The purpose of the Texas Topaz Reading List is to provide children, teens, 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 recommendation by the Texas Topaz Committee.


Macadam tells the little-known story of the first Jewish transport to Auschwitz. The book follows a group of girls and women taken from small towns in Slovakia and details their hardships, while highlighting their unique personalities and their relationships to each other. An important piece of history that is based on extensive research on the Holocaust and interviews with the few remaining survivors of the 999.


The touching account of the final days and death of the beloved father and mother of Rodrigo Garcia. To survive the death of a parent is difficult but when your father is Nobel Prize winner Gabriel García Márquez (Gabo), you have to navigate the additional stressors of the media and the fact that the world is mourning with you. Garcia writes with honesty about the real and tender moments with his parents and their impact in his life and in the lives of "the readers," as Gabo called his fans.

In this sprawling account of the history of North American hurricanes, Dolin provides a vivid description of the powerful destruction and devastation unleashed by mother nature each year from June through November. While the scientific and technological strides in meteorology are impressive, and necessary, it’s clear that there are limits to our ability to predict hurricanes and humans remain vulnerable to these mammoths of weather.

A Human Algorithm: How Artificial Intelligence is Redefining Who We Are by Flynn Coleman (Counterpoint Press, 2019)

It’s predicted that we are at the end of the last cycle of technological development led entirely by humans and that the age of intelligent machines is upon us. Human rights attorney and writer Coleman explores how our relationship with intelligent technologies will help (and potentially hurt) humanity in profound ways, and the importance of ensuring human beliefs and values are incorporated into artificially intelligent systems. A thought provoking and urgently important read as we develop, implement, and interact with future technologies.


Overshadowed by the Watergate scandal, the resignation of Nixon’s Vice President Spiro Agnew in 1973 over corruption and tax evasion is almost forgotten history. Rachel Maddow revisits Agnew’s story – and explains how the lessons are still relevant today.

Bee People and The Bugs They Love by Frank Mortimer (Citadel Press, 2020)

An entertaining look at the world of beekeeping and the importance of bees for communities. With humor and sincerity, Mortimer takes the reader on his journey from a novice beekeeper to expert, educator, and advocate. You won’t look at bees the same way again!

This memoir by one of the Exonerated Five sheds light on his wrongful incarceration and how he worked to build a life despite the horror of spending his youth in prison for a crime he did not commit. His story is one of love for himself, his family, and his faith.


A harrowing and beautiful memoir about a young woman's cancer journey, from her difficult diagnosis, brutal treatments, and physical and mental recovery.

Broken (In the Best Possible Way) by Jenny Lawson (Henry Holt & Company, an imprint of Macmillan Publishers, 2021)

A hilarious look inside the mind of Texas author Jenny Lawson. Lawson gives an honest portrayal of her struggles with severe anxiety and depression, as well as how the COVID pandemic affected her life and mental health. Lawson has a way of writing that is laugh-out-loud funny and incredibly endearing.

Chasing the Thrill: Obsession, Death, and Glory in America's Most Extraordinary Treasure Hunt by Daniel Barbarisi (Alfred A. Knopf, 2021)

Plunge into the modern-day treasure hunt started by Forrest Fenn in 2010. Follow the decade-long obsession of thousands of treasure hunters (including the author) scrambling across the American southwest as skepticism, controversy, and tragedy begin to taint Fenn's seemingly pure motives for the hunt.

Japanese Breakfast frontwoman Michelle Zauner describes the struggles of growing up biracial in a small Oregon town. Her fraught relationship with her Korean mother is told through their shared love of food, and comes to a heartbreaking conclusion when her mother is diagnosed with cancer. A beautiful tribute to the enduring bond between mothers and daughters and our capacity to pick up the pieces after losing a loved one.

*Dolly Parton, Songteller: My Life in Lyrics* by Dolly Parton with Robert K. Oermann (Chronicle Books, 2020)

An intimate look at Dolly Parton's songwriting history, told by Dolly herself. Explore her songs in order through from her early career to the present. A must read for music and Dolly fans.

*Empire of Pain: The Secret History of the Sackler Dynasty* by Patrick Radden Keefe (Doubleday, 2021)

The saga of three generations of the Sackler family, whose fortune was built on the development and deception marketing techniques of Valium and other drugs, and the eventual creation of OxyContin--one of the most popular pain medications prescribed in the 1990s and 2000s and a significant contributor to today's opioid crisis. Keefe writes a compelling history of the Sackler dynasty, rife with drama, greed, and deceit.


A lively and entertaining account of the events that led to the Battle of the Alamo and a look at the origins of several of the stories surrounding this popular period. The authors describe how the Alamo has played a role in American politics and popular culture. Attention is paid to the Tejano population of Texas and how efforts to shed light on this part of history are often met with resistance.
Giannis: The Improbable Rise of an NBA MVP by Mirin Fader (Hachette Books, 2021)

Fader's captivating biography of NBA star Giannis Antetokounmpo follows his path from his home in Greece where he was born to Nigerian immigrants, but did not receive Greek citizenship until just before his being drafted into the NBA in 2013, to success and rise to stardom with the Milwaukee Bucks. The details of Giannis’ work ethic, commitment to family, and humble upbringing make this story memorable.

¡Hola Papi!: How to Come Out in a Walmart Parking Lot and Other Life Lessons by John Paul Brammer (Simon & Schuster, 2021)

Brammer’s memoir is written in the style of his advice column on Grindr, an app designed for men seeking men. His journey as a gay man and Mexican American growing up in Oklahoma and finding his way in the world is, in turns, humorous, poignant, and insightful.


A fascinating look at how a speech-language pathologist taught her dog to communicate using buttons for words. The book is filled with conversations Hunger had with Stella, and steps for how you can teach your dog to communicate.


Journalist Cal Flyn explores some of the most damaged and desolate areas of the world, including some in the United States, which have been abandoned by people who formerly lived in them. To her surprise, she finds that resilient Nature has begun to "re-wild" them, offering natural regeneration in the most unexpected places.

An interesting, important biography, thoroughly researched and carefully written, of Lady Bird Johnson, one of our nation's most skilled and influential First Ladies, but a woman whose story has not been fully told until now.


Details the high sea adventure of a little known expedition from Belgium to Antarctica. The voyage of the Belgica seems to be doomed when the vessel gets trapped in the Antarctic ice for months. The isolation and lack of sunlight create an environment that the men on board are not equipped to handle. Some of the men become ill, mad, and even perish. A well written historical account of an adventurous group of men and the trials they had to face to survive, yet touching on the importance of exploration.


Told in alternating chapters by Willie Nelson and his sister Bobbie, this is a touching memoir about growing up in small-town Texas and how music saved both of their lives.
**Oak Flat: A Fight for Sacred Land in the American West** by Lauren Redniss (Random House, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2020)

Recounts the history of a land that is sacred to the Apache peoples and details the fight to save it from mining. Using narrative, dialogue, and illustrations, Redniss jumps between small towns, living rooms, Congressional conference rooms, and the mountains of Oak Flat itself to tell the story of the people who want to protect them, as well as the reasons cited for the proposed development.

*Of Bears and Ballots: An Alaskan Adventure in Small-Town Politics* by Heather Lende (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2020)

A look at the politics of a small town in Alaska through the lens of a woman who ran for and won a local office. The cast of characters is compelling, and the author treats political differences with sensitivity and empathy. Over the course of the book, the author learns a lot about what it’s like to try and govern, and the compromises that necessarily ensue. A great read for anyone interested in how local government and politics work.

*On Juneteenth* by Annette Gordon-Reed (Liveright Publishing, 2021)

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and Texas native Gordon-Reed reflects on the complicated history of Black Texans and the meaning of Juneteenth. A concise and insightful read that weaves together American history and personal anecdotes.


Former President George W. Bush brings together full-color portraits of men and women who have immigrated to the United States with their unique and varied personal stories of pursuing the American Dream. Readers will appreciate the strength necessary to persevere in becoming an American citizen.

Bestselling novelist and neuroscientist Genova shares her knowledge about how the brain can remember events from your childhood in detail, while at the same time forgetting where you last put your car keys. Discover how memory is profoundly impacted by meaning, emotion, sleep, stress, and context.

**The Anthropocene Reviewed: Essays on a Human-Centered Planet** by John Green (Dutton, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2021)

Popular young-adult novelist John Green presents a volume of essays for adults--all of us who are living in the Anthropocene, our current geologic era. Writing in his lively, warmhearted style, Green offers a series of five-star reviews of topics he finds interesting and thought-provoking for today, including Dr Pepper, Halley's Comet, velociraptors, teddy bears, and much, much more.

**The Bomber Mafia: A Dream, a Temptation, and the Longest Night of the Second World War** by Malcolm Gladwell (Little, Brown & Company, 2021)

Gladwell weaves together stories of a Dutch genius and his homemade computer, a band of brothers in Alabama known as the Bomber Mafia, a British psychopath, and a group of chemists at Harvard with a tendency to set things on fire, all in an examination of the bombing innovations of WWII and their moral challenges.

**The Book Collectors: A Band of Syrian Rebels and the Stories That Carried Them Through a War** by Delphine Minoui, translated by Lara Vergnaud (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2020)

A group of young resistance fighters in Daraya, Syria hold on to hope through the power of community, learning, and books. Minoui brings a far-off, complicated war into vivid focus, and explores the importance of finding hope wherever you can.
The Book of Rosy: A Mother's Story of Separation at the Border by Rosayra Pablo Cruz & Julie Schwietert Collazo (HarperOne, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2020)

After violence caused her to make the incredibly difficult decision to migrate to the U.S. with her children, Rosayra must then figure out how to survive under the "zero tolerance" policy that separates her from her children. This detailed account of her journey through the immigration center, detention facilities, separation from her children, and challenges in adapting to her new home provides an eye-opening look at the struggles faced by immigrants, and also the importance of coming together to support one another and build community.

*The Burning Blue: The Untold Story of Christa McAuliffe and NASA's Challenger Disaster by Kevin Cook (Henry Holt & Company, 2021)

The fascinating and distressing story of Christa McAuliffe, the “Teacher in Space,” and the Challenger space shuttle crew that lifted off on a cold January day in 1986, and found itself in a catastrophic disaster only moments later. With vivid portraits of Christa and the Challenger astronauts, Cook conveys important messages about exploration, education, and perseverance, and reveals the human price the crew and America paid for politics and progress.

The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper by Hallie Rubenhold (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019)

This detailed account of the lives of the five women murdered by Jack the Ripper sheds light on the inaccuracies of their portrayals in the press and in popular culture, and it offers insight into the difficulties faced by women living in Victorian-era England.

Marking the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre in the Greenwood district of Tulsa, Oklahoma known as Black Wall Street, historian Scott Ellsworth describes the long road to the discovery of a mass grave related to the event and shows the importance of keeping our history alive despite attempts to hide it.


This memoir of Holocaust survivor Eddie Jaku tells of his ability to endure and persevere through the unbelievable hardships and atrocities of Nazi concentration camps. Jaku’s simple but powerful beliefs in kindness, community, and gratitude, turned what could have been a hate-filled life into one where he is able to smile everyday and live with hope instead of sadness.


A multigenerational story of two rival Jewish families--the Kadorries and the Sassoons--that immigrated to China from Baghdad and found business success and influence that allowed their families to flourish into the 20th century. Then, at the height of WWII, the families joined together to rescue and protect thousands of Jewish refugees. Discover the lasting legacies of two families that continue to define Shanghai and Hong Kong to this day.

The heartwarming story of Nora, a polar bear cub abandoned at birth by her mother at an Ohio zoo. Heroic efforts to save her life become the starting point for this exploration of the complicated relationship between humans and wild animals, the need for conservation in the Arctic and elsewhere, and the perils of climate change for all of us.

The Queens of Animation: The Untold Story of the Women Who Transformed the World of Disney and Made Cinematic History by Nathalia Holt (Little, Brown & Company, 2019)

Meet the women storytellers and artists who were able to attain jobs working for Walt Disney in the male dominated early days of animated feature films. Laced with elements of world war, social history, and technological advances, discover the unsung contributions of talented women who worked to create beloved classic Disney films and helped transform moviemaking.


Explore the sometimes surprising history of home economics, a popular high school class for so many girls in the 20th century that still has much to teach us now. This book argues for the value of "home ec" in our schools today--it should be required, and provide a scientifically rigorous, focused, interdisciplinary course that teaches invaluable life skills to American students of every gender, color, and background.

Americans spend over $700 billion annually at supermarket-style grocery stores, and spend 2% of their lifetime inside one. Grocery stores are the point of interface most familiar to us in our food supply change, but it's the least understood by most Americans. This book takes a look at a largely hidden world of groceries, grocery stores, and our supply chain--something brought to the forefront of our lives during the COVID-19 shutdown.


McGhee explores how racism is the common denominator of our most vexing social, economic, and political problems, and makes clear how racism hurts everyone, including the people who may think they benefit.

*The Ugly Cry: A Memoir* by Danielle Henderson (Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2021)

Henderson’s story of growing up in New York, abandoned by her mother, abused, poor, and outcast in every possible way as one of the few black families in her white neighborhood. Even her brother tried to murder her when she was a baby. In spite of all the trauma, she had the love of her grandmother which helped her become a successful adult. Her stories of growing up as a child of the 80's will resonate with many.

*The Way I Heard It* by Mike Rowe (Gallery Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2019)

Emmy winner Mike Rowe, weaves 35 fascinating stories about people you may know, filled with startling facts that you probably didn't. Stories filled with surprising revelations, entertaining wit, and sharp observations. Based on the podcast of the same name.
The Woman They Could Not Silence: One Woman, Her Incredible Fight for Freedom, and the Men Who Tried to Make Her Disappear by Kate Moore (Sourcebooks, 2021)

A riveting account of the life of Elizabeth Packard, who was sent to an asylum by her husband for expressing different religious views. Her writings detailing the horrific conditions she endured and the abuse she witnessed helped in her eventual fight to obtain more rights for women and to ensure regulations on asylums.

The Yellow House: A Memoir by Sarah M. Broom (Grove Atlantic, 2019)

An elegantly written memoir set in New Orleans East, tBroom's story of her girlhood and her family, and the yellow shotgun house which became her mother's "thirteenth and most unruly child," until it was lost in Hurricane Katrina. Winner of the 2019 National Book Award.

This is Your Mind on Plants by Michael Pollan (Penguin Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2021)

A fascinating and open-minded deep-dive into three different psychoactive plant drugs-- opium, caffeine, and mescaline. Pollan challenges how we think about drugs through a unique blend of history, science, and memoir.
This Land is Their Land: The Wampanoag Indians, Plymouth Colony, and the Troubled History of Thanksgiving by David J. Silverman (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019)

The year 2021 marked the 400th anniversary of what most Americans were taught in school to be the first Thanksgiving—a harvest celebration among the Wampanoag native people and the European settlers in the Plymouth Colony. But relations between these peoples was far from celebratory. This in-depth, thoroughly researched book gives context and insight into the real story of colonization, treatment of the Native people, and the Thanksgiving myth.

Uncomfortable Conversations with A Black Man by Emmanuel Acho (Flatiron Books, 2020)

A succinct exploration of what are often difficult topics of discussion around race, racism, white privilege, and black culture. Acho openly tackles questions to which all Americans need the answer. With honesty, humility, and compassion, the author explores and explains concepts of which many of us are afraid to confront, and provides a variety of practical steps we can take to learn more and do better.

Wake: The Hidden History of Women-Led Slave Revolts written by Rebecca Hall, illustrated by Hugo Martínez (Simon & Schuster, 2021)

A graphic novel that is part history of African slave revolts and part memoir of the historian conducting the research and the process of delving into this history. The book centers the women in the narratives, bringing this marginalized narrative to the forefront. The black and white illustrations bring the stories to life and make them real.

What Happened to You?: Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing by Dr. Bruce D. Perry & Oprah Winfrey (Flatiron Books, 2021)

Through deeply personal conversations, Perry and Winfrey advocate for changing our focus from "what’s wrong with you?” to “what happened to you?” A subtle but profound shift in our approach to trauma that brings to the forefront our past experiences and how they affect us and resonate throughout our life.
Wow, No Thank You: Essays by Samantha Irby (Vintage Books, 2020)

Irby's third essay collection offers relatable and hilarious stories that cover everything from career changes to aging and marriage.

You Will Get Through This Night: A Practical Mental Health Guide by Daniel Howell (Dey Street Books, an imprint of William Morrow, 2021)

This practical and often funny mental health support guide gives relatable and professional advice for how to take control of your mental health. Practical things are suggested for immediate use in our toughest moments, to things you can do for long term mental health, with the ultimate reminder that you will get through this night.