Harvard Prize Book Program

Who: Harvard Prize Books are awarded to outstanding students in the next-to-graduating high school class who display excellence in scholarship and high character, combined with achievement in other fields. Donated by Harvard Clubs and Shared Interest Groups (SIGs), Prize Books are presented annually in nearly 2,000 high schools around the world.

Where: Prize Books may be awarded to students in a high school of the Club’s or SIG’s choosing.*

When: Prize Books are generally presented at the end of the academic year, at high school award ceremonies or graduation exercises, with remarks from a local Harvard alumnus or alumna.

Why: Prize Books are an important way for Harvard Clubs and SIGs to help attract the attention of talented young students to the opportunities at Harvard College.

How: To establish a Harvard Prize Book award, a Club or SIG need only contribute the cost of one book. Participating Clubs and SIGs should contact the local high school principal and guidance counselor to introduce the program. The goal of the Harvard Prize Book program is to recognize outstanding high school students who display general excellence and high character. Awards should not be tied to such criteria as athletic achievement or work in a specific community. Prize Books are awarded without regard to race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, or political beliefs. Additionally, it is at the discretion of the high school to determine the recipient of a Prize Book. Selection cannot be done through an application process.

*The Harvard Prize Book program is not offered in New York City.

Prize Book Selection

All books come with an official Harvard bookplate to record the names of the donor(s) and award recipient, plus a commemorative bookmark.

The Harvard Book ($24), by the late William Bentinck-Smith AB ’37, is a collection of passages and quotations about Harvard. The revised edition adds 120 pages to the original material from 1953. The book includes passages by Presidents Eliot, Lowell, and Conant, and narratives of the presidencies of Nathan Pusey and Derek Bok. Contributing writers include Cleveland Amory, W. Jackson Bate, Alistair Cooke, Charles Dickens, David Halberstam, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Archibald MacLeish, Erich Segal, John Updike, Barbara Ward, Theodore H. White, and Thomas Wolfe.

Harvard A to Z ($23), by John T. Bethell AB ’54 et al., offers an alphabetical compendium of short but substantial essays about Harvard University. The book contains more than 200 entries written by three Harvard veterans who bring to the task more than 125 years of experience within the University. The entries range from essential facts to no less interesting ephemera—from the Arnold Arboretum designed by Frederick Law Olmsted to the peculiar medical specimens of the Warren Museum; from arts and athletics to towers and tuition; and from the very real environs of Cambridge, the Charles River, and Quincy Street to the Harvard of Hollywood and fiction.

Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds ($19), by Richard J. Light PhD ’69, offers concrete advice from Professor Light’s 10 years of interviews with Harvard seniors. He answers fundamental questions: How do you choose classes wisely? What is the best way to study? Why do some professors inspire you while others leave you cold? How can you connect what you’re learning in the classroom with the rest of life? Filled with practical advice and illuminated with stories of real students’ self-doubts, failures, discoveries, and hopes, this is a handbook for academic and personal success.

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