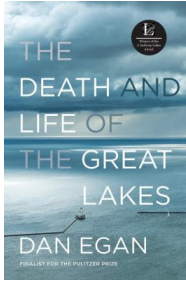


Books by the Stack



The Death and Life of the Great Lakes by David Egan

Traces the scientific, historical, and ecological factors endangering the Great Lakes, discussing late-nineteenth century efforts to connect the lakes to the Atlantic, which unexpectedly introduced invasive species from the natural world.

Why you'll like it: *Nature & science writing. Thought-provoking. Accessible.*

About the Author: Dan Egan is a reporter at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and a senior water policy fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's School of Freshwater Sciences. He has twice been a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, and he has won the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Award, John B. Oakes Award, AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Award, and J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award. A graduate of the Columbia Journalism School, he lives in Milwaukee with his wife and children.

Questions for Discussion

1. The five great lakes – Lake Erie, Superior, Michigan, Huron and Ontario – make up the world's largest freshwater system. Some 40 million people live near their shores, and many more of us depend on them for fresh drinking water, work or recreation. What's been your own experience of the Great Lakes?
2. In the book's opening, Egan writes that more than any ordinary lake, each of the Great Lakes "can hold all the mysteries of an ocean, and then some." He mentions that there are 6,000 shipwrecks, many of which have never been found, at the bottom of the Great Lakes. What other mysteries are you learning about as you read?
3. Egan also writes that the biggest threat to the Great Lakes at present "is our own ignorance," and that it's a "mirage" that humans and lakes have learned to get along. What surprises you about how humans have messed with the lakes, even after the passage of the major Clean Water Act of 1972?
4. Why is it not actually a good thing that the Great Lakes are as clear as they are?
5. A recurring theme in the book is the invasive species that have been brought to the lakes from ships arriving from ports all over the world. Today the Great Lakes are home to 186 nonnative species – the worst being the **zebra and quagga mussels**. How and why are these species a problem?
6. Egan tells us that one of the most recognizable images of the perils facing the Great Lakes is "**the grotesque mug of an Asian carp**," which was imported in the 1960s for government research on sewage treatment. This invasive species can grow up to 70 pounds and eat up to 20 percent of its weight in plankton a day, and is now making its way closer to Lake Michigan. What could happen if the Asian carp do enter the Great Lakes?
7. Does this book introduce us to heroes and villains in the Great Lakes story? If so, who are they?
8. As the news is filled with stories of **water shortages in California** and water crises like **the one still facing Flint, Michigan**, how do the Great Lakes fit in?

9. Egan argues that if threats to the Great Lakes aren't addressed, there will be huge implications for property owners, shipping, drinking water and sewage treatment. How could it affect you, if at all?

10. What does the book suggest can be done to protect the future of the Great Lakes? What do you think Egan is trying to tell us in the book's final scene with his son?

(Questions provided by PBS News Hour)



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