ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION:

What is your favorite Core book?

Jamie Afghani, Class of 2018

If I had to pick just one book, it would be the Five Books of Moses. The Bible as a whole has a lot going for it; but the New Testament tends to borrow from the Old, and I prefer to read from the root and not the leaves. The Pentateuch has been a success for so many years because lends itself to interpretation, allowing it to be used for both good and evil purposes, as most great texts are. This malleability allows people to relate to it as they encounter conflict and need in their own lives—the way, for example, a married couple grappling with the crisis of infertility might find strength in the story of Sara and Jacob.

Frances Gossen, Class of 2018

Although in the space of a second this decision could be easily overturned by the next best Core book I think of, one work that has stayed with me with particular sharpness is Paradise Lost. In our humanities sequence, so much of the reading focuses on an elevation of the human world—Plato’s ideal society, the Way of Laozi—that the scope of Milton’s epic poem seems almost humble. Yes, the history of the Fall could easily be thought of as elevated, but Milton’s telling of the story is decidedly human. When Adam realizes Eve has taken that fatal bite from the fruit of the tree of knowledge, his reaction is relatable. He is shocked. Unlike Eve, he spent their time apart picking roses for her. So innocent! When he realizes that the innocence is gone, and he must choose his future, the ending could not be more touching:

They looking back, all th’ Eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late thir happie seat,

---

1 Clever trick, picking one that is actually five books. —Eds.
Wav’d over by that flaming Brand, the Gate
With dreadful Faces throng’d and fierie Armes:
Som natural tears they drop’d, but wip’d them soon;
The World was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
Through Eden took thir solitarie way.

This is not the Fall as we are used to thinking of it. Milton gives us an ending that is actually a beginning, one leading to all that humanity has done, its successes and failures both. This to me seems hopeful, much as leaving for University did, four years ago, so long ago now.

**Stefanie Grossano, Class of 2016**

I often joke that I live in a closet. My single in a freshman dorm (nevermind that I’m a junior) has barely enough room to stand with my arms outstretched. Despite the limited space, I found a corner for my box of spine-splintered, marked-up, dog-eared Core books. Why, you might ask, would I squander such precious square footage on books from classes I’ve already finished? Partly because I’m sentimental—like that blanket you smuggled to college. My Core books are also a memento. They are a portal back to some of the most intellectually stimulating moments of my undergraduate life so far: the day we chanted *Hare Krishna* in discussion section; our discussing the future of democracy as a culmination to Plato’s *Republic*; that lecturer who told us about the origins of the universe, and how we’re all actually made of star dust. (Crazy, right?) I cherish my Core books for more pragmatic reasons as well. The ideas in them do not die. They nourish my GPA and feed my soul. When my non-Core professors describe something as ‘Machiavellian’, or allude to the Allegory of the Cave, I smile a little to myself, knowing that I do not have to scratch my head. And just as Core has prepared me for the intellectual world, it has prepared me for the real one as well. I can open Aristotle in the busiest hour and remind myself the importance of balance and modera-
tion. I can thumb through *The Life of the Buddha* and recollect the liberation of detachment. When I re-read *Categorically Unequal* I am reminded of my privilege and this renews my dedication to fight injustice. So there my Core books are, shoved into a cardboard box, occupying a tiny spot in my room and a larger spot in my mind. I look forward to the day when I leave this coffin of a room—not only so I can move around freely, but also so these transcendent tomes can occupy a space more fitting of their value.

*Hannah Hamilton, Class of 2017*

I fear that the question, “Which one Core text is your favorite?,” is a disguised way of asking a different question: “To which single ideology do you most tightly subscribe?” Therein lies the rub, for in Core we are not asked to align ourselves with any one viewpoint, but are instead challenged to explore many, to question everything, even our most deeply held beliefs. We are asked by the *Ajax* to confront the suicide of military personnel. Cervantes demands to know what societal forces we think keep us in place. We discuss the beginnings of the universe and the ecology of our own tiny blue dot of a planet. From the facial recognition of lobsters to the melting of ice in spring on Walden Pond, we contemplate, meditate and appreciate the world for what it is, and what it could be. I have read of faithful Penelope, and of the slave girl Hagar, of Confucius and Vergil, Plato and Locke. How can I pick any one book? That would be like picking one particular point-of-view, and I know that the truth is my point-of-view has been informed by all of them.

*Justin Lievano, Class of 2016*

Do I have a favorite Core book? A *favorite*, yes, but a *book*, no. I found a favorite *author* in Core. I find Emily Dickinson’s verse sublime. For a writer who rarely left her home and who never left Amherst, her poetry captures an extraordinary breadth of human experience, and in so doing, captures me as well. The question of her ‘book’ is an interesting one. Dickinson published only a dozen or so poems in her lifetime, all in periodicals. The poet, how-
ever, engaged in a kind of bookmaking on her own. After completing a poem, Dickinson would transcribe the working draft onto fine stationary, creating fair copies that she would stab-bind with needle and thread. One might refer to these booklets, often called fascicles by historians, as Dickinson’s book, for they represent a lifelong project of writing and crafting. Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote in a journal entry: “Make your own Bible. Select and collect all the words and sentences that in all your readings have been to you like the blast of a trumpet.” In Dickinson, I find those verses that call to me, that seem to account for what my life wants, meaning that in a sense, Emily Dickinson’s poetry is a book, the book that is my bible.

Lydia Erickson, Class of 2017

My favorite Core book, which I encountered just this semester, is William Blake’s Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience. Tolkien believed that there was no such thing as writing for children, and I think Blake would have agreed, at least with regard to his poetry. His verse is written in a style that seems on the surface to be something like nursery rhyme—but in its deceptive simplicity, the poet finds a way to combine Otherness with Intimacy. The results are haunting, and often conceal deep layers of social critique. The sounds, and rhythms, the accessible style and complex themes—I just love it. Most of all, I love how well Blake combines his criticism of humanity with a celebration of humanity. The experiences of life, whether good or bad, are all somehow sacred, Blake seems to say.

ANALECTS OF THE CORE

Don Quixote: Finally, from so little sleeping and so much reading, his brain dried up and he went completely out of his mind.