

RoadTrip

Literary Inspiration on the Streets of D.C.

WHERE: The District.
WHY: Writerly homes, anti-Bic pens and caffeinated poetry.
HOW FAR: About 14 miles from start to finish.

Since Thomas Jefferson first came to Washington, the city has played host and home to some of the most prolific and celebrated writers to put pen to paper. After meeting President Abraham Lincoln here, Nathaniel Hawthorne was moved to write the essay "Chiefly About War Matters," published in the Atlantic Monthly's July 1862 issue. During the same period, Louisa May Alcott worked as a nurse at a Civil War hospital in Georgetown before writing her novel "Little Women" in 1868. Writers "come here for all different reasons," says Paul Dickson, a local author who co-wrote "On This Spot: Pinpointing the Past in Washington, D.C." "For all people, this has always been a place to express themselves." Before the National Portrait Gallery became home to a painting of Walt Whitman, the grand old building housed the Patent Office and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, where the "Leaves of Grass" poet did his 9 to 5. During the Civil War, the building became a makeshift hospital where Whitman spent many evenings tending to the wounded, an experience that inspired much of the poetry in his 1865 collection, "Drum Taps." Elsewhere in the city, Whitman contemporary Julia Ward Howe not only slept at the Willard Hotel but by candlelight scribbled the words to "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." And pay attention, wannabe Maya Angelou: Harlem Renaissance writer Langston Hughes proved that being discovered doesn't happen only in New York and London publishing circles. While working as a busboy at the Wardman Park Hotel, now owned by Marriott, Hughes grabbed the attention of American poet Vachel Lindsay by dropping his poems next to Lindsay's dinner plate. As for tomorrow's talent, check out the poetry scene at Ebenezer's Coffeehouse. Who knows? You might be listening to the next Sterling A. Brown, the first poet laureate of our book-smart city.

— Karen Hart

Road Trip maps are available at www.washingtonpost.com/roadtrip, as are addresses and hours of operation. (Be sure to check before you go.) Have an idea for a trip? E-mail roadtrip@washpost.com.

MAP BY JEROME COOKSON FOR THE WASHINGTON POST; BUSBOYS AND POETS PHOTO BY SUSAN BIDDLE — THE WASHINGTON POST; OTHERS BY KAREN HART FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

MediaMix

A Quick Take on New Releases

	TITLE	BASIC STORY	SAMPLE GRAB	WHAT YOU'LL LOVE	WHAT YOU WON'T	GRADE
BOOK	Free-Range Chickens By Simon Rich Random House \$17	The young comedic writer ("Ant Farm," "Saturday Night Live") and son of New York Times columnist Frank Rich churns out his second collection of quirky, imaginative musings on life and his place in it.	"— Got your nose! — Please just kill me. Better to die than to live the rest of my life as a monster." — From a section titled "Terrifying Childhood Experiences"	Rich has a knack for self-deprecating humor that seems beyond his years, offering tales that range from the very funny ("A Conversation Between the People Who Hid in My Closet Every Night When I Was Seven") to the not-so-much ("The Final Moments of the Titanic"). Alas, the latter tends to cancel out the former, so the collection as a whole feels tossed-off and a bit thin. — Reviewed by Sara Cardace	C+
BOOK	Epilogue: A Memoir By Anne Roiphe HarperCollins \$24.95	The National Book Award finalist lays bare her soul after her husband of 39 years collapses and dies in the lobby of their apartment building.	"Old age with its dribble and tremble and watery eyes and half-hearing ears is not a delightful prospect, but erasure can only promise itself." — Roiphe contemplates a premeditated death	The author's descriptions of the universal but deeply personal experience of widowhood are flawless.	Roiphe's tendency to flit from intolerable depression to lukewarm musings about potential Match.com dates is maddening — but so is losing a life partner. — Alexis Burling	A
CD	Sunshine Lies Matthew Sweet Shout! Factory \$15.98	The tunelessly brooding retro-power-pop prodigy reemerges with a sparkling, kaleidoscopic near-masterpiece.	"If you can't feel fear you've gone insane" — "Feel Fear"	It's melodic and seductive from beginning to end. "Room to Rock" sounds like a great forgotten Tom Petty track, whereas "Byrdgirl" might end up on many a courtship-initiatin' mix tape.	The words have never been where Sweet's genius resides, but "Let's Love" approaches Lenny Kravitz depths of lyrical insipidity. — Chris Klimek	A-
CD	This Much Is True Maiysha Eusonia \$11.98	A new prog-soul diva arrives fully formed with designs on Alicia Keys's crown.	"Celebrity is paradise / Baby, it's worth the sacrifice / For fame, funky fame, yeah!" — "Celebrity"	The bluesy album-closing take on Peter Gabriel's "Sledgehammer" manages to pull the iconic '80s chart-topper both back into the Prohibition era and forward into the iPod age.	"U.S.H." interrupts the disc's bubbly groove for four minutes of awkward and obvious political critique. — C.K.	B
DVD	Heroes: Season 2 Not rated Universal \$39.98	In the NBC series's second season, megapowerful Peter (Milo Ventimiglia) has amnesia, time traveler Hiro (Masi Oka) is stuck in feudal Japan and easy-healing Claire (Hayden Panettiere) is in love.	"First you show me that I can be harmed by no weapon, and then you cut me deeper than any blade possibly could." — Friend-turned-foe Adam (David Anders) vows to make Hiro miserable	The season almost redeems itself with a tense finale. Almost. Those with patience will enjoy that episode's alternative ending and deleted scenes.	This show suffered a significant drop-off in smarts, suspense and anything worth savoring from Season 1. (Take heart: The third season looks like a return to form.) — Greg Zinnman	C
DVD	Where in the World Is Osama Bin Laden? Rated PG-13 Weinstein \$24.95	Morgan Spurlock ("Super Size Me") heads out in search of global public enemy No. 1. The twist? His wife is totally pregnant!	"We create these demons in the media. And we create these visions that are so beyond reality. They start feeding themselves after a while. Our fear just becomes exponential." — Spurlock does a little "Terrorism for Dummies"	If nothing else, Spurlock succeeds in giving us an idea of how deeply screwed up things still are in Afghanistan.	The director's insistence on shoeorning the birth of his child into a purported examination of international politics comes off as shallow narcissism. — G.Z.	C-
GAME	Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People Rated Teen Telltale \$10	Masked egomaniac Strong Bad, breakout character of the Internet cartoon "Homestar Runner," must fight such distractions as party invitations and fan mail to plan the defeat of his rival, Homestar.	"Ah, the short-lived seven-track player. It was the lack of a play button that led to your downfall." — Strong Bad, surveying his archaic electronics	The exploits of this gravely voiced hero (or is he a villain?) don't really resemble anything you'd call a "game," but you'll keep playing just to move from one joke to the next.	With such a voluminous barrage of gags, expect to come across some real groaners along with the belly laughs. — Christopher Healy	B+
GAME	Braid Number None/ Microsoft Xbox 360 Rated Everyone 10+ \$15	Heartbreak and regret take center stage in a downloadable side-scrolling adventure in which a young man named Tim ventures through memory-filled landscapes to rescue a former girlfriend.	Each level allows the player to manipulate time in a different way (rewinding it or speeding it up, for example) to solve the game's mind-bending puzzles.	Braid combines philosophical aspirations with clever tweaks to standard Super Mario Bros.-style gameplay.	Frustratingly, for a game requiring a change in perception, it offers little in the way of tutorial or guidance. — Evan Narcisse	B-

MORGAN SPURLOCK FROM WEINSTEIN