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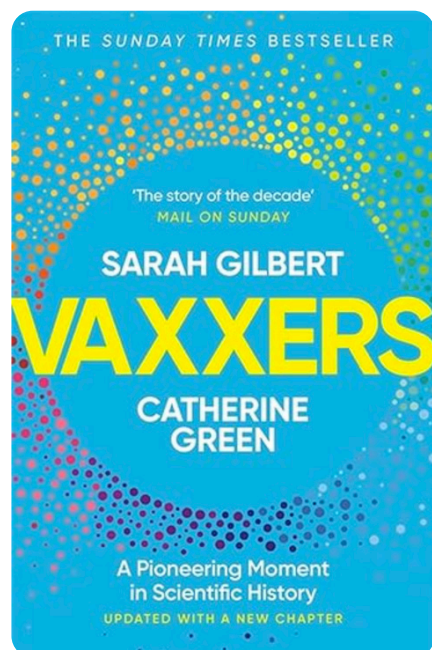
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# Student book reviews

Post-16 students review books they are reading now, revisit classics and see which new works light a spark



## Vaxxers: A Pioneering Moment in Scientific History

Sarah Gilbert and Catherine Green

London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2022

382 pp. £9.99

ISBN 978 1 52936988 5

In a world that often finds itself at the crossroads of scepticism and misinformation, *Vaxxers* emerges as a beacon of hope, knowledge and empowerment. With an unwavering commitment to the truth, the authors' journey through the synthesis of the first COVID-19 vaccines not only educates but will also resonate deeply with readers.

From the very first page, they captivate their audience by weaving together compelling narratives of individuals who have dedicated their lives to advancing the science of vaccinations. These stories are masterfully interspersed with thorough explanations of vaccine development, historical insights and up-to-date

research. Gilbert and Green tell us the story of the problems that they faced in terms of vaccine efficacy but also how they triumph in worldwide distribution of the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine. This rollercoaster journey relates to some of our lives in which, the book teaches, we will triumph through tenacity and diligence.

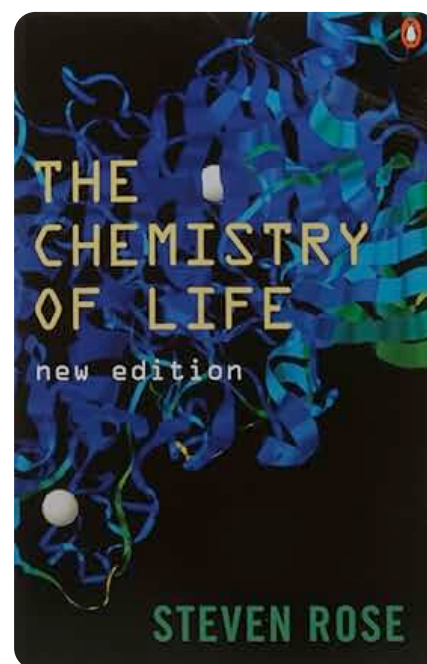
The heart of *Vaxxers* lies in its unapologetic advocacy of science-based decision-making. The authors skilfully dissect the often-bewildering world of vaccine myths and misinformation, equipping readers with the tools they need to critically evaluate sources and make informed choices. Through meticulous research, they unravel the intricate web of falsehoods, ultimately empowering readers to confidently navigate conversations around vaccinations with evidence and compassion. However, what truly sets this book apart is its ability to inspire a sense of agency. The authors show how ordinary individuals, from scientists to healthcare professionals and parents, have taken it upon themselves to champion public health through education and advocacy. Their stories are a testament to the power of collective action and the profound impact that informed voices can have on society.

In a world teeming with uncertainty, *Vaxxers* stands as a resolute declaration of the power of knowledge. It is a captivating journey that informs, engages and, most importantly, empowers. I believe the most powerful message that the book conveys is that consistent hard

work will enable us to really obtain the fruits of our labours. It has inspired me to work even harder regardless of the odds, which is what we should all strive to do.

**Krishnendu Roy**

*St Albans School, Hertfordshire*



## The Chemistry of Life

4th edn. Steven Rose

London: Penguin, 1999

384 pp. £12.99

ISBN 978 0 14 027273 4

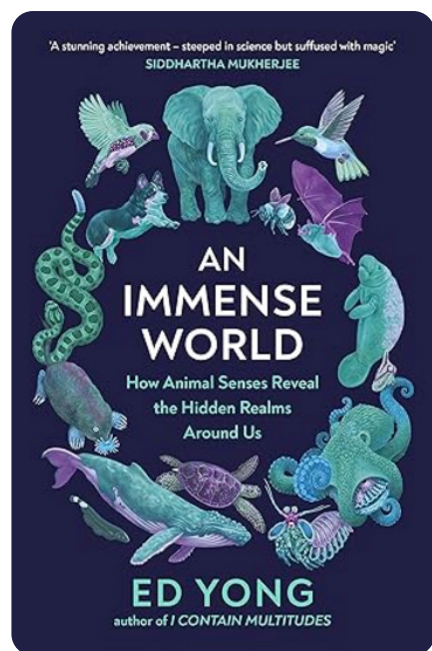
*The Chemistry of Life* is an in-depth analysis of the role chemistry plays in living organisms. The book dives into how our body is able to keep us alive. This fourth edition of the original 1966 book has been revised and updated with new scientific developments of the human genome, protein synthesis and cell regulation. What attracted me to reading this book is the high level of detail and scientific knowledge explained. The level of prior knowledge of biology and



chemistry needed to read the book is merely GCSE level as the book is very good at explaining the basic concepts of chemistry and biology before going into more depth; for example, the whole first chapter is about explaining concepts, from atoms to covalent compounds to ions, electrovalent bonds and buffers. As a whole, the book gave me a great in-depth introduction to the biochemical pathway mechanisms that I will face in year 13 biology and chemistry content. This inspired me to do an online biochemistry course on *FutureLearn*. I would definitely recommend this book to sixth-formers, specifically to be read between years 12 and 13 for a good introduction to the more difficult new content.

**Toby Abrahams**

St Albans School, Hertfordshire



### An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us

Ed Yong

London: Bodley Head, 2022

449 pp. £18.67

ISBN 978 1 84792608 1

I selected the book *An Immense World* because I have a fascination with animals,

particularly how they interact with their environment through their senses and the differences between how they perceive the world and how humans perceive it. *An Immense World* expertly explores these ideas in a well-broken-down narrative in which the author successfully crafts a story of how animals respond to the world through the idea of an *umwelt* [an organism's unique sensory world].

The author balances a conversational tone with scientific facts in a way that makes the information accessible and easy to understand, if a bit technical at times. The book helps put into perspective how we as humans may never fully understand how animals experience the world as some have completely different senses that are beyond our limited comprehension. Humans try to force 'our own sensory world' onto senses that we can't fathom, such as, the ability to detect electrical fields. I found this idea particularly fascinating and it gave me a deeper appreciation of the world around us. I thought this book was very thought provoking and would recommend it to anyone who wants to develop their understanding of animals and our natural world.

**Elise Paturel**

Beaulieu Convent School, Jersey

### The Song of the Cell: An Exploration of Medicine and the New Human

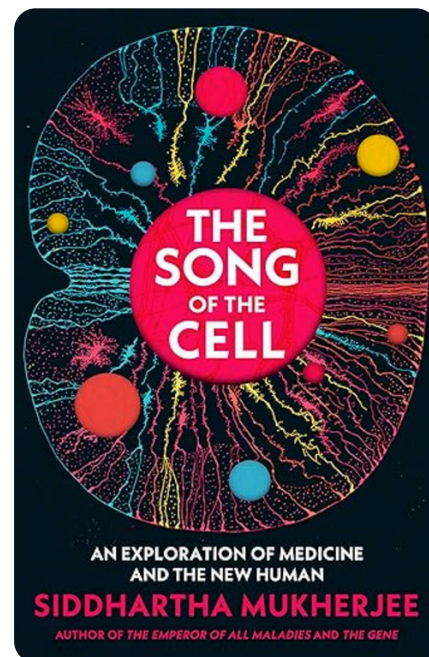
Siddhartha Mukherjee

London: Bodley Head, 2022

496 pp. £17.00

ISBN 978 1 84792597 8

This book appealed to me because of its combination of scientific content and patient case studies, which were of particular interest to me as a prospective medical student, as



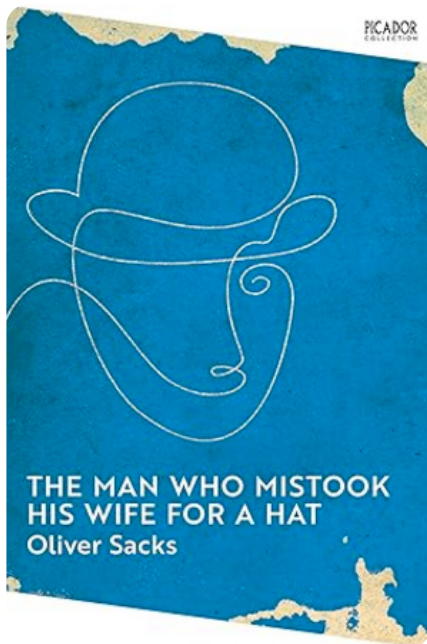
well as the author's personal experiences. This diversity of subject matter was made all the more compelling by the author's clear passion for his work.

Having studied 'changes in medicine' during my history GCSE, I particularly enjoyed the focus on the history and development of medicine and cellular biology that is a central theme throughout. I was surprised by the vast time frame and range of areas in medicine that the author was able to cover, while ensuring that each section was still explained in detail, making it an engaging read, with interesting and varied links between topics. I would say that this book is definitely suitable for a sixth-form student studying science, but the clear explanations make it equally accessible for readers without a science background.

Overall, I found this book thought provoking and it helped me to learn a lot more about different areas within medicine and cellular biology. Having previously read another book by Siddhartha Mukherjee, I am keen to explore more of his work in the future.

**Poppy Pendergast**

Beaulieu Convent School, Jersey



## The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat

Oliver Sacks  
London: Picador, reprint, 2014  
233 pp. £8.97  
ISBN 978 0 33052362 2

I chose this book because of my deep interests in psychology and neurology. I wanted a book that could both teach me more about neuroscience – terminology and phenomena – as well

as be a fun and captivating read, which it was. This book is written very anecdotally, with the author giving an account of neurological cases he has come across. With my prior understanding, I could easily follow along with the book, especially with its anecdotal nature and emotive elements. I learnt of a wide range of frequently described 'phantasmagoric' conditions, which I went on to research (phantom limbs, agnosia, and Witzelsucht), but I also understood how these affect the people with the condition and the nature of our 'human' qualities.

This book reinforced my fascination with the brain, particularly how a specific part not working can have such serious and unique effects on behaviour, and that no two cases are the same. After reading it, I am still looking to study neuroscience and would love to discover more about the conditions described. I would

highly recommend this book to someone who is looking to follow the same path or who has a fascination with the complexities of the human body.

**Siobhan Stears**

*St Albans School, Hertfordshire*

### Acknowledgement

Thanks to Deepika Narula, Research and Outreach Coordinator and teacher of chemistry at St Albans School, Hertfordshire, and to Jon Hale, Assistant Head Teacher and biology teacher at Beaulieu Convent School, Jersey, for supporting the student reviewers at their schools.

**Maria Kettle**, Book Reviews Editor, worked as a physics teacher in sixth-form settings for 18 years, then 11½ years as Outreach Officer, Department of Engineering, University of Cambridge. She has supported sixth-formers through all aspects of the university admissions process.

## Do you have any students who may be interested in writing a 200-word student book review?

**If so, please contact our book reviews editor via [StudentBOOKSase@gmail.com](mailto:StudentBOOKSase@gmail.com)**

The purpose of our student book review section is to share books that students have selected, a chance to revisit popular science classics. This is in addition to our reviews of new publications where teacher reviewers are issued with a copy of the book to review.

Participating teachers will be provided with access to a spreadsheet listing the books reviewed so far to avoid duplication and a writing frame to support students in writing and structuring their reviews.

## Why you should encourage your students to review books for SSR

Reading popular science books gives students context for their studies, it promotes wider understanding of their course content. A good author will help students to identify their favourite parts of subjects and guide their choices for the next steps after sixth form.

Writing reviews will make your students reflect on what they have learned from their reading; that reflection is ideal content for personal statements, especially UCAS.