

UC SANTA BARBARA

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‘UCSB Reads’ Picks ‘Moby-Duck’ by Donovan Hohn

Questions can be like ocean currents, notes author Donovan Hohn. "Wade in a little too far and they can carry you away. Follow one line of inquiry and it will lead you to another, and another." Hohn knows from whence he speaks.

When the former senior editor at Harper's Magazine heard about the mysterious loss of thousands of bath toys at sea, he began to ask questions. His search for answers is recounted in his book, "Moby-Duck: The True Story of 28,800 Bath Toys Lost at Sea and of the Beachcombers, Oceanographers, Environmentalists and Fools, Including the Author, Who Went in Search of Them" (Viking, 2011). The UC Santa Barbara Library has chosen the book as this year's selection for UCSB Reads.

An annual winter quarter event, UCSB Reads engages the campus and the Santa Barbara community in conversations about a key topic while reading the same book. The theme for 2012 is "Making an Impact. What's Yours?" UCSB Reads is presented by the UCSB Library, in partnership with the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor. A committee that included faculty and staff members, administrators, and student representatives made this year's selection.

Beginning at 11:30 a.m. on Thursday, January 12, the UCSB Library will distribute 2,500 free copies of the book to registered UCSB students. The book will also be available at the UCSB Bookstore. The Antioch University Library, the Luria Library at Santa Barbara City College, the Westmont College Library, and local high schools are

partners in the program, and the book is also a Santa Barbara Public Library System "Read" selection for this winter. Extra copies will be available for loan throughout Santa Barbara County, including a downloadable electronic version.

Other program co-sponsors include the UCSB Associated Students Coastal Fund and the Plastic Pollution Coalition.

A variety of free campus and community events and discussions about the book will take place throughout winter quarter in public libraries and at UCSB. Among these are a series of Community Conversations, which will feature UCSB faculty members, as well as faculty from other campuses, discussing topics related to the book and to the 2012 theme. In addition, a presentation by the author is scheduled for Monday, March 5, in Campbell Hall.

"Among many other things, the plastic ducks that set this book going bring us face to face with another way in which our dependence on oil impacts our planet -- plastic pollution," noted Bruce Tiffney, dean of the College of Creative Studies, professor of earth science, and a member of the UCSB Reads Advisory Committee. "We know global warming results from fossil fuels, but these same fuels create plastic bags, bottles and ...

ducks -- structures whose individual environmental impact will be with us for decades if not centuries, but which are normally hidden from our consciousness."

When Hohn set about uncovering the mystery of the lost bath toys, he expected to interview a few oceanographers, talk with beachcombers, and brush up on his knowledge of Arctic science and geography. Little did he know his quest would lead him into the secretive world of shipping conglomerates, the derring-do of Arctic researchers and maverick sailors, and the shadowy world of Chinese toy factories.

Hohn is the recipient of the Whiting Writers' Award, a 2010 NEA Creative Writing Fellowship, Hopwood Awards in essay and poetry, and a Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution Ocean Science Journalism Fellowship. His work has appeared in Harper's Magazine, The New York Times Magazine, and Outside, among other publications. His January 2007 cover story for Harper's was included in "The Best Creative Nonfiction, Vol. 2," and received honorable mention in "The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2008." A former English teacher and a former senior editor of Harper's, he is now the features editor of GQ. "Moby-Duck" is his first book.

For more information about UCSB Reads, contact Jane Faulkner at (805) 893-5380 or faulkner@library.ucsb.edu, or Janet Martorana at martoran@library.ucsb.edu or (805) 893-8724. A complete list of upcoming UCSB Reads activities is available at <https://www.library.ucsb.edu/ucsbreads>.

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