**Reading Materials**

This document provides information about the reading materials for this theme, including a complete list of available titles, as well as book summaries and author information for each.

**Complete Book List**

Included below is the complete list of books which have been vetted and recommended for this theme, and which are available in inventory from the ICfL.

* *Mind Fixers: Psychiatry's Troubled Search for the Biology of Mental Illness*, by Anne Harrington. Published 2019, 384 pages.
* *Klara and the Sun,* by Kazuo Ishiguro. Published 2021, 320 pages.
* *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest,* by Susan Simard. Published 2021, 368 pages.
* *Crack in Creation: Gene Editing and the Unthinkable Power to Control Evolution,* by Jennifer Doudna. Published 2018, 304 pages.
* *Mama’s Last Hug: Animal Emotions and What they Tell Us about Ourselves,* by Franz de Waal. Published 2019, 352 pages.
* *The Water Knife,* by Paolo Bacigalupi. Published 2015, 384 pages.
* *A Briefer History of Time,* by Stephen Hawking with Leonard Mlodinow. Published 2008, 162 pages.
* *Alone Together, Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other,* by Sherry Turkle. Published 2017, 400 pages.
* *Animals in Translation: Using the Mysteries of Autism to Decode Animal Behavior,* by Temple Grandin. Published 2006, 358 pages.
* *Born in Africa: The Quest for the Origins of Human Life,* by Martin Meredith. Published 2012, 230 pages.
* *Physics of the Impossible: A Scientific Exploration into the World of Phasers, Force Fields, Teleportation, and Time Travel,* by Michio Kaku. Published 2009, 352 pages.
* *The Botany of Desire: A Plant’s Eye View of the World,* by Michael Pollan. Published 2002, 304 pages.
* *The Control of Nature,* by John McPhee. Published 1990, 288 pages.
* *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks,* by Rebecca Skloot. Published 2011, 400 pages.
* *The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher,* by Lewis Thomas. Published 1978, 160 pages.

**Book Summaries & Author Information**

Included below are the detailed summaries of each book available for this theme, as well as background information about the author.

**Mind Fixers: Psychiatry’s Troubled Search for the Biology of Mental Illness**, by Anne Harrington. Published 2019, 384 pages.

Anyone who has wandered the bewildering corridors of mental illness, whether on their own behalf or alongside a loved one, learns that pat answers and clear solutions are not on offer.

What *Mind Fixers* does offer to someone who has explored this labyrinth is context. Every current idea about mental illness has a history. That history is tangled in knowledge and trends that move through religion, popular culture, science, and philosophy. Out of this comes a wash of facts, anecdotes, and opinions that a person grappling with mental illness must make sense of, somehow.

Harrington walks the reader through the history of the illnesses which today are called schizophrenia, depression, and bipolar disorder. She points out the many different levels of interpretation and judgement that can shape narratives about mental suffering and relief. Harrington offers a context for treatments like lobotomies and electroshock, as well as for the roles of Big Pharma and the DSM today. She explains why some researchers have taken a keen interest in the placebo effect.

Author Information

Anne Harrington (b.1960) is a professor of the History of Science at Harvard University. Her research interests include the history of psychiatry, neuroscience, and cognitive science. She is the author of four books and numerous articles.

**Klara and the Sun**, by Kazuo Ishiguro. Published 2021, 320 pages.

On the surface, this is a simple tale of a near-futuristic society where automation has replaced many people in the workforce, children can be engineered to have superior intelligence, and people can acquire Artificial Friends—AI robots. Klara is one such robot, and the story is told from “her” point of view. The deceptively simple language and casual pacing belie the deep issues the story explores. Readers will end up grappling with questions about automation, empathy, caregiving, love and whether a person can be effectively replaced by a machine. What responsibility will humans have for the “well-being” of these machines? Other details of the fictional society offer a chance to ask what directions we hope artificial intelligence will take humanity. Readers might forever think differently about the word “robot.”

Author Information

Kazuo Ishiguro (b. 1954) became a British citizen in 1983. He was born in Nagasaki, Japan, and emigrated to Britain with his parents when he was five. He is the author of numerous award-winning novels, screenplays, and short stories. His novel *Remains of the Day* won the Booker Prize in 1989. In 2017, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

**Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest**, by Susan Simard. Published 2021, 368 pages.

Suzanne Simard grew up in rural British Columbia on land her family had logged for generations. She does not remember a time when she wasn’t immersed in the natural world, and she always felt a connection to the trees. She relates an incident from her childhood which made her determined to study how all the elements of the natural world were related when she grew up.

Simard studied forestry and worked in the timber industry but became increasingly troubled by the contradictions between the science underpinning industrial timber production and her instincts and observations about the forests she was hired to “treat.” Despite obstacles and ridicule, she became a pioneering researcher who developed a scientific understanding of how a forest is a vast web of interconnection. Her experiments demonstrated how underground fungal networks allow trees to support one another’s well-being by sharing nutrients and communicating about pests. Her research upends a model that views competition among species or individual trees as the driving factor in forest growth. This is a personal story of the life and work of a scientist working at the cusp of a paradigm shift.

Author Information

Suzanne Simard (b. 1961) grew up in rural British Columbia on land that had been in her family for generations. She received her PhD in Forest Sciences from Oregon State University and is currently a professor in the Department of Forest and Conservation Sciences at the University of British Columbia. She has given several TED talks about her pioneering theories of forest ecology.

**Crack in Creation: Gene Editing and the Unthinkable Power to Control Evolution**, by Jennifer Doudna. Published 2018, 304 pages.

The authors of *A Crack in Creation* tell us in the prologue that since the invention of CRISPR, “an organism’s entire DNA content, including all its genes, has become almost as editable as a simple piece of text.” They believe that the ethical issues raised by the CRISPR technology, which they helped to invent, are as deep, confusing, and important as those surrounding the development of atomic energy. This book is one of their attempts to educate the public about all of the ramifications of this “miracle” technology because they believe the public should be aware of and involved in the decision-making for its application and use.

The first section of this book is dense with technical information. It explains in detail what CRISPR is, the collaborations from which it was developed, and how it differs from other genetic modification tools. The second half of the book describes the many ways that CRISPR can be used—for good and for ill.

Jennifer Doudna, a coauthor of *A Crack in Creation*, won the Nobel Prize for her work on the development of CRISPR. She wants us to ask ourselves where we should draw the line between using CRISPR to develop vaccines and cure diseases and using it to permanently alter the human race by designing “better” humans.? What effects might human alteration of genes have on all the other life forms on the planet? Can this technology really be controlled? Doudna has considered these conundrums since her pioneering work began. The authors argue strongly for the public to become engaged in this conversation.

Author Information

Jennifer Doudna (b. 1964) is a professor of Chemistry and Molecular and Cell Biology at the University of California, Berkeley. She shared the 2020 Nobel Prize in Chemistry with Emmanuelle Charpentier for her role in the development of the genome editing tool CRISPR. That same year she was runner-up for the Time Person of the Year. She grew up in Hilo, Hawaii and received a PhD from Harvard Medical School.

**Mama’s Last Hug**, by Franz de Waal. Published 2019, 352 pages.

Do animals have emotions in the same ways that humans do? That’s the question Franz de Waal raises after 4 decades of studying the behavior of our primate cousins. His answer is yes. He offers a readable discussion of what an emotion actually is, how emotions are not only different from feelings, but also inseparable from thinking. Such ideas remain controversial in animal studies. By telling stories of his many research experiences observing and interacting with primates over his long career, de Waal makes it hard for a reader to maintain the view that emotions, motivation, a sense of fairness and self-awareness are solely human qualities. In addition, he offers insights into the history and ethics of research with primates.

Author Information

Frans de Waal (b. 1948) is a primatologist and ethologist who was born in The Netherlands. He is currently a professor of Primate Behavior at Emory University and director of the Living Links Center at the Yerkes National Primate Research Center at Emory. He is the author of numerous books on primate social behavior.

**The Water Knife**, by Paolo Bacigalupi. Published 2015, 384 pages.

The novel opens with Angel Velasquez, a water knife, doing his job—cutting off water to an entire city at the behest of Catherine Case, a water baron. We soon meet Maria Villarosa, one of the hordes of displaced people from Texas, and Lucy Monroe, a journalist who knows too many things other people want to find out. Meanwhile, California, Arizona, Utah, and Nevada are all fighting for the same water in the courts. Unlikely alliances develop. Beliefs and loyalties are challenged. This genre-bender is part noir crime thriller, part dystopian fiction, sometimes violent, and often dark.

Written in 2015, The Water Knife is a work of speculative fiction whose plot has become increasingly plausible. In the summer of 2021, six years after the book’s publication, the American West experienced a real-life onslaught of record-breaking and deadly heat waves and exceptional draught. As our reality bends closer and closer toward the plot of *The Water Knife*, readers will find ourselves asking, will this be our future and if not, what’s ahead?

Author Information

Paolo Bacigalupi (b. 1972) is the author of several novels for both teens and adults as well as numerous essays and short stories. His first novel, *The Windup Girl* won both the Hugo and Nebula awards. His work addresses the implications of technology for the future of humanity. His essays have appeared in *High Country News* and *The Idaho Statesman*.

**A Briefer History of Time**, by Stephen Hawking. Published 2008, 162 pages.

Stephen Hawking’s worldwide bestseller *A Brief History of Time* remains a landmark volume in scientific writing. But for readers who have asked for a more accessible formulation of its key concepts—the nature of space and time, the role of God in creation, and the history and future of the universe—A *Briefer History of Time* is Professor Hawking’s response. Although “briefer,” this book is much more than a mere explanation of Hawking’s earlier work. *A Briefer History of Time* both clarifies and expands on the great subjects of the original and records the latest developments in the field—from string theory to the search for a unified theory of all the forces of physics. Thirty-seven full-color illustrations enhance the text and make *A Briefer History of Time* an exhilarating and must-have addition in its own right to the great literature of science and ideas.

Author Information

Stephen Hawking (1942-2018) was the former Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at the University of Cambridge and author of *A Brief History of Time*, which was an international bestseller. In 1963, Hawking contracted motor neuron disease and was given two years to live. Yet he went on to Cambridge to become a brilliant researcher and Professorial Fellow at Gonville and Caius College. Professor Hawking was awarded over a dozen honorary degrees and was awarded the CBE in 1982. He was a fellow of the Royal Society and a Member of the US National Academy of Science. Stephen Hawking is regarded as one of the most brilliant theoretical physicists since Einstein.

Leonard Mlodinow was born in Chicago, Illinois, to immigrant Jewish parents who were holocaust survivors. He received his PhD in theoretical physics from the University of California at Berkeley and is now at Caltech. His book *The Drunkard's Walk: How Randomness Rules our Lives* was a New York Times Bestseller, Editor's Choice, and Notable Book of the Year, and was short-listed for the Royal Society book award. His other books include two co-authored with physicist Stephen Hawking -- *A Briefer History of Time* and *The Grand Design*. In addition to his books and research articles, he has written for the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, and Forbes magazine, among other publications, and for television series such as McGyver and Star Trek: The Next Generation.

**Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each other**, by Sherry Turkle. Published 2017, 400 pages.

Facebook, Twitter, Ticktock, “Smart” phones, robotic pets, robotic lovers; thirty years ago we asked what we would use computers for. Now the question is what don’t we use them for. Now, through technology, we create, navigate, and perform our emotional lives.Winston Churchill once argued “We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.” The same is true of our digital technologies. Technology promises to let us do anything from anywhere with anyone. But it also drains us as we try to do everything everywhere. We begin to feel overwhelmed and depleted by the lives technology makes possible. We may be free to work from anywhere, but we are also prone to being lonely everywhere. In a surprising twist, relentless connection leads to a new solitude. We turn to new technology to fill the void, but as technology ramps up, our emotional lives ramp down.

Alone Together is the result of MIT technology and society specialist Sherry Turkle’s nearly fifteen-year exploration of our lives on the digital terrain. Based on interviews with hundreds of children and adults, it describes new, unsettling relationships between friends, lovers, parents, and children, and new instabilities in how we understand privacy and community, intimacy and solitude. It is a story of emotional dislocation, of risks taken unknowingly. But it is also a story of hope, for even in the places where digital saturation is greatest, there are people—especially the young—who are asking the hard questions about costs, about checks and balances, about returning to the sustenance of direct human connection.

Author Information

A professor, author, consultant, and researcher, Sherry Turkle has spent the last 30 years researching the psychology of people’s relationships with technology. She is the Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology in the Program in Science, Technology, and Society at MIT, as well as the founder and current director of the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self, a center of research and reflection on the evolving connections between people and artifacts. Referred to by many as the "Margaret Mead of digital culture," Sherry has investigated the intersection of digital technology and human relationships from the early days of personal computers to our current world of robotics, artificial intelligence, social networking, and mobile connectivity.

**Animals in Translation: Using the Mysteries of Autism to Decode Animal Behavior**, by Temple Grandin. Published 2006, 358 pages.

Temple Grandin's *Animals in Translation* speaks in the clear voice of a woman who emerged from the other side of autism, bringing with her an extraordinary message about how animals think and feel. Temple's professional training as an animal scientist, and her history as a person with autism have given her a perspective like that of no other expert in the field. Standing at the intersection of autism and animals, she offers unparalleled observations and groundbreaking ideas about both. Autistic people can often think the way animals think -- in fact, Grandin and co-author Catherine Johnson see autism as a kind of waystation on the road from animals to humans -- putting autistic people in the perfect position to translate "animal talk." Temple is a faithful guide into their world, exploring animal pain, fear, aggression, love, friendship, communication, learning, and, yes, even animal genius. Not only are animals much smarter than anyone ever imagined, in some cases they are outright brilliant.

The sweep of *Animals in Translation* is immense, merging an animal scientist's thirty years of study with her keen perceptions as a person with autism -- Temple sees what others cannot.

Author Information

Grandin was diagnosed with autism in 1950. Having been labeled and diagnosed with brain damage at age two, she was placed in a structured nursery school with what she considers to have been good teachers. Grandin's mother spoke to a doctor who suggested speech therapy, and she hired a nanny who spent hours playing turn-based games with Grandin and her sister. At age four, Grandin began talking and making progress. She considers herself lucky to have had supportive mentors from primary school onwards. However, Grandin has said that middle and high school were the worst parts of her life. She was the "nerdy kid" whom everyone teased. At times, while she walked down the street, people would taunt her by saying "tape recorder," because she would repeat things over and over again. Grandin states that, "I could laugh about it now, but back then it really hurt." After graduating from Hampshire Country School, a boarding school for gifted children in Rindge, New Hampshire, in 1966, Grandin went on to earn her bachelor's degree in psychology from Franklin Pierce College in 1970, her master's degree in animal science from Arizona State University in 1975, and her doctoral degree in animal science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1989. She received an Honorary doctorate degree from the Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario, Canada at the 2012 Winter Convocation where she was the keynote speaker.

**Born in Africa: The Quest for the Origins of Human Life**, by Martin Meredith. Published 2012, 230 pages.

Africa does not give up its secrets easily. Buried there lie answers about the origins of humankind. After a century of investigation, scientists have transformed our understanding about the beginnings of human life. But vital clues still remain hidden. In *Born in Africa*, Martin Meredith follows the trail of discoveries about human origins made by scientists over the last hundred years, recounting their intense rivalry, personal feuds, and fierce controversies, as well as their feats of skill and endurance. The results have been momentous. Scientists have identified more than twenty species of extinct humans. They have firmly established Africa as the birthplace not only of humankind but also of modern humans. They have revealed how early technology, language ability, and artistic endeavor all originated in Africa; and they have shown how small groups of Africans spread out from Africa in an exodus sixty thousand years ago to populate the rest of the world. We have all inherited an African past.

Author Information

Martin Meredith is a historian, journalist, and biographer who has written several books on Africa and its modern history. Meredith first worked as a foreign correspondent in Africa for the Observer and Sunday Times, then as a research fellow at St Antony's College, Oxford. Living near Oxford, he is now an independent commentator and author. Meredith's writing has been described as authoritative and well-documented, despite the pessimism inherent in his subject matter.

**Physics of the Impossible: A Scientific Exploration into the World of Phasers, Force Fields, Teleportation, and Time Travel**, by Michio Kaku. Published 2009, 352 pages.

A fascinating exploration of the science of the impossible—from death rays and force fields to invisibility cloaks—revealing to what extent such technologies might be achievable decades or millennia into the future. One hundred years ago, scientists would have said that lasers, televisions, and the atomic bomb were beyond the realm of physical possibility. In *Physics of the Impossible*, the renowned physicist Michio Kaku explores to what extent the technologies and devices of science fiction that are deemed equally impossible today might well become commonplace in the future. From teleportation to telekinesis, Kaku uses the world of science fiction to explore the fundamentals—and the limits—of the laws of physics as we know them today. He ranks the impossible technologies by categories—Class I, II, and III, depending on when they might be achieved, within the next century, millennia, or perhaps never.

Author Information

Michio Kaku is a futurist, popularizer of science, and theoretical physicist, as well as a bestselling author and the host of two radio programs. He is the co-founder of string field theory (a branch of string theory) and continues Einstein’s search to unite the four fundamental forces of nature into one unified theory. He holds the Henry Semat Chair and Professorship in theoretical physics and a joint appointment at City College of New York and the Graduate Center of C.U.N.Y. He is also a visiting professor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton and is a Fellow of the American Physical Society.

**The Botany of Desire: A Plant’s Eye View of the World**, by Michael Pollan. Published 2002, 304 pages.

Michael Pollan’s bestselling book has been described by one reviewer as a “don’t-wanna-put-it-down unspooling of the socio-political, economic and historical forces that led to the cultivation of four crops.” It may surprise us to discover that any kind of discourse focusing on the subjects of apples, tulips, potatoes, and marijuana would be likely to rivet our attention (with the possible exception of the last item), but that proves to be the case here because the author is part botanist, part ordinary backyard gardener, part historian, and part journalist.

In his introduction, Pollan tells us he reversed the notion that we elect to plant this or that crop and posits the question, “Did I choose to plant these potatoes, or did the potato make me do it?” He decided both statements are true, and he explains that his book “is as much about the human desires that connect us to these plants as it is about the plants themselves.” Accordingly, he constructs each of his four chapters around a specified “desire”: the apple for sweetness, the tulip for beauty, marijuana for intoxication, and the potato for control. The desires upon which Pollan bases his book are variously interpreted. For example, he observes that the introduction of the potato into Ireland from the New World at the end of the sixteenth century gave the Irish, whose land was not hospitable to grain crops, “a welcome measure of control over their lives.” Meanwhile, however, Pollan narrates his experiences planting a new “genetically engineered” potato from Monsanto in his own garden –a different kind of “control” altogether.

Author Information

Michael Pollan was born in 1955 and grew up on Long Island. He received his B.A. from Bennington College and studied at Oxford University before completing his master’s degree in English at Columbia University in 1981. His father is the well-known attorney and financial and life consultant, Stephen M. Pollan, author with Mark Levine of such books as *Fire Your Boss* and *It’s All in Your Head: Thinking Your Way to Happiness.* His sister is actress Tracy Pollan. Michael Pollan’s books include *A Place of My Own* (1997), which recounts his building of a “one-room outbuilding” to use as his study (the ten-page index makes good reading in its own right), and *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (2006), a critique of modern agribusiness, which the New York Times names one of the five best nonfiction books of the year. His most recent book, *How to Change Your Mind*, explores the relationship between psychedelic drugs, consciousness, mental health, and transcendence.

**The Control of Nature**, by John McPhee. Published 1990, 288 pages.

The Control of Nature is John McPhee's bestselling account of places where people are locked in combat with nature. Taking us deep into these contested territories, McPhee details the strategies and tactics through which people attempt to control nature. Most striking is his depiction of the main contestants: nature in complex and awesome guises, and those attempting to wrest control from her - stubborn, sometimes foolhardy, more often ingenious, and always arresting characters. For some years, he had been planning a book about places in the world where people have been engaged in all-out battles with nature, about (in the words of the book itself) "any struggle against natural forces--heroic or venal, rash or well advised--when human beings conscript themselves to fight against the earth, to take what is not given, to rout the destroying enemy, to surround the base of Mt. Olympus demanding and expecting the surrender of the gods." In the natural cycles of the Mississippi's deltaic plain, In Iceland, at some of the more expensive real estate in Los Angeles. Taking us deep into these contested territories, McPhee details the strategies and tactics through which people attempt to control nature.

Author Information

John McPhee was born in Princeton, New Jersey, and was educated at Princeton University and Cambridge University. His writing career began at Time magazine and led to his long association with The New Yorker, where he has been a staff writer since 1965. Also in 1965, he published his first book, *A Sense of Where You Are*, with Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, and in the years since, he has written nearly 30 books, including *Oranges* (1967), *Coming into the Country* (1977), *The Control of Nature* (1989), *The Founding Fish* (2002), *Uncommon Carriers* (2007), and *Silk Parachute* (2011). *Encounters with the Archdruid* (1972), and *The Curve of Binding Energy* (1974) were nominated for National Book Awards in the category of science. McPhee received the Award in Literature from the Academy of Arts and Letters in 1977. In 1999, he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for *Annals of the Former World*. He lives in Princeton, New Jersey.

**The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks**, by Rebecca Skloot. Published 2011, 400 pages.

From a single, abbreviated life grew a seemingly immortal line of cells that made some of the most crucial innovations in modern science possible. And from that same life, and those cells, Rebecca Skloot has fashioned in *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* a fascinating and moving story of medicine and family, of how life is sustained in laboratories and in memory.

Henrietta Lacks was a mother of five in Baltimore, a poor African American migrant from the tobacco farms of Virginia, who died from a cruelly aggressive cancer at the age of 30 in 1951. A sample of her cancerous tissue, taken without her knowledge or consent, as was the custom then, turned out to provide one of the holy grails of mid-century biology: human cells that could survive--even thrive--in the lab. Known as HeLa cells, their stunning potency gave scientists a building block for countless breakthroughs, beginning with the cure for polio. Meanwhile, Henrietta's family continued to live in poverty and frequently poor health, and their discovery decades later of her unknowing contribution--and her cells' strange survival--left them full of pride, anger, and suspicion. For a decade, Skloot doggedly but compassionately gathered the threads of these stories, slowly gaining the trust of the family while helping them learn the truth about Henrietta, and with their aid she tells a rich and haunting story that asks the questions, who owns our bodies, and who carries our memories?

Author Information

Rebecca Skloot is an award-winning science writer whose work has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine; O, The Oprah Magazine; Discover*; and many other publications. She specializes in narrative science writing and has explored a wide range of topics, including goldfish surgery, tissue ownership rights, race and medicine, food politics, and packs of wild dogs in Manhattan. She has worked as a correspondent for WNYC’s *Radiolab* and PBS’s Nova *ScienceNOW*. She and her father, Floyd Skloot, are co-editors of *The Best American Science Writing 2011*.

**The Lives of a Cell**, by Lewis Thomas. Published 1978, 160 pages.

This book contains 29 short essays by physician-scientist Lewis Thomas. Originally published in the early 1970s in The New England Journal of Medicine, the essays center on science and range in focus from the molecular (e.g., DNA), to the subcellular, to the organism, to social interactions, and all the way up to the search for extra-terrestrial life. Some themes reappear in several essays: science as a grand, engaging enterprise worthy of the brightest minds; communication between organisms creating the intricate dance of the social organism; the relationship of man to both nature and the grand scheme of the universe. Lewis is fascinated by communication not only at the cellular level, but also at the pheromonal and cerebral level: "Language, once it comes alive, behaves like an active, motile organism" (90). The ant and its colony, as an example of a simultaneous individual and integrated social organism, form a link for Thomas between the enclosed unit of a cell and the complex interactions of a society. Indeed, macro-micro comparisons continue throughout the essays, and even conclude the final essay, "The World's Biggest Membrane," which lauds the atmosphere as protector, filter, and provider: "Taken all in all, the sky is a miraculous achievement. It works, and for what it is designed to accomplish it is as infallible as anything in nature…it is far and away the grandest product of collaboration in all of nature" (48).

Author Information

Lewis Thomas (November 25, 1913–December 3, 1993) was a physician, poet, etymologist, essayist, administrator, educator, policy advisor, and researcher. Thomas was born in Flushing, New York and attended Princeton University and Harvard Medical School. He became Dean of Yale Medical School and New York University School of Medicine, and President of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Institute. His formative years as an independent medical researcher were at Tulane University School of Medicine. He was invited to write regular essays in the New England Journal of Medicine and won a National Book Award for the 1974 collection of those essays, *The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher*. He also won a Christopher Award for this book. Two other collections of essays (from NEJM and other sources) are *The Medusa and the Snail* and *Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler's Ninth Symphony*.