic can’t tell you anything on this subject, Ha! You may even serendipitously find a better word than serendipitous for this discovery. No spoiler read the book.

Ammon Shea read the OED "so that you don’t have to". This account of the experience has one chapter for each letter of the alphabet; each chapter is roughly equally split between a selection of words and definitions and Shea’s musing on some aspect of dictionaries, lexicography, or the logistics of his current project, many of which have to do with finding good places to do his reading.I enjoyed the book, though not quite as much as I had expected to. Shea is a genial guide, and one admires his stamina and enthusiasm. But ultimately the gimmick is a little flimsy to support an entire book. Shea’s random musings are fascinating and quirkily charming, for the most part, and occasionally dull (way too much information about where he was doing his reading). His writing isn’t bad, though it is a little clunky at times, and there are surprising lapses into imprecision:"One of the things that has been painfully apparent as I read through the enormity of the English language is just how little of it I know."Use of the skunked term ’enormity’ distracts the reader unnecessarily here; and even if one allows the meaning of ’great size’ or ’hugeness’, the construction remains

clumsy.In another passage, he refers to the tribe of library denizens (people who spend their days in the New York Public Library reading room) as 'elusive', having told us a paragraph earlier that one of their defining characteristics is their tendency to occupy the same seats, day in, day out.However, it seems unfair to come down on him too harshly for this. Each of us has surely had the experience of staring at a word on the page for too long, until it starts to look really bizarre, just a weird concatenation of random-looking syllables. Or just repeat any word out loud ten times -- by the time you're done it will seem like gibberish. Reading the OED could be enough to unhinge one altogether.Ammon Shea deserves our admiration for having made it through intact. In this account of the journey he has not been completely successful in overcoming a fundamental difficulty, which is that the pleasures of the dictionary are generally private, idiosyncratic, and personal. Hardcore word lovers are likely to find more excitement in the dictionary itself; the rest of us can be grateful for this charming Cook's tour.Of the words I learned from reading the book, among my favorites are:lant: to add urine to ale, to make it strongeryepsen: the amount that can be held in two hands cupped togetherfleeten: having the color of skim milk.As Shea correctly remarks, "It is unclear to me why this is such a repulsive word. But it is."

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