This past winter, Senior Lecturer Carrie Conaway, a former chief strategy and research officer for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, talked politics, messages from Betty Friedan, and reading in front of her fireplace.

What are you currently reading?
I am just about to finish President Barack Obama’s latest book, A Promised Land.

What drew you to it?
I wanted to understand what motivated Obama to run for office and what he viewed as his successes, failures, and missed opportunities as president. Since I worked for many years in the public sector to bring more research into policymaking, I was also curious how he navigated the political environment to get policy passed while not losing sight of what science and data can contribute to the policy process.

What was your favorite book as a child or as a teenager and why?
One book that stands out from my teenage years is Betty Friedan’s A Feminine Mystique, which I read on the recommendation of my high school AP U.S. history teacher. It was the first grown-up book I read by a feminist, and the first one that showed me how social structures can create and reinforce inequality of all kinds. I ended up majoring in sociology with a focus on gender inequality in college, so its message clearly stuck with me.

Is there a book on your bookshelf that you keep meaning to read but can’t quite get to?
I never seem to get around to all the great books written by my colleagues! I have at least two on my shelf right now: Where Teachers Thrive by Susan Moore Johnson, M.A.T.’69, Ed.D.’81, and The Privileged Poor by Tony Jack.

What book do you assign to your Ed School students that you think all educators should read?
Not to be self-serving, but I wish every educator would read my book, Common-Sense Evidence. The evidence we build through research has much to offer to educators, but educators are rarely trained on how to use research to inform their work, let alone how to build their own evidence. Our book shows educators how to evaluate whether evidence is convincing and relevant for their needs, as well as how to use evidence from existing research and their own analysis to improve their work over time.

What’s next on your reading list?
Next up is Caroline Criado Perez’s Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men, recommended to me by one of my students from last year.

Favorite place to read?
In front of my fireplace, with my feet up on an ottoman.

● Read an excerpt from Conaway’s new book, Common-Sense Evidence: gse.harvard.edu/ed

My spring course focuses on how to harness the power of data and stories to inspire change. Two of the books I use in that course — William Zinsser’s classic On Writing Well and Dona Wong’s The Wall Street Journal Guide to Information Graphics — would benefit everyone who needs to communicate about data (which is to say, everyone). Both are concrete and clear about how to communicate ideas effectively, whether through words or data displays, and provide plenty of examples and illustrations.