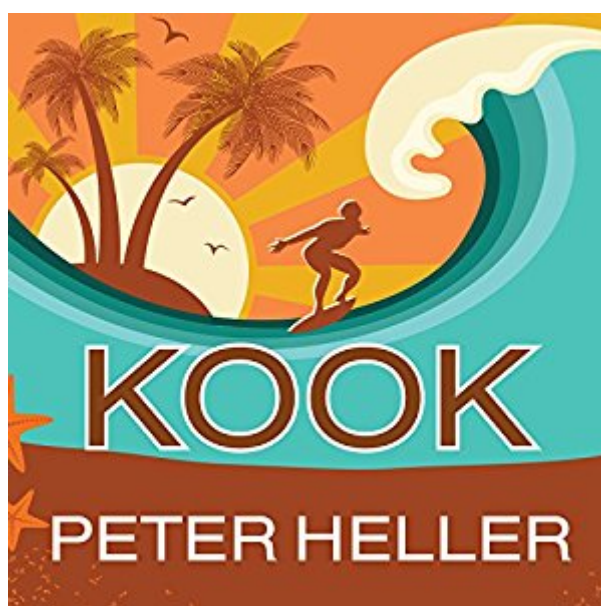


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Kook: What Surfing Taught Me About Love, Life, And Catching The Perfect Wave



Synopsis

With grit, poetry, and humor, Peter Heller, acclaimed author of *The Whale Warriors*, recounts his remarkable journey of discovery - of surfing, an entirely new challenge; of the ocean's beauty and power; of the strange surf subculture; of love; and, most of all, of how to seek adventure while crafting a meaningful life. Having resolved to master a big - hollow wave - that is, to go from kook (surfer for beginner) to shredder in a single year, Heller travels from Southern California down the coast of Mexico in the company of his girlfriend and the eccentric surfers they meet. Exuberant and fearless, Heller explores the technique and science of surfing the secrets of its culture, and the environmental ravages to the stunning coastline he visits. As Heller plumbs the working of his own heart and finds joy in both love and surfing, he affords listeners vivid insight into this fascinating world, with all of its perils and pleasures, its absurdity and wonder. Exhilarating, entertaining, and moving, *Kook* is a love story between a man and his surfboard, a man and his girlfriend, a not-so-old man and the sea.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is my first review ever, and I'm only writing it because there were none, so I figured it would be helpful to prospective purchasers to have something here other than professional reviews. I'll start by saying this book is an easy read, entertaining and well worth the price of admission, even to non-surfers. Heller, as a self described kook (or beginner), takes us slowly into surfing culture and lingo at a pace where we can easily understand certain aspects of surfing without actually being a surfer. There is a good feel for the complexity and commitment that it takes to become proficient at

surfing and I thought the author was able to get the emotions and spirituality of the surfing experience across to a wider audience. As a surfing lifestyle book, I think it is a success. The other themes of the book are secondary: Ocean Conservation and Relationships. It is obvious Heller's passion is the ocean and there is a conservationist message sprinkled throughout that is mostly well integrated, but at times seemed a bit forced. If you are a right wing ultra conservative (or Japanese) you may find the message off putting, but if you fall into that camp you probably wouldn't be out surfing or reading this book. The only reason I didn't give the book a full five stars is because I wasn't convinced Heller learned the relationship advice he was giving himself as he grew throughout the book. Towards the end of the book, he doesn't seem to be any more understanding of his girlfriend/wife's difficulties, and even if he understands, he doesn't seem to actually *do* anything about it, he just goes surfing and leaves her behind or whines about having to wait for her, even though he knows it's selfish. As a relationship book, I think this fails.

Kook is a well written book and was entertaining to read. Near the end, Heller argues with himself whether the book is about love or surfing. I'd say it's really about neither. I thought the book was really about "mastery"--a concept Heller touches on and about which he writes somewhat perceptively. Heller doesn't seem as interested in surfing as in becoming a master surfer. He semi-idolizes the accomplished surfers he meets, notes how they seem "larger than themselves". He has a nice section where he notes we admire doctors, pilots, soldiers, shamans because they've "given themselves to a larger power" and let themselves be shaped by it, as surfers are shaped by the ocean. Heller clearly wishes he'd started surfing as a child. This is where the book kind of grated on me--Heller's personality irritated me, at least. He's having an admitted mid-life crisis at 45-48. While he seems to enjoy surfing, what he really craves is having mastery of the sport that would make him feel better about himself and ooze cool in the presence of others. This desire to be hipper than Thou is off-putting, for me at least, and apparently for a good number of other reviewers. Heller is obviously an accomplished writer and outdoorsman who's devoted many hours to being good at both. Why can't he be satisfied with that? What is so much better about surfing anyway? He never tells us and never seems to really reflect deeply on that question either. How would he feel about someone who decided they'd become an accomplished, and well reviewed author in six months? Hmmm? As other reviewers have noted, Heller can be very rude to other surfers and inconsiderate of his wife/girlfriend.

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