



## 2019 Texas Topaz Nonfiction Reading List - ADULT (Annotated)

The purpose of the Texas Topaz Reading List is to provide children and adults with recommended nonfiction titles that stimulate reading for pleasure and personal learning. It is intended for recreational reading and is not designed to support any particular curriculum. Due to the diversity in age range and topics, Texas librarians should consider titles on this list in accordance with their own local collection development policies.

(\*) denotes a unanimous vote by the committee.  
Primary and secondary interest levels noted after annotation.

**\*Ali: A Life** by Jonathan Eig. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 2017.

Muhammad Ali's personal life, interviews, FBI and boxing records plus photos are explained in more than 600 jammed-packed pages on the life of the greatest fighter of all time. The author travels the history of Cassius Clay to Ali spanning national and international settings in this thrilling story of a man who became one of the iconic boxers of the Twentieth Century. (Adult, adult for young adults)

**American Like Me: Reflections on Life Between Cultures** by America Ferrera. Simon & Schuster / Gallery Books. 2018.

Torn between two cultures and two countries, the author gives a firsthand account of her journey to talk about what it's like to be an immigrant, a child or grandchild of immigrants, an indigenous person and how America values and views on race relations. From artists to actors and comedians to writers and politicians, award-winning actress, America Ferrera, and her friends share their vignettes on American identity. (Adult, adult for young adults)

**American Wolf: A True Story of Survival and Obsession in the West** by Nate Blakeslee. Penguin Random House / Crown. 2017.

The pendulum between the majesty and danger of wolves unfolds in this multigenerational saga focusing on the charismatic, female alfa wolf O-Six. Tension between people, communities, and politics endanger the majestic creatures with each participant's narrative fully formed. (Adult)

**Bad Blood: Secrets and Lies in a Silicon Valley Startup** by John Carreyrou. Penguin Random House / Knopf. 2018.

Describes the rise and fall of Theranos, a biotech company that fraudulently claimed that its blood-testing device could perform better testing than any device and with just a few drops of blood. (Adult)

**\*Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"** by Zora Neale Hurston. HarperCollins / Amistad. 2018.

Zora Neale Hurston comes alive again sharing first-hand account the oral histories of the last known survivor of the slave trade and his stories of capture, his path to freedom and the daunting truths of the slavery and the Middle Passage. Barracoon offers an insightful poignant and powerful work into the haunting legacy of the shared history and culture of the people who make up the Americas. (Adult)

***The Best Land Under Heaven: The Donner Party in the Age of Manifest Destiny*** by Michael Wallis. W.W. Norton & Co. Inc. 2017.

This book presents a fascinating account of the Donner Party. Using primary sources and contemporary newspaper accounts Wallis tells the events of the tragedy with an objective eye while still being sympathetic to those in horrific circumstances. (Adult)

***Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy*** by Heather Ann Thompson. Penguin Random House / Pantheon Books. 2016.

Thompson brings to light how excessive force and bad decisions during the retaking of Attica during the 1971 uprising lead to the deaths of 43 people, law officers' abusive retaliation, and the conspiracies to cover both up. (Adult)

***Broad Band: The Untold Story of the Women Who Made the Internet*** by Claire L. Evans. Penguin Random House / Portfolio. 2018.

These are the lesser known stories of the women who pioneered computing, but whose names and accomplishments have been marginalized. The author points to how this historic erasure puts girls today in categories that make computing and engineering inaccessible. (Adult)

***Buttermilk Graffiti: A Chef's Journey to Discover America's New Melting-Pot Cuisine*** by Edward Lee. Workman Publishing / Artisan. 2018.

The author reveals unexpected cultures, making an accessible US atlas of uncovered, ethnically diverse junctures that create the food we eat, asking again and again: what is authentic? Many of the book's food experiences are tied to memory, reminding the reader how rich and complex the simple foods from our childhood are. (Adult)

***The Cadaver King and the Country Dentist: A True Story of Injustice in the American South*** by Radley Balko and Tucker Carrington. Perseus Book Group / PublicAffairs. 2018.

The book focuses on the most prominent medical examiner and forensic dentist in Mississippi and reveals how the questionable methods and conclusions of these two forensic experts were used to put people on death row. (Adult)

***The Captain Class: A New Theory of Leadership*** by Sam Walker. Penguin Random House / Random House. 2017.

This book appeals to many facets of a modern reader: psychology, leadership, teamwork, sports, and what it takes to lead others to victory. With the author using studies to support successful captain qualities, the book goes from focusing on sports to imprinting universal ideas of working in a team. (Adult)

***The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*** by Richard Rothstein. W.W. Norton & Co. Inc. / Liveright. 2017.

The legal systemic segregation from public housing to racial zoning is explored in this book where regulations galvanized the economic, social, and political mobility of African Americans. The author chases through the history of laws and court cases to help unravel how federal, state and local governments polarized racial discrimination for people of color. (Adult)

**\*The Cooking Gene** by Michael Twitty. HarperCollins / Amistad. 2017.

From Africa to America, who really knows where the Southern Food's DNA originated and how did this gene/genre of cuisine become an integral part to the ancestry of the American pallet. The author brings a new perspective to the most divisive cultural issues in cooking, persevering and organizing the history of Southern cuisine that traces back to slavery and present day. (Adult)

**\*The Defender: How the Legendary Black Newspaper Changed America** by Ethan Michaeli. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 2016.

Michaeli's book explores how the Chicago-based newspaper, which was founded in 1905, improved conditions for African-Americans by reporting on racism, segregation, lynching, unfair working conditions and political empowerment. Other topics include the newspaper's involvement in the Great Migration, breaking the color barrier in professional sports and the encounters with the political machines of Chicago. (Adult)

**Designing Your Life: How to Build a Well-lived, Joyful Life** by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans. Penguin Random House / Knopf. 2016.

Problem solving takes many forms, and design thinking, in this book, is the framework for work through problems, primarily those focused on career. The authors write about experimentation, wayfinding, prototyping, and others as catalysts for readers reframe the way to work towards the life they want. (Adult)

**\*Educated: a memoir** by Tara Westover. Penguin Random House / Random House. 2018.

This is an engaging memoir about a young woman who did not attend school until she was seventeen. This book follows the journey of Tara Westover from an isolated childhood into adulthood and the wider world provided by education. (Adult, adult for young adults)

**\*Exoplanets: Diamond Worlds, Super Earths, Pulsar Planets, and the New Search for Life Beyond Our Solar System** by Michael Summers and James Trefil. Smithsonian Books. 2017.

One of the most exciting developments in recent astronomy is the discovery of planets located outside of our solar system. This book describes the processes used to make these discoveries, as well as the search for signs of life somewhere other than on Earth. (Adult)

**Faster, Higher, Farther** by Jack Ewing. W.W. Norton & Co. Inc. 2017.

The story of how Volkswagen lost its soul: an intrepid group of researchers and regulators discover that car company Volkswagen used ingenious (and incredibly illegal) cheat devices to make their diesel cars seem cleaner. (Adult)

**A First Class Catastrophe: The Road to Black Monday, the Worst Day in Wall Street History** by Diana Henriques. Macmillan / Henry Holt. 2017.

Monday, October 19, 1987: Black Monday and the biggest market crash ever recorded in Wall Street history. This is the compelling story of an event worse than both the Great Depression and the Great Recession--but which serves as the bridge between them. (Adult)

***The Genius of Birds*** by Jennifer Ackermann. Penguin Random House / Penguin Press. 2016.

If you've ever been called a bird brain, you should be flattered as Ackerman aptly shows in her engaging work about bird intelligence. She demonstrates how recent research has indicated that birds are capable of a wide range of cognitive skills. (Adult)

***Ghosts of the Tsunami: Death and Life in Japan's Disaster Zone*** by Richard Lloyd Parry. Macmillan / Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 2017.

Parry relates the experiences of people who lived through the tsunami that hit northeast Japan. The stories of how those that remained provides telling insight into contemporary Japanese culture. (Adult)

***\*The Gift of Our Wounds: A Sikh and a Former White Supremacist Find Forgiveness After Hate*** by Arno Michaelis and Pardeep Singh Kaleka. Macmillan / St. Martin's Press. 2018.

The massacre at a Sikh Temple in Milwaukee by a white supremacist brings together the son of one of the victims and a former skin head. They relay their stories to show how this event lead to their unlikely partnership to speak out against racism. (Adult)

***The Girl Who Smiled Beads: A Story of War and What Comes After*** by Clemantine Wamariya and Elizabeth Weil. Penguin Random House / Crown. 2018.

This memoir takes the reader from a child's idealic family life in Rwanda to the horrors of the Rwandan civil war. The interweaving timelines recount the epic survival of two young sisters traversing a content in crisis which connects the narrative to the sisters trying to find healing as refugees in the aftermath of war. (Adult, adult for young adults)

***God Save Texas: A Journey into the Soul of the Lone Star State*** by Lawrence Wright. Penguin Random House / Alfred A. Knopf. 2016.

Wright interweaves Texas history with information about the state's contemporary culture and politics in addition to details about its larger cities. A must read for Texans and those interested in the influential state. (Adult)

***A Higher Loyalty: Truth, Lies, and Leadership*** by James Comey. Macmillan / Flatiron Books. 2018.

Former FBI director Comey gives insight on his own demons and delights while working for the US Federal Government whereas he reviews his education, career, family and relationships to find a new level of leadership and loyalty to embark. From chapters discussing Trump Tower to Hoover's Shadow, The author speaks his viewpoints on his dismissal from the Oval Office to Professor at Howard University. (Adult)

***I Am I Am I Am: Seventeen Brushes with Death*** by Maggie O'Farrell. Penguin Random House / Knopf. 2018.

This memoir narrates the author's coming of age and life history through the prism of near-death experiences, written as essays summarizing the events in proximity with the author's own mortality ranging from commonplace incidents to singular experiences. (Adult)

***\*In a Different Key: The Story of Autism*** by John Donvan and Caren Zucker. Penguin Random House / Crown. 2016.

Reviews how society has perceived autism from its beginnings in 1940s to contemporary times. Provides clear-eyed insight into a topic frequently in the media spotlight. (Adult)

***The Inheritance: A Family on the Front Lines of the Battle Against Alzheimer's Disease*** by Niki Kapsambelis. Simon and Schuster. 2017.

A devastating description of the science and treatment of Alzheimer's disease, told through the lens of a family afflicted with a genetic mutation for early onset of the disease. (Adult)

***The Kings of Big Spring: God, Oil, and One Family's Search for the American Dream*** by Bryan Mealer. Macmillan / Flatiron Books. 2018.

The author introduces us to five generations of his own unforgettable and compelling family surviving through heart wrenching struggles of scarcity, addiction, excess, and identity. The multigenerational saga is set against the cyclical rises and falls of Big Spring, Texas economic and oil booms. (Adult)

***Lab Girl*** by Hope Jahren. Penguin Random House / Knopf. 2016.

Jahren describes her wondrous (and sometimes hazardous) research experiences and findings with plants in the wild and in the laboratories that she built. She also interweaves stories about the wonders of the plant world and how plants sustain life on Earth, as well as her experiences as a teacher and as a female scientist. (Adult)

***Last Hope Island: Britain, Occupied Europe, and the Brotherhood That Helped Turn the Tide of War*** by Lynne Olson. Random House. 2017.

Last Hope Island offers a unique perspective by telling the story of countries that were captured by Nazi Germany. It overturns many commonly held but inaccurate beliefs about the roles these countries played in the defeat of the Nazis. (Adult)

***\*The Line Becomes a River: Dispatches from the Border*** by Francisco Cantu. Penguin Random House / Riverhead Books. 2018.

Written with a lyrical voice, this memoir of the border takes you beyond the headlines of the immigration crisis to find real people. It is a story of self-exploration, family, and a search for redemption. (Adult)

***The Long Haul: A Trucker's Tales of Life on the Road*** by Finn Murphy. W.W. Norton & Co. Inc. 2018.

Finn Murphy is a long-haul moving trucker, at the bottom of the barrel in the trucker hierarchy, and an engaging and entertaining raconteur who tells fascinating stories of his life on the road. (Adult)

***Megafire: The Race to Extinguish a Deadly Epidemic of Flame*** by Michael Kudas. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 2017.

Forest fires are more deadly and more frequent than they've ever been. Michael Kudas walks us through decades of wrongheaded forestry management and political compromises to explain how we got here. (Adult)

***Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge*** by Erica Armstrong Dunbar. Simon & Schuster / Atria. 2017.

Dunbar draws on the story of the Washingtons' escaped slave to examine what life was really like for slaves, reasons why slaves sought their freedom, and what life was like on the run. This tale provides insights into both enslaved blacks and white masters. (Adult)

***No One Tells You This: A Memoir*** by Glynnis MacNicol. Simon & Schuster. 2018.

The author outlines woman who are hunting to find voice, valor and value in this world through examining discrimination, love, death, sex, friendship, career, education and loneliness. The book engages and rages the social norms and cookie-cutter molds of what not only mothers, wives, aunts, sisters, grandmothers should be but how these females even view themselves along with the world. (Adult)

***Poisoned City: Flint's Water and the American Urban Tragedy*** by Anna Clark. Macmillan / Metropolitan Books. 2018.

In 2014, after switching their water source, the residents of Flint, Michigan, noticed that their tap water was turning a dark color, and they also starting suffering from ailments such as skin burns and respiratory diseases. Clark's book explores how city and state policies (including denials about the poisoned water and lead exposure) created an even worse situation that could have been avoided. (Adult)

***The Potlikker Papers : A Food History of the Modern South*** by John T. Edge. Penguin Random House / Penguin Press. 2017.

A detailed view of how food of the South sustained the poorest citizens, yet powerfully impacted politics, civil rights, and provided connections in communities. Southern cooking is being reinvented by chefs throughout the world- again to bring people back to the table to once again engage with others. (Adult)

***The Radium Girls*** by Kate Moore. Sourcebooks. 2017.

Radium was seen as a miracle substance in the early part of the 20th century and people clamored for it. The radium girls of this story, who put the substance not just on watch dials but all over their teeth and clothes, fought for compensation after gruesome injury and death followed their time in the watch factories. (Adult)

***Space Odyssey: Stanley Kubrick, Arthur C. Clark and the Making of a Masterpiece*** by Michael Benson. Simon & Schuster. 2018.

Benson discusses the making of "2001: A Space Odyssey," which was one of the most remarkable, and controversial, science fiction movies ever made. The movie took 4 difficult years to create, film and edit, but it introduced many innovative techniques that are still being used today. (Adult)

***Tesla: Inventor of the Modern*** by Richard Munson. W.W. Norton & Co. Inc. 2018.

A well researched and interesting book on the life and inventions of NikolaTesla including some photographs and information on Tesla's complex relationship with Thomas Edison. (Adult)

***Things That Make White People Uncomfortable*** by Michael Bennett and Dave Zirin. Haymarket Books. 2018.

An examination of the current state of social justice in the U.S. through the lens of Super Bowl champion, organizer, activist and feminist Michael Bennett, written with urgency and humor. (Adult for young adult, Adult)

***Threading My Prayer Rug*** by Sabeeha Rehman. Arcade Publishing. 2017.

Sabeeha Rehman tells the story of how she became a Muslim in America, with all the cultural clashes and attendant difficulties, after an arranged marriage brings her to the US from her birth country of Pakistan. (Adult)

***\*Thursday Night Lights: The Story of Black High School Football in Texas*** by Michael Hurd. UT Press. 2017.

In the the land of 'Friday Night Lights', Black high schools played played some of the best football in Texas on Thursdays during segregation. Post-integration, their stories threatened to be lost until this carefully researched book filled the gap. (Adult)

***Tomorrow Will Be Different: Love, Loss, and the Fight for Trans Equality*** by Sarah McBride. Penguin Random House / Crown. 2018.

Sarah McBride focuses her autobiography on the eventful years after she came out as a trans gender woman. In addition to her work promoting LGBTQ rights, she also falls in love with a trans gender man who she loses to cancer. (Adult)

***Women & Power: A Manifesto*** by Mary Beard. W.W. Norton & Co. Inc. / Liveright. 2017.

Beard reflects on how the power of public speaking has reflected on women's roles throughout history. Drawing on her own experiences, contemporary politics, and the media for examples, the author demonstrates how the same dynamic is still in place today. (Adult)