

## — AUTHOR BIO —



Daniel James Brown fell in love with the written word when he was five and his mother first read Danny and the Dinosaur to him. Since then he has earned a BA in English from the University of California at Berkeley and an MA in English from UCLA. He has taught writing at San Jose State University and Stanford University and now lives in the country east of Redmond, Washington, where he writes nonfiction books about compelling historical events.

Brown's newest book is the New York Times bestseller--*The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics*. The Weinstein Company has purchased the rights to adapt the book for a feature film.

His previous book--*The Indifferent Stars Above: The Harrowing Saga of a Donner Party Bride*--was chosen as an Indie Next Notable Selection by the American Bookseller's Association. His earlier book, *Under a Flaming Sky: The Great Hinckley Firestorm of 1894* was selected as a Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers pick, was named one of the Best Books of 2006 by Booklist magazine, and was a finalist for the Washington State Book Award.

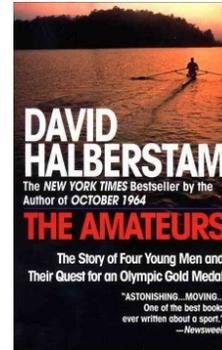
(Source: Litlovers.com, 2016)



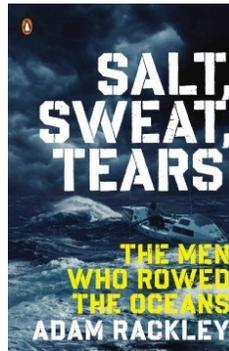
## — READ ALIKES —

### *The Amateurs* by David Halberstam

The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author of *The Best and the Brightest* profiles the struggles of four unknown young men who compete to represent the U.S. as its lone single sculler in the 1984 Olympics.



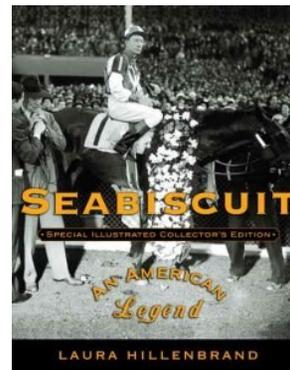
### *Salt, Sweat, Tears* by Adam Rackley



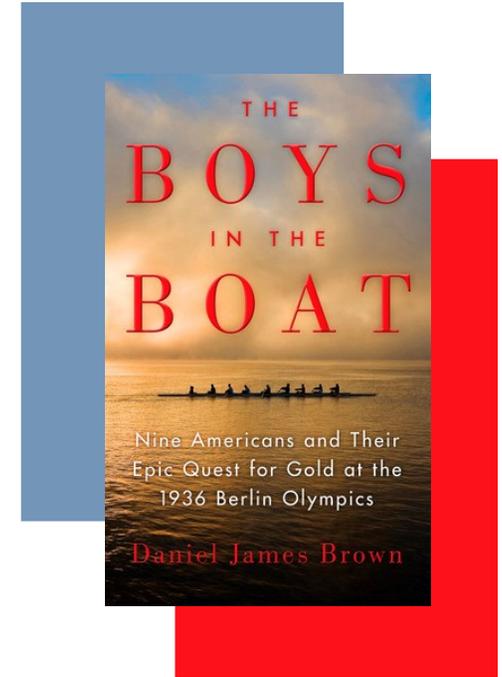
The true-life adventure of two men who rowed across the Atlantic Ocean and the history of those who came before. More people have climbed Mount Everest than have rowed across the Atlantic. For more than seventy days, Adam Rackley and his rowing partner, slept and rowed in a boat seven meters long by two meters wide, in one of the world's most extreme environments. This is his story of adventure, endurance, and self-discovery.

### *Seabiscuit* by Laura Hillenbrand

To look at *Seabiscuit* one would never know that he had the potential to become the most popular racehorse of the 20th century. But, thanks to the efforts of his owner, his dedicated trainer, and his jockeys, *Seabiscuit* made racing history despite his stunted legs and knobby knees.



(Source: NovelList Plus, 2016)



“Cogent history...and a surprisingly suspenseful tale of triumph”

-USA Today

“An evocative, cinematic prose...[Brown] makes his heroes' struggles as fascinating as the best Olympic sagas.”

-Publishers Weekly

## — DISCUSSION QUESTIONS —

1) Did you know much about rowing before reading *The Boys in the Boat*? If not, what aspects of the sport surprised you most? If so, did you learn anything about rowing that you didn't know before?

2) Compare how the Olympics were regarded in the 1930s to how they are regarded now. What was so significant about the boys' win in 1936, right on the dawn of the Second World War? What political significance do the Olympics Games hold today?

3) Thanks to hours of interviews and a wealth of archival information from Joe Rantz, his daughter Judy, and a number of other sources, Daniel James Brown is able to tell Joe's story in such fine detail that it's almost as if you are living in the moment with Joe. What significance does Joe's unique point of view have for the unfolding of the narrative? And why do you think Joe was willing to discuss his life in such detail with a relative stranger?

4) While *The Boys in the Boat* focuses on the experiences of Joe Rantz and his teammates, it also tells the much larger story of a whole generation of young men and women during one of the darkest times in American history. What aspects of life in the 1930s struck you most deeply? How do the circumstances of Americans during the Great Depression compare to what America is facing now?

5) Brown mentions throughout the book that only a very special, almost superhuman individual can take on the physical and psychological demands of rowing and become successful at the sport. How did these demands play out in the boys' academic and personal lives? How did their personal lives influence their approach to the sport?

6) Despite how much time Joe Rantz spent training with the other boys during his first two years at the University of Washington, he didn't really form close personal relationships with any of them until his third year on the team. Why do you think that was? What factors finally made Joe realize that it did matter who else was in the boat with him?

7) Joe and Joyce maintain a very loving and supportive relationship throughout Joe's formative years, with Joyce

consistently being his foundation, despite Joe's resistance to relying on her. How did their relationship develop while they were still in college? In what ways did Joyce support Joe emotionally? How do you think her relationship with her parents affected her relationship with Joe?

8) Al Ulbrickson's leadership style was somewhat severe, to say the least, and at many times, he kept his opinions of the boys and their standings on the team well-guarded. Even with this guardedness, what about him inspired Joe and the boys to work their hardest? What strategies did Ulbrickson use to foster competition and a strong work ethic among them and why?

9) George Pocock and Al Ulbrickson each stand as somewhat mythic figures in *The Boys in the Boat*; however, they were very different men with very different relationships to the boys. Discuss their differences in leadership style and their roles within the University of Washington's rowing establishment. What about Pocock enabled him to connect with Joe Rantz on such a personal level?

10) At one point, Pocock pulls Joe aside to tell him, "it wasn't just the rowing but his crewmates that he had to give himself up to, even if it meant getting his feelings hurt" How do you think this advice affected Joe's interactions with the other boys? How do you think it might have affected Joe's relationship to his family, especially after the deaths of Thula Rantz and his friend Charlie MacDonald?

11) What was Al Ulbrickson and Ky Ebright's relationship to the local and national media? How did they use sportswriters to advance their teams' goals and how did the sportswriters involve themselves in collegiate competition? Were you surprised at all by the level of involvement and how does it compare to collegiate sports coverage today?

12) When Al Ulbrickson retired in 1959, he mentioned that one of the highlights of his career was "the day in 1936 that he put Joe Rantz in his Olympic boat for the first time, and watched the boat take off". Why do you think that moment was so important for Ulbrickson? What about Joe was so special to him and how did Joe become the element that finally brought the boys of the *Husky Clipper* together?

13) Later in the book, it is noted "all along Joe Rantz had figured that he was the weak link in the crew", but that he found out much later in life that all the other boys felt the same way. Why do you think that was? And why do you suppose they didn't reveal this to each other until they were old men?

14) What was your favorite hair-raising moment in *The Boys in the Boat*? Even knowing the outcome of the 1936 Olympic Games, was there any point where you weren't sure if Joe and the boys would make it?

## — SUMMARY —

Daniel James Brown's robust book tells the story of the University of Washington's 1936 eight-oar crew and their epic quest for an Olympic gold medal, a team that transformed the sport and grabbed the attention of millions of Americans. The sons of loggers, shipyard workers, and farmers, the boys defeated elite rivals first from eastern and British universities and finally the German crew rowing for Adolf Hitler in the Olympic Games in Berlin, 1936.

The emotional heart of the story lies with one rower, Joe Rantz, a teenager without family or prospects, who rows not for glory, but to regain his shattered self-regard and to find a place he can call home. The crew is assembled by an enigmatic coach and mentored by a visionary, eccentric British boat builder, but it is their trust in each other that makes them a victorious team. They remind the country of what can be done when everyone quite literally pulls together—a perfect melding of commitment, determination, and optimism.

Drawing on the boys' own diaries and journals, their photos and memories of a once-in-a-lifetime shared dream, *The Boys in the Boat* is an irresistible story about beating the odds and finding hope in the most desperate of times—the improbable, intimate story of nine working-class boys from the American west who, in the depths of the Great Depression, showed the world what true grit really meant.