

Why We Chose This Book

In Persuasion Nation is a collection of 12 stories from MacArthur Fellowship recipient, George Saunders. It is, first of all, a vastly entertaining read. Saunders's voice and sense of humor are absolutely unique, and if nothing else, readers will be engaged by the wild creativity and striking absurdity that is to be found on virtually every page. Saunders takes all kinds of inventive premises – a quasi-futuristic advertising organization using teenagers implanted with computer chips, a TV sitcom that progresses into a surrealistic nightmare, as well as a militant army of corporate mascots out for blood – and creates memorable stories that will keep the reader in a constant state of surprise and laughter. At the same time, much of his writing contains disturbing and controversial themes. After a lot of thought about this book, we feel that while certain passages might take readers out of their comfort zones, Saunders's message is crucial for our colleagues to receive.

As a satirist, Saunders uses over-the-top and sometimes grotesque images and situations to hold a mirror to contemporary American society.

He takes aspects of our society and then blows them out of proportion to challenge the reader to reconsider what he or she has previously accepted. In doing this, he pushes the envelope in content matter, including scenes with disturbing violent and sexual imagery. Given the abundance of violence in our culture already, much of it won't be a huge surprise to our campus. Images such as those described in the text are available on television as well as the internet already. By making the images so absurd, we are compelled to notice the violence around us more clearly. We are forced to be more self-aware. For those who haven't been exposed to such realities, this exposure is an important introduction to the world around them. For those who have, this exposure will elicit a strong desire to take action to make beneficial changes to the world we live in.

What makes this book special is its ability to leave a lasting impression on the reader. Saunders's witty irony and weird situations are extremely effective allegorical weapons for making jabs at the politics, corporate culture, advertising, technology, and media industry of contemporary American society. Even more importantly, underneath his deadpan absurdism – or perhaps because of it – Saunders pinpoints truths in and confronts thoughts about love, grief, prejudice, and even what lies beyond death, using his singular and eloquent voice to make a memorable appraisal of not only the American but also the human experience.

-The Honors Seminar Scholars, 2008-2009