

The Professor and the Madman by Simon Winchester

Questions, adapted from HarperCollins.com

- Given the title, did you feel the author balanced the stories well? The book was published in England as *The Surgeon of Crawthorne: A Tale of Murder, Madness, and the Love of Words*.
- What did you think of the elaborate process of creating the *Oxford English Dictionary*? Was it easy to visualize? Did it surprise you to learn how long it took and that more than 6 million slips with definitions were submitted by volunteers? Crowdsourcing way before Wikipedia!
- Had you realized that dictionaries did not exist in Shakespeare's time? Do you own a dictionary, and when was the last time you used it?
- Each chapter is accompanied by excerpts of an OED definition of a word. Did this enhance or detract from the author's tale? See http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/diagram_OED_parts.html for a helpful guide to OED abbreviations and symbols.
- What is madness? Murray and Minor were both described as meticulous and obsessed. Where does "meticulous" end and "obsession" begin? Do you think if Minor's illness had been treated that he would still have worked on the OED? How would you describe Minor's life at the asylum?
- How did you feel about Winchester's theorizing upon the causes of Minor's madness, and other embellishments to the story? (e.g., naked girls in Ceylon, attraction to George Merrett's widow)
- What elements of this story did you find especially harrowing, fascinating, bewildering, surprising? Did you feel sympathetic toward Dr. Minor?

Biography from LitLovers.com

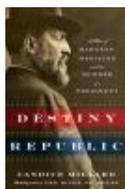
Simon Winchester was a geologist at Oxford and worked in Africa and on offshore oil rigs before becoming a full-time foreign correspondent with articles in *National Geographic* and *Condé Nast Traveler*. He is the author of *Krakatoa: the day the world exploded*, *The Map that Changed the World*, and many other titles. He currently lives on a small farm in the Berkshires and in New York City.

Other books to try:



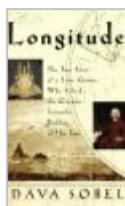
The devil in the white city: murder, magic, and madness at the fair that changed America by Erik Larson (364.1523 Larson)

In this book the smoke, romance, and mystery of the Gilded Age come alive as never before. Erik Larson's gifts as a storyteller are magnificently displayed in this rich narrative of the master builder, the killer, and the great fair that obsessed them both.



Destiny of the Republic: a tale of madness, medicine, and the murder of a president by Candice Millard (973.8409 Millard)

Four months after James A. Garfield's presidential inauguration, a deranged office seeker shot him in the back. But the shot didn't kill Garfield. What happened subsequently is a meticulously researched, powerful story of a nation in turmoil.



Longitude: the true story of a lone genius who solved the greatest scientific problem of his time by Dava Sobel (Illustrated edition, OVERSIZE 526.6209 Sobel)

Longitude is the dramatic human story of an epic scientific quest, and of Harrison's forty-year obsession with building his perfect timekeeper, known today as the chronometer. Full of heroism and chicanery, it is also a fascinating brief history of astronomy, navigation, and clockmaking.