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Chicago Tribune
books

A new user's guide to e-readers

Is a Kindle or other e-publication download device right for you?

By Owen Youngman
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

I was at Ikea the other week, looking to buy more bookshelves. While I have hundreds of linear feet of storage and display space already at home and work, it's never enough to keep up with my favorite authors (Halldor Laxness, Marilynne Robinson, Henry Petroski) and topics (media, technology, Web culture).

So perhaps it is not surprising that I have an Amazon Kindle and am likely to be experimenting with its competitors soon. Entranced though we all may be by acid-free paper, e-paper has its hypnotic potential too. And, quite likely, many of you received such a device as a gift this season and are wondering what, if anything, can be done to shorten the learning curve.

Answer: a lot. For example:

1. Impatient to get your hands on that book that was reviewed in the newspaper? Can't wait two days to have it shipped, and won't be driving past Borders or Barbara's today? If a book has been "e-published," it'll download in seconds. When the reviews of Ken Auletta's "Googled" hit the papers, I needed, and got it, in seconds ... and then bought the hardcover too.

2. Do you find yourself reading in bursts at unpredictable times? Not only does the Kindle bookmark where I am, it syncs with my iPhone so I can steal a few minutes sans e-reader. This also is great for collections of short stories, or a book such as Joyce Carol Oates' "Wild Nights!" whose chapters are thematically but not narratively linked.

3. Getting on a transcontinental or trans-Atlantic flight? Lighten your load by dozens of pounds — and make room in your carry-on for some extra chocolate — with a freshly loaded reader instead.

4. Want to keep up with the hometown paper while out of town but can't easily find what you want on its Web site after a couple of days? The Kindle editions of newspapers such as the Tribune offer the organization, browsability and serendipity of their print counterparts, and they, too, download in seconds.

5. Like to take notes but hate to deface a book? The Kindle and many other readers allow you to annotate text, then easily retrace your steps ... without the guilt. This

also makes rereading easy. I am quite tickled to have "Pride and Prejudice" (price: \$0) available for reference, reinforcement and random quotation.

Will using your new Kindle or other e-reader take some getting used to? Ultimately, ease of use of a Kindle, or one of its growing stable of competitors, depends on the "use case": Can the hardware and software combine to do a better job of delivering the experience and information you want, at a particular time and place, than the traditional format? My take:

■ For books that are bursting with photos or colorful graphics, the answer is "no" (though there are some new readers coming that have been designed to deal with this issue).

■ For straight text, the answer can be "yes," if the advantages and attributes listed above matter to you on a regular basis. There are others, but I have found those to be key for me.

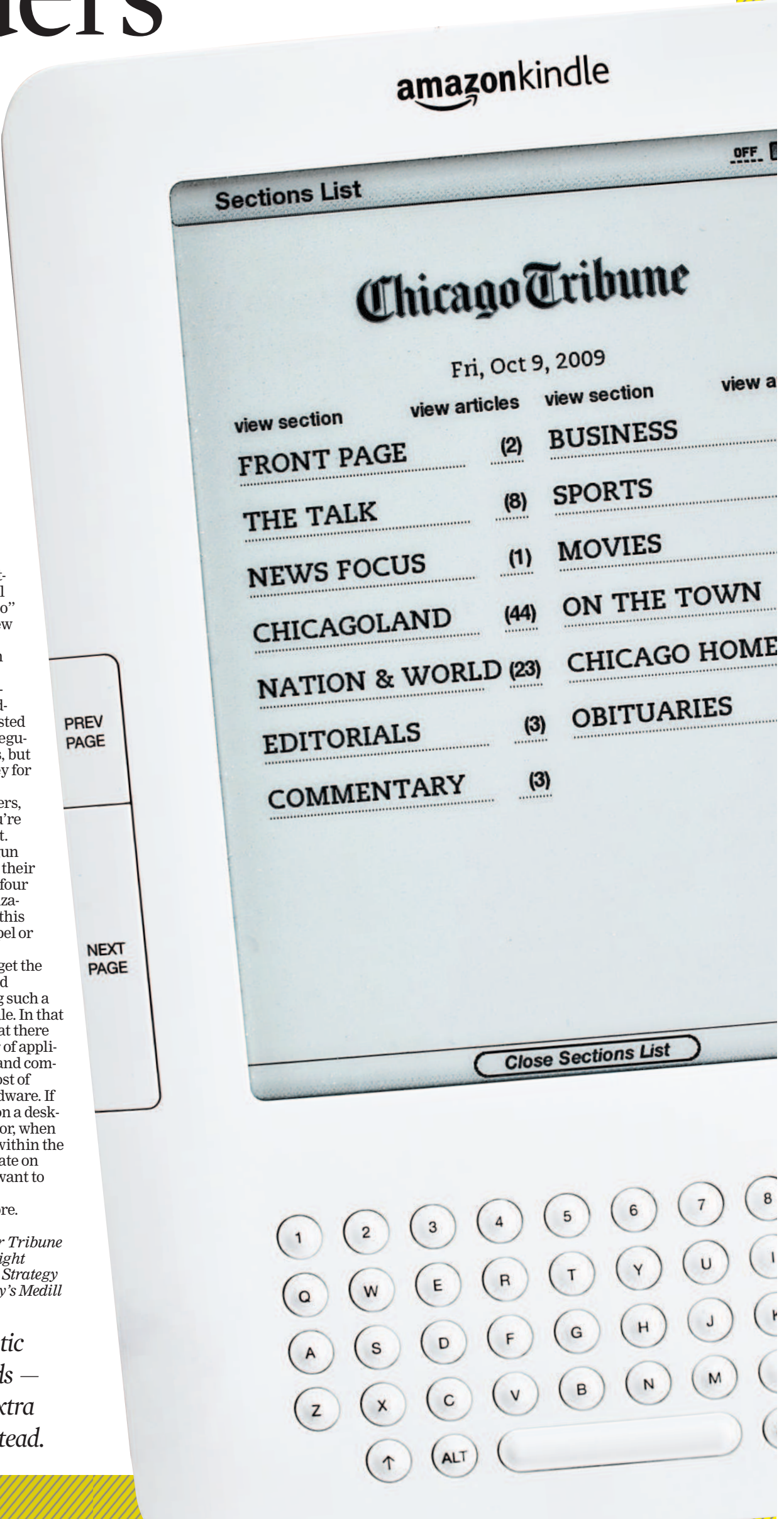
■ For the hottest best-sellers, you may not find what you're looking for. At least not yet. Some publishers have begun delaying e-publication for their hottest new titles by up to four months, fearing cannibalization. It's too early to tell if this strategy will prop up, propel or pare back print sales.

Or perhaps you did not get the e-reader gift you hoped and you're considering buying such a device in a post-holiday sale. In that case, it should be noted that there are an increasing number of applications for smart phones and computers that save you the cost of buying a new piece of hardware. If you are OK with reading on a desktop computer or laptop — or, when you're on the go, reading within the limited amount of real estate on your phone — you might want to start there.

See you in the e-bookstore.

Owen Youngman, a former Tribune editor and executive, is Knight Professor of Digital Media Strategy at Northwestern University's Medill School.

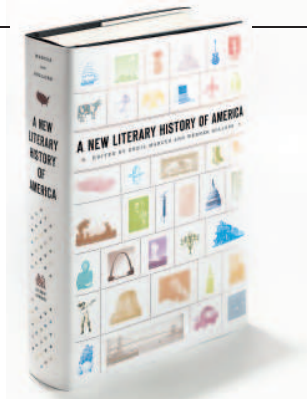
Getting on a transcontinental or trans-Atlantic flight? Lighten your load by dozens of pounds — and make room in your carry-on for some extra chocolate — with a freshly loaded reader instead.



Editor's choice

This may be called a literary history, but it is more broadly a cultural history, a history of language in its many forms — novels, essays, plays, public speeches and private letters, sermons and on and on. In their introduction, the editors explain that this collection of more than 200 essays is a "reexamination of the American experience as seen through a literary glass, where what is at issue is speech in many different forms." The first essay, an explanation of how the name "America" appeared for the first time on a map in 1507, and the book segues chronologically through the centuries, each entry written by a luminary writer on a provocative subject, such as President Jackson's bank veto, integration of the military, Hurricane Katrina. The last entry is a series of illustrations on the election of Barack Obama. The choices made by the editors are smart, and the writers of the essays engage ideas with great passion.

— Elizabeth Taylor, literary editor



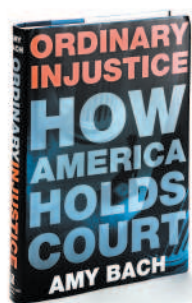
"A New Literary History of America"
Edited by Greil Marcus and Werner Sollers
Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1,095 pages, \$49.95



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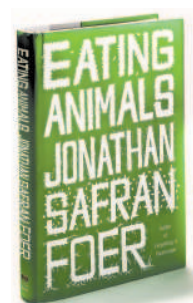
"Ordinary Injustice: How America Holds Court"
By Amy Bach; reviewed by Steve Mills

A compelling look at routine injustices that occur in courtrooms across the country.



"True Confections"
By Katharine Weber; reviewed by Wendy Smith

A wonderful, but not necessarily sweet, novel involving a family-owned and -operated candy company.



"Eating Animals"
By Jonathan Safran Foer; reviewed by Monica Eng

On the brink of fatherhood, the novelist explores the question of eating meat.



"Little Richard: The Birth of Rock 'n' Roll"
By David Kirby
"Jerry Lee Lewis: Lost and Found"
By Joe Bonomo; reviewed by Dennis Drabelle

A duo of books about the musical stars, from enthusiastic champions of their talent.



Reader reviews from the Chicago Tribune Signature Club: "This book totally described so many cringe-worthy things about holidays and family in such a funny and dead-on way. Thumbs up." "The Dreaded Feast," edited by Michele Clarke and Taylor Plimpton, as reviewed by reader Mark Boyle of Chicago. Find more at chicagotribune.com/printersrow. Ask us about reader reviews at printersrow@tribune.com.