



Youth Titles

Texas Topaz Nonfiction Reading List, 2020

Grades K-2

An Inconvenient Alphabet: Ben Franklin & Noah Webster's Spelling Revolution by Beth Anderson, illustrated by Elizabeth Baddeley (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2018)

Have you ever wondered why English spelling can be so challenging or why British and American spellings vary? Language is constantly evolving, and this charming book highlights the real-life struggles, successes, and failures of spelling reformation.

A Green Place to Be: The Creation of Central Park by Ashley Benham Yazdani (Candlewick Press, 2019)

The history of the most famous public park with a focus on the landscape design and the unique landmarks of Central Park, demonstrating how we all come together in public space. It is brought to life through bright and fresh watercolor illustrations.

* *Cute as an Axolotl: Discovering the World's Most Adorable Animals* by Jess Keating, illustrated by David DeGrand (Alfred A. Knopf, 2018)

Meet some of the world's cutest animals and uncover curious facts about them. Gorgeous, colorful photos on every spread let you see for yourself just how cute these animals are.

* *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales (Neal Porter Books, 2018)

In this autobiographical picture book, author and illustrator Yuyi Morales describes the journey she made with her son to the United States and the struggles they encountered once here. However, their new home includes a wonderful place, the public library, where their imaginations can take flight.

Free as a Bird: The Story of Malala by Lina Maslo (Balzer + Bray, 2018)

A picture book telling the story of Malala Yousafzai a young girl from Pakistan who speaks to people around the world to advocate for equality and education for every person. Enduring hardship from an enemy that tried to silence her, she has continued to be an inspiration to many.

Guitar Genius: How Les Paul Engineered the Solid Body Electric Guitar and Rocked the World by Kim Tomsic, illustrated by Brett Helquist (Chronicle Books, 2019)

This story of Les Paul details the creation of the first solid-body electric guitar and other inventions that have changed the music world forever. His curiosity, grit, and perseverance are strongly portrayed throughout his biography.

Karl's New Beak: 3-D Printing Builds a Bird a Better Life by Lela Nargi (Capstone Editions, 2019)

Karl, an abyssinian ground hornbill, has lost the lower part of his beak, which makes eating difficult prompting the zookeepers at the National Zoo to work with the Smithsonian Institute to build Karl a 3D printed beak, demonstrating the value of how design thinking result in real world solutions.

* *Planting Stories: The Life of Librarian and Storyteller Pura Belpré* by Anika Denise, illustrated by Paola Escobar (Harper, 2019)

The story of librarian, author and storyteller, Pura Belpre who came to New York from Puerto Rico and used her multiple talents to promote and create works for the Latinx community in the United States. She is now honored by the American Library Association with the Pura Belpre Award that recognizes outstanding works by Latinx authors and illustrators.

Skulls! by Blair Thornburgh, illustrated by Scott Campbell (Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2019)

A funny and accessible look at the sometimes-scary human skull, with lots of reasons to love it. Exuberant and cheerful!

Starstruck: The Cosmic Journey of Neil DeGrasse Tyson by Kathleen Krull and Paul Brewer, illustrated by Frank Morrison (Crown Books for Young Readers, 2018)

This is a very engaging biography of African American Neil Degrasse Tyson who discovered our skies and our solar system at the Hayden Planetarium. His Harvard education and passion leads him to working at the Hayden and a career in this field with many surprises!

* *The Book Rescuer: How a Mensch from Massachusetts Saved Yiddish Literature for Generations to Come* by Sue Macy, illustrated by Stacy Innerst (Simon & Schuster, 2019)

One man's love for stories and search for Yiddish literature led him on a quest to collect books that many viewed as irrelevant, as garbage. Between book donations and rescues, Aaron Lansky built a collection that became the Yiddish Book Center and now contains a million and a half books, preserving Yiddish language and culture.

* *The Eye That Never Sleeps: How Detective Pinkerton Saved President Lincoln* by Marissa Moss, illustrated by Jeremy Holmes (Abrams, 2018)

This is a well illustrated account of how Allan Pinkerton foils the plot to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln. This Pinkerton book is geared toward children, aged 6-8. It keeps you engaged in the president's cross-country train travels while you see the mechanics of the many secret endeavors to save our President.

The Roots of Rap: 16 Bars on the 4 Pillars of Hip-Hop by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Frank Morrison (Little Bee Books, 2018)

An exuberantly illustrated, lyrically written homage to the art of rap and hip-hop, both musically and culturally. With a glossary and profiles of Who's Who in Hip-Hop.

When Angels Sing: The Story of Carlos Santana by Michael James Mahin, illustrated by José Ramírez (Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2018)

Mahin traces the musical journey of Carlos Santana from his roots in Mexico to success as a guitar virtuoso and musician who influenced the world music genre.

Grades 3-5

A Place to Land: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Speech That Inspired a Nation by Barry Wittenstein, illustrated Jerry Pinkney (Holiday House, 2019)

A beautiful exploration of MLK Jr's "I Have a Dream" speech that features the many people that helped shape it, and MLK Jr's own personality traits that allowed him to succeed.

A Ray of Light: A Book of Science and Wonder by Walter Wick (Scholastic Press, 2019)

Walter Wick's gorgeous follow up to his awardwinning "A Drop of Water." This book covers all of the principles of STEM through detailed photographs displaying the amazing properties of light.

- * *All in a Drop: How Antony van Leeuwenhoek Discovered an Invisible World* by Lori Alexander, illustrated by Vivien Mildenerger (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019)

A tradesman, not a scholar, is the scientist who discovers microbes, and changes how we see and think about the world. This biography of Antony van Leewenhoek is an engaging chapter book.

- Engineered! Engineering Design at Work* by Shannon Hunt, illustrated by James Gulliver Hancock (Kids Can Press, 2017)

Discover nine branches of engineering and nine real-world problems solved through engineering design. This book is a fantastic resource for STEM teachers and students and it provides examples of design thinking throughout.

- Fly with Me: A Celebration of Birds through Pictures, Poems, and Stories* by Jane Yolen, Heidi E. Y. Stemple, Adam Stemple, and Jason Stemple (National Geographic, 2018)

A gem of a book for bird lovers and nature lovers alike, this volume gathers the incredible photography and information National Geographic is known for and artfully combines it with poetry, stories, and folklore in which birds play a role.

- * *Guts* by Raina Telgemeier (Graphix logo, 2019)

Bestselling graphic novelist Raina Telgemeier recounts her experiences with anxiety and therapy as a preteen.

- * *Just like Rube Goldberg: The Incredible True Story of the Man behind the Machines* by Sarah Aronson, illustrated by Robert Neubecker (Beach Lane Books, 2019)

Through perseverance and following his dreams, Rube Goldberg became known for his 20th-century comics and eponymous machines that demonstrate impractical but humorous logic.

- * *Magic Ramen: The Story of Momofuku Ando* by Andrea Wang, illustrated by Kana Urbanowicz (Little Bee Books, 2019)

Hungry to hear about the invention of one of the world's most popular foods? Magic Ramen: The Story of

Momofuku Ando is the inspirational story of one man's determination to make a convenient, delicious, and inexpensive food for Japanese people after World War II.

- Just Right: Searching for the Goldilocks Planet* by Curtis Manley, illustrated by Jessica Lanan (Roaring Brook Press, 2019)

For every child who's ever wondered if we are alone in the universe comes this well-researched and accessible book outlining both what we know now and what is suspected concerning life on other planets. As we follow a young girl and her family through a museum, we explore what a planet needs to sustain life - what makes it "just right".

- Pass Go and Collect \$200: The Real Story of How Monopoly Was Invented* by Tanya Lee Stone, illustrated by Steven Salerno (Henry Holt and Company, 2018)

A fascinating look at the origins of one of the world's most famous games, Monopoly, and its inventor, Elizabeth "Lizzie" Magie. The book traces the game's evolution, twists and turns, drama, and people that brought us the version we play today.

- Soldier for Equality: José de La Luz Saénz and the Great War* by Duncan Tonatiuh (Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2019)

The true story of Jose de la Luz Saenz, a schoolteacher who became a World War I Tejano soldier when he went overseas to fight for his country, and then came back to the United States to fight for civil rights.

- Something Rotten: A Fresh Look at Roadkill* by Heather L. Montgomery, illustrated by Kevin O'Malley (Bloomsbury, 2018)

What can we learn from roadkill, how can we help prevent more animals from dying along roads, and why does it matter? This is a younger reader's equivalent to Mary Roach's Stiff.

- * *The Superpower Field Guide* – the entire series which including Moles, Beavers and Ostriches by Rachel Poliquin, illustrated by Nicholas John Frith (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019)

Several volumes (ostriches, beavers, moles), each of which is an excellent combination of information and humor. These will appeal to animal lovers and serendipitous library browsers alike. Fun, funny and educational!

Yogi: The Life, Loves, and Language of Baseball Legend Yogi Berra by Barb Rosenstock, illustrated by Terry Widener (Calkins Creek, 2019)

Yogi Berra is as well known for his sayings as for his forty-three years in New York baseball. Rosenstock's book blends Berra's story of perseverance, hard work, and success on the diamond with many of his well-known quips and quotes.

Grades 6-9

* *1919 the Year That Changed America* by Martin W. Sandler (Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2019)

Nestled between two prominent years, 1919 might seem easy to overlook, yet key events occurred that have significant repercussions even 100 years later.

* *Anne Frank's Diary: The Graphic Adaptation* by Ari Folman, Anne Frank, illustrated by David Polonsky (Pantheon Books, 2018)

The graphic adaptation of the classic Anne Frank: Diary of a young girl, the story of a family that is in hiding from the Nazi told from the point of view of Anne, a young girl. It stays true to the original, using Anne's humor and wit to narrate the story. This is a fresh presentation making Anne's story approachable by a new generation.

Dear America: The Story of an Undocumented Citizen (Young Reader's Edition) by Jose Antonio Vargas (Harper Collins, 2019)

Now a Pulitzer-prize winning journalist, Jose Antonio Vargas, was sent to the United States when he was 12 years old, never realizing that he had undocumented status. After learning of this by applying for his driver's permit, he spent almost 20 years trying to hide the fact he was undocumented. Through his journey, and we learn there are no easy answers.

Fighting for the Forest: How FDR's Civilian Conservation Corps Helped Save America by P. O'Connell Pearson (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2019)

This inspiring book by O'Connell chronicles the Civilian Conservation Corps. Beginning with a quick overview of the Great Depression, it follows Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal to help the U.S. survive the economic crisis by calling on government inter-agency cooperation and

collaboration to help restore hundreds of state and national parks and planting three billion trees.

Funny, You Don't Look Autistic: A Comedian's Guide to Life on the Spectrum by Michael McCreary (Annick Press, 2019)

Michael McCreary discusses his journey from being diagnosed with autism at age five to being a professional comedian, calling into question general misconceptions about the autism spectrum disorder along the way. Funny and relevant.

* *Killer Style: How Fashion Has Injured, Maimed, and Murdered through History* by Alison Matthews David (Owlkids Books, Inc, 2019)

A chatty tone and lots of fascinating photos lighten the underlying message that social and economic equality play a large part in the damaging world of style. Compelling short passages detail the damage done to hatmakers, pajama wearers, hair colorers, tutu wearers, and more.

* *O Captain, My Captain: Walt Whitman, Abraham Lincoln, and the Civil War* by Robert Burleigh, illustrated by Sterling Hundley (Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2018)

This is the story of Walt Whitman's experience observing Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. Beautifully describing Whitman's experiences as a "friend-nurse" to the wounded, the author describes the toll the war took on both Whitman and President Lincoln.

My Corner of the Ring: A Memoir from a Champ by Jesselyn Silva (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2019)

Jesselyn Silva embodies passion and determination as she pursues her dreams in the boxing ring, busting stereotypes and overcoming challenges along the way.

Parkland Speaks: Survivors from Marjory Stoneman Douglas Share Their Stories by Sarah Lerner, ed. (Crown, 2019)

Parkland Speaks tells the story from the survivors of the Parkland School shooting. The details are raw, emotional, and put the reader in the school as the events unfold. A definitive read for middle and high school students.

* *Path to the Stars: My Journey from Girl Scout to Rocket Scientist* by Sylvia Acevedo (Clarion Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018)

Sylvia Acevedo, CEO of the Girl Scouts of America, reflects on her challenges and successes growing up in the small, tight-knit community of Las Cruces, NM. She recounts the skills she learned in her Girl Scout troop that carried her forward into a career with NASA and then full circle to her leadership position with the Girls Scouts.

* *Proud: Living My American Dream (Young Reader's Edition)* by Ibtihaj Muhammad (Little, Brown and Company, 2018)

As the first American to compete in the Olympic games wearing hijab, Ibtihaj Muhammad shares her story of falling in love with fencing as a young girl and competing on the international stage despite facing opposition. Her hard work, success, and ability to overcome obstacles makes this story truly inspiring.

Spooked! How a Radio Broadcast and the War of the Worlds Sparked the 1938 Invasion of America by Gail Jarrow (Calkins Creek, 2018)

If you think that the "fake news" of today is a new development, think again. A radio broadcast on October 30, 1938, incited panic across the nation, launching both a federal investigation and the career of Orson Welles.

The Tornado Scientist: Seeing Inside Severe Storms by Mary Kay Carson, photographed by Tom Uhlman (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019)

As a young girl interested in extreme weather events, Robin Tanamachi discovered that people researched the weather as a job leading her to become a meteorologist. This story shares stories from her childhood as well as the science of severe weather and tornadoes across the United States.

High School

* *(Don't) Call Me Crazy: 33 Voices Start the Conversation about Mental Health* by Kelly Jensen, ed. (Algonquin, 2018)

An important, accessible, and diverse collection of writings, drawings, and photographs about mental health, with riveting entries on related topics. With resources for help and suggestions for further reading.

* *Attucks! Oscar Robertson and the Basketball Team That Awakened a City* by Phillip M. Hoose (Farrar Straus Giroux Books for Young Readers, 2018)

Oscar Robertson, the "Big O" and one of basketball's all-time greats, capped a run that saw the Crispus Attucks High School Tigers crowned state champs in 1955 and 1956. More than his story, this is the history of a school, a coach, and a team that brought integration to the Indiana state basketball tournament as well as the city of Indianapolis.

Captured: An American Prisoner of War in North Vietnam by Alvin Townley (Scholastic Focus, 2019)

Shot down as one of the first Americans captured in Vietnam, naval aviator Jerry Denton's story of his experiences as a prisoner of war is detailed in this well-researched account. During his seven and a half years as a POW, Denton helped lead the POWs in creating secret communication codes and withstand all that happened to them with the hope of returning home with honor.

Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic, A Young Adult Adaptation by Sam Quinones (Bloomsbury Childrens Books, 2019)

Dreamland follows the impact of the prescription drug OxyContin, its abuse, and the subsequent epidemic of black tar heroin on families of middle-class rural and suburban young people across the country. Replete with interviews and first-hand accounts from addicts, their families, the authorities who waged war against the pharmaceutical companies, and Mexico-based heroin

suppliers, readers will better understand the current opioid crisis.

buildings and objects - along with quiet heroes who worked to track and preserve art for future generations.

Grand Theft Horse by Greg Neri, illustrated by Corban Wilkin (Tu Books, 2018)

November 2, 2006, Gail Ruffu went to court in California on the charge of grand theft horse. This graphic novel exposes the dark side of horse racing in the U.S. and tells the story of one woman's willingness to sacrifice everything to keep a racehorse, Urgent Envoy, from becoming another casualty of the system.

The Stonewall Riots: Coming Out in the Streets by Gayle E. Pitman (Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2019)

Filled with primary source materials, *The Stonewall Riots* presents the history of the LGBTQ+ movement in America from its beginnings. Great background knowledge for students about an important moment in our history.

* *Shout: A Poetry Memoir* by Laurie Halse Anderson (Viking, 2019)

Opening up many years after her landmark Y.A. novel *Speak*, this memoir documents Laurie Halse Anderson's story. Written in free verse, she shares her story of survival along with those of others, and she provides hope and advocacy for those who have been wounded.

They Called Us Enemy by George Takei, Justin Eisinger, and Steven Scott, illustrated by Harmony Becker (Top Shelf Productions, 2019)

Actor and activist George Takei shares the story of his childhood when he spent four years in Japanese American internment camps. His story chronicles the innocence of those years, interspersed with his parents' perspectives, as well as the impact on his life and career.

The Greatest Treasure Hunt in History: The Story of the Monuments Men (Young Reader's Edition) by Robert M. Edsel (Scholastic Focus, 2019)

How can art survive a crisis like World War II, when cultural repositories were under occupation, under fire, and under attack by systematic thievery? We have the Monuments Men to thank - those who enlisted in the armed forces with the goal of protecting irreplaceable

Unpresidented: A Biography of Donald Trump by Martha Brockenbrough (Feiwel and Friends, 2018)

Meticulously researched, this biography traces President Trump's roots, rise, and reign as well as his penchant for self-promoting, hyperbolic, fact-defying statements. Whether or not you like the president, it's difficult to ignore him.

Adult for Young Adult

* *Becoming* by Michelle Obama (Crown, 2018)

An important glimpse into the life of Michelle Obama, before, during, and after Barack and the White House. Readers get to know First Lady Obama a little more, viewing her as a person, versus just a political figure.

Failing up: How to Take Risks, Aim Higher, and Never Stop Learning by Leslie Odom (Feiwel and Friends, 2018)

Although Odom has enjoyed many lucky breaks, he also faced challenges in his pursuit of stage and screen roles. He remains upbeat throughout the narrative and offers helpful advice that can translate beyond the realm of entertainment.

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.

The 2020 Topaz Committee consisted of:

Hillary Volkmann (Aldine ISD), Carol Hafer (Crowley ISD), Kristi Starr, (Lubbock ISD), Laura Stiles (Round Rock ISD), Cindy Buchanan (Aldine ISD), Jenny Rodriguez (New Braunfels Public Library), Kari Heitman (Katy ISD)