Believers: Faith in Human Nature, by Melvin Konner, Ph.D. ’73, M.D. ’84 (W.W. Norton, $27.95). The biological anthropologist/neuroscientist at Emory University examines the origins of faith from his upbringing (as an Orthodox Jew, who became a nonbeliever at age 17), his work in Africa among the !Kung, and the perspectives of, yes, modern science. Faith, he finds, is “an evolved, biologically grounded, psychologically intimate, socially strong set of inclinations and ideas that…will never go away.”

Indispensable Reading: 1,001 Books from the Arabian Nights to Zola, by William Roger Lewis, A.M. ’63 (I.B. Tauris, $35). As Barnes & Noble is taken private and students express outrage at being asked to read, you know, a whole book, the growing up,” she explains. She thought she would concentrate in English or philosophy, then return to Singapore to be a teacher. But freshman year she discovered the Harvard-Radcliffe Modern Dance Company, where she both danced and choreographed.

She also started volunteering as a stage manager for the Harvard-Radcliffe Dramatic Club. “And somewhere along my freshman year, someone said, ‘We’ve got our spring concert coming up, but there’s no one to do the lighting,’” Mak recalls. “And I said, ‘Well, I don’t really know anything about lighting, but I’ll press some buttons for you.’”

Kerr professor of English history and culture at the University of Texas at Austin delivers a bracing message: reading will persist, it is worth the work, and here are 1,001 curated suggestions for doing so. The helpful categories range from those clearly good for you (history, literature, etc.) to enticing vices (A.J. Liebling on cooking and food; Calvin Trillin on crime). A healthy dose of optimism, at the most opportune time.

You’re It, by Leonard J. Marcus et al., of the National Preparedness Leadership Initiative (PublicAffairs, $28). The nation isn’t acting to stave off hurricane disasters, so it should welcome guidance on “crisis, change, and how to lead when it matters most” (the subtitle) from four affiliates of the public-health/Kennedy School NPLI. Their examples (an active shooter, a data breach, etc.) are distressingly familiar, and the jacket copy about “turbulent times” can be read as a sad commentary on stormy weather—and the times in general.

Fair Play, by Eve Rodsky, J.D. ’02 (Putnam, $26) A checklist sort of book offering a “game-changing,” project-management solution for the real inequalities of domestic life, particularly as they impinge on women, whether they work outside the home or not. The cause is noble, the solutions may well be effective—but readers have to put up with a lot of Upper Cased Tips and Suggestions (“Conception, Planning, and Execution,” etc.), and what must be one of the worst typefaces ever deployed across 300-plus pages.

Sharenthood: Why We Should Think before We Talk about Our Kids Online, by Leah A. Plunkett (MIT, $24.95). A faculty associate of Harvard’s Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society warns about the terabytes of accessible, trackable information about their progeny that parents are spreading about. “If Tom Sawyer were a real boy, alive today,” she begins, “he’d be arrested for what he does in the first chapter” of Twain’s novel—because of Aunt Polly’s social-media posts about his exploits. Time to carve out a little private space for childhood.

Bleeding Out, by Thomas Abt, adjunct lecturer in public policy (Basic Books, $30). “A young man, unconscious, lies before you on a gurney,” bleeding profusely from a gunshot wound in the thigh. What to do? “First you stop the bleeding”—absent that, nothing else counts. With that vivid image, the author, a criminal-justice policymaker, says the response to urban violence has to focus first on the violence (homicides, for example), before trying to address it through attacks on drugs, gangs, or guns. “Murder on the streets of our cities is a deadly serious problem,” he says, “but it is also a solvable one.”

John Rawls: The Path to a Theory of Justice, by Andrius Galisanka (Harvard, $45). The late political philosopher remains
but with it comes a burden she was not expecting. Art, she says, is “something that I do every day now, and it’s something that I too percent think has an irreplaceable role in society, but also, with war and poverty and climate change, every day I ask myself: how do we speak to these important issues with art?”

She continues to design more traditional performances, art whose purpose is “entertainment, to make us feel good, to make us laugh”—like a staged version of The Bridges of Madison County, about a mid-twentieth-century Italian war bride who falls in love with a traveling photographer. The play was presented this past February and March by the Philadelphia Theater Company, and Mak was behind the lighting changes crucial to the plot, literally (light dawning over a bridge) and emotionally (the softening of light that evokes falling in love).

Still, she says, “What I’ve been most interested in working on is art that is a call to action.” She collaborates with the Albany Park Theater Project, a company in Chicago that employs local high-schoolers as actors and professional artists like Mak as the surrounding team. Its shows are based on interviews conducted with community members, many of whom are immigrants.

She recently designed lighting and projections for one of these plays, Ofrenda, based on interviews with Albany Park residents about “the meaning of home.” One storyline followed a Syrian refugee who immigrates to Chicago with her family. “It was really important, for design, to think about how to recreate—not recreate—mmm, what’s the word I’m looking for?—for the design to echo the journey that she had been on,” Mak explains.

In the play, the woman is unable to bring photos of her home and family with her to recreate—not recreate—mmm, what’s the word I’m looking for?—for the design to echo the journey that she had been on,” Mak explains.