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## Summer Reading Program Explores Ethics, Race, Social Justice

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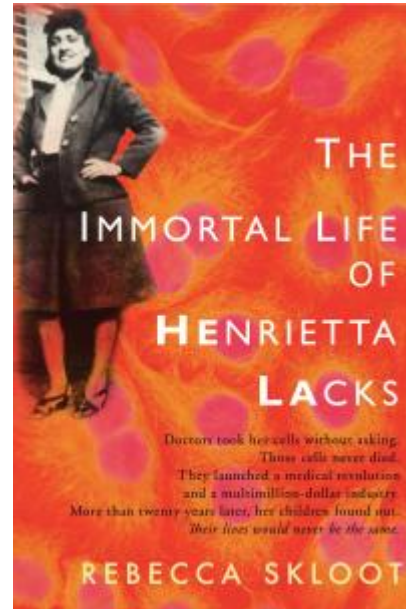
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# Summer Reading Program Explores Ethics, Race, Social Justice

June 27, 2012

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Members of the Illinois Wesleyan University community will explore questions of ethics, race and social justice as they read Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* for the 2012 Summer Reading Program selection.

Henrietta Lacks was a patient on the "colored" ward at Johns Hopkins Hospital in the 1950s, when her cells were harvested in exchange for medical treatment without her knowledge or consent. Her cells became the first immortal cell line and live on as a vital tool in medical research. Skloot's book tells the story of Lacks and her family, while also tracing the development of the cell line that would change the world — ultimately asking readers to contemplate questions about intersections between privacy, ethics, profits, race and medicine. The interdisciplinary nature of this book lends to its strength as a summer reading selection.



"The ideal summer reading is interesting, engaging, and offers possibilities for connections across disciplines," said Chandra Shipley, director of academic advising. "What set *The Immortal Life* apart from other (possible) selections was that it touches on many disciplines, ranging from biology to philosophy, and is appealing to all students," she said.

"The Summer Reading Program benefits first-year students because it provides an example of what to expect in four years on campus in terms of critical thinking, effective communication, and the spirit of inquiry found both in and out of the classroom," Shipley said.

Based on the idea that reading and critical reflection are central to the mission of a liberal arts college, IWU's annual summer reading program provides an opportunity for new students to participate in a shared intellectual conversation with the campus community by expressing ideas about a common text, and helps ease the transition from high school to college by preparing new students for the discussion-oriented courses characteristic of IWU. With past titles including Colin Beavan's *No Impact Man* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, "the reading program serves to provide some classroom experience in the week of orientation, when some students are experiencing anxiety about how the college academic classroom will manifest itself," said Matthew Damschroder, assistant dean of student life and director of residential life.

The joint selection of *The Immortal Life* by the First-Year Advisory Board and Speakers Committee this year will expose the class of 2016 to a bestseller which not only has been featured on over 60 critics' best of the year lists, but also won the Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize for Nonfiction, the Wellcome Trust Book Prize, the American Association for the Advancement of Science's Award for Excellence in Science Writing and a Medical Journalists' Association Open Book Award. *The Immortal Life* is currently being translated into more than 25 languages, as well as being made into an HBO movie produced by Oprah Winfrey and Alan Ball.

The reading program will culminate during Turning Titan: New Student Orientation in small group discussions to be held on Wednesday, August 22. Participating faculty and staff members will attend a pre-discussion planning session on August 20 before first-year students arrive to campus.

In coordination with the reading program, this year's President's Convocation, to be held on Wednesday, September 12, will welcome Skloot as the guest speaker.

Skloot is an award-winning science writer with a B.S. in biological sciences and an M.F.A. in creative nonfiction. She has taught creative writing and science journalism at the University of Memphis, the University of Pittsburgh, and New York University. *The Immortal Life*, Skloot's debut book, took more than a decade to research and write, and instantly became a *New York Times* bestseller upon its release in 2010. She has been featured on numerous television shows, including CBS Sunday Morning, The Colbert Report, Fox Business News, and others, and was named One of Five Surprising Leaders of 2010 by the *Washington Post*.

For additional information about the reading program and new student orientation, visit the websites at [www.iwu.edu/advising/reading/](http://www.iwu.edu/advising/reading/) and [www.iwu.edu/orientation/titan/](http://www.iwu.edu/orientation/titan/).

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