

# 2023 Texas Topaz Nonfiction Reading List

## *Titles for Adults*



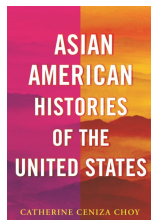
The purpose of the Texas Topaz Reading List is to provide children, teens, and adults with recommended nonfiction titles that stimulate reading for pleasure and personal learning. It is intended for recreational reading and is not designed to support any particular curriculum. Due to the diversity in 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.

(^) Denotes an enthusiastic recommendation for the audiobook format by the Texas Topaz Adult Sub-Committee.

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***Asian American Histories of the United States*** by Catherine Ceniza Choy (Beacon Press, 2022)



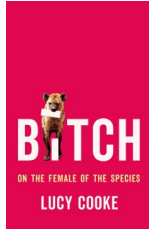
Catherine Ceniza Choy, Asian American and Asian Diaspora Studies, Comparative Ethnic Studies Professor at U.C. Berkeley, focuses on three interconnected themes in her book: anti-Asian violence, erasure of Asian American contributions, and the resistance of Asian Americans to this omission. From labor activism to legislative advocacy, people of Asian descent are integral to the American experience. It is well beyond time for the erasure to end, and it starts with American history books like this one.

***\*Being Seen: One Deafblind Woman's Fight to End Ableism*** by Elsa Sjunneson (Tiller Press, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2021)



Disability is not a bad word, but our media and culture portray persons with a disability as weak, infantile, burdens, and villains. In *Being Seen*, Elsa Sjunneson, a Deafblind woman, professor, and science fiction author explores disability tropes in media, her struggles in the healthcare system, and her advocacy for the disabled community. She asks the reader to think twice about how they look at and treat disabled persons and help to work to dismantle the ableist system.

***Bitch: On the Female of the Species*** by Lucy Cooke (Basic Books, an imprint of Perseus Books, 2022)



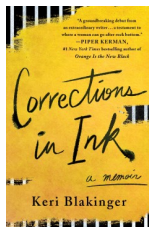
Zoologist Lucy Cooke tells the story of evolution and sex from the perspective of the females of the animal kingdom, long ignored and misunderstood by scientists. Far more interesting than they have been given credit for, these animals exhibit variations in genetics, morphology, and behavior that will surprise you.

***Broken Horses: A Memoir*** by Brandi Carlile (Crown, an imprint of Random House, 2021)



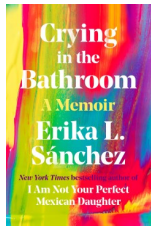
Grammy-winning singer-songwriter Brandi Carlile opens up about her dysfunctional yet beautiful childhood and how her formative years altered her journey to adulthood and impacted her success as an artist. Poetic, lyrical, and raw, Carlile's memoir takes readers on her journey from a serious illness at age five that almost took her life to her teen years as an openly gay young person struggling with her sexuality and her faith, and up to her hard won successes as a mother, musician, and advocate.

***\*Corrections in Ink*** by Keri Blakinger (St. Martin's Press, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2022)



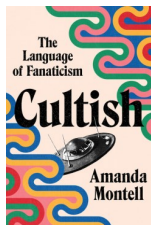
In this riveting memoir, Keri Blakinger shares her story of growing up as a competitive figure skater full of promise, while hiding a self-destruction that eventually finds her serving a prison sentence on a felony drug charge. Blakinger's insider knowledge of America's prison system, along with her skill and passion for writing, gave her unique opportunities to give voice to an often ignored population—that of residents in America's jails and prisons. Blakinger's writings to date have helped spur changes including getting dentures for men and women in the Texas prison system. This honest and electric memoir is told with brutal honest and sly humor, ending with hope and redemption.

***Crying in the Bathroom: A Memoir*** by Erika L. Sánchez (Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2022)



An unflinching series of essays by author of “I am not your perfect Mexican daughter”, Erika L. Sanchez. She writes about her life including her past, her beliefs, struggles, and breakthroughs.

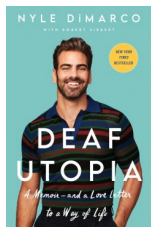
**\**Cultish: The Language of Fanaticism*** by Amanda Montell (HarperWave, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2021)



What makes “cults” so fascinating, powerful, and frightening? What leads people to join and stay in such extreme groups? Montell’s argument is that, on some level, we are all already members of a cult. Montell posits that it's not about 'brainwashing' but that the key to manufacturing intense ideology and community all comes down to language—cultish language that we all hear and are influenced by every single day. Explore the effects of language on notorious groups like

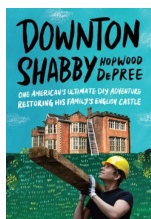
Heaven's Gate, as well as the pervasive and influential language of modern start-ups, Peloton leaderboards, and social media influencers.

**\**Deaf Utopia: A Memoir and a Love Letter to a Way of Life*** by Nyle DiMarco with Robert Siebert (William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2022)



Nyle DiMarco shares the joys and challenges of growing up as a 4th-generation Deaf man in a hearing world. Part of a community that includes around 10 million people in the US and close to 360 million world-wide, this model, actor, and producer is an activist for Deaf rights and education, advocating for individuals who are frequently misunderstood and underestimated.

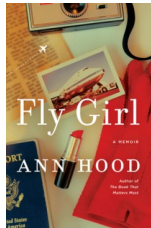
***Downton Shabby: One American's Ultimate DIY Adventure Restoring His Family's English Castle*** by Hopwood DePree (William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2022)



LA film producer, Hopwood DePree, thought his grandfather's stories of an ancestral castle were just that, stories. After his grandfather and then his father's sudden death, Hopwood starts looking into his family history to learn more about the men he misses so much. In his research, he finds there is actually a proper English manor that his ancestors once owned. He then goes on an adventure to

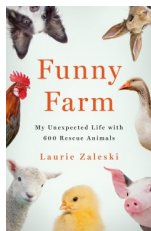
see the manor and in doing so changes his life and the life of a small English town through, of all things, home renovation.

***Fly Girl: A Memoir*** by Ann Hood (W. W. Norton & Company, 2022)



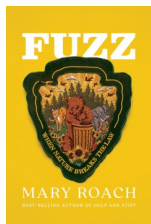
Ever wonder what goes on behind the scenes on an airplane? Author Ann Hood recounts her years of working as a flight attendant capturing stories that range from surprising to funny to sad. Not only is this the story of Hood's career, but the story of the evolution of both the airline industry and the career we know as flight attendant.

***Funny Farm: My Unexpected Life with 600 Rescue Animals*** by Laurie Zaleski (St. Martin's Press, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2021)



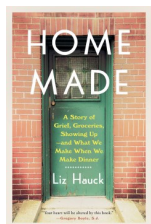
A fun and touching memoir by Laurie Zaleski, owner of the Funny Farm located in New Jersey. It's a history of her turbulent childhood and how she wanted to fulfill a promise she made to her mother that ultimately led to Laurie owning a 600 animal farm.

***\*Fuzz: When Nature Breaks the Law*** by Mary Roach (W. W. Norton & Company, 2021)



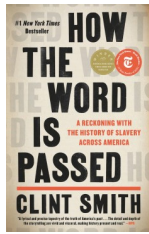
As we expand further into territories where wild animals live, interactions with wildlife become more common and increasingly complicated. Follow Mary Roach around the world as she meets wildlife biologists, human-animal conflict specialists, and conservationists and learns of their efforts to help humans and animals coexist more peacefully. This humorous and informative look at nature will help readers reflect on their own behaviors and beliefs about animals.

***Home Made: A Story of Grief, Groceries, Showing Up -- and What We Make When We Make Dinner*** by Liz Hauck (The Dial Press, an imprint of Random House, 2021)



In trying to come to terms with her father's death, author Liz Hauck decides to volunteer in the residential home for teenage boys where her father spent many years working. She shows up one evening a week with groceries in hand to cook a meal and then share it with the boys. This memoir tells the story of the three years Liz and the boys spent together and the community they built around the table they shared.

**\**How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America* by Clint Smith (Little, Brown and Company, 2021)**



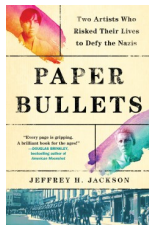
Author and poet Clint Smith takes readers on a guided tour of landmarks, monuments, and cities with ties to slavery. The sites featured demonstrate how slavery and its legacy are intertwined with our past and our present.

**\**I'm Glad My Mom Died* by Jennette McCurdy (Simon & Schuster, 2022)**



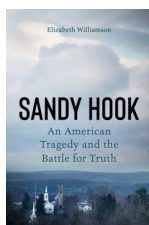
Jennette McCurdy shares her heartbreaking struggles as a former child actor, including eating disorders, addiction, and her complicated, abusive relationship with her overbearing mother. Told with brutal honesty and dark humor, McCurdy details her struggle to carve a path for herself after the death of her mother, to begin to heal through therapy and discover who she really wants to be. McCurdy's story is ultimately one of resilience and hope that sparks serious thought about our complicated relationships with our mothers.

**\**Paper Bullets: Two Women Who Risked Their Lives to Defy the Nazis* by Jeffrey H. Jackson (Algonquin Books, 2020)**



Gender-bending Parisian avant-garde artists Claude Calhun (Lucy Schwob) and Marcel Moore (Suzanne Malherbe), living on the British Channel island of Jersey under Nazi occupation during World War II, resisted the Germans by planting creative, sometimes humorous "paper bullet" messages that appeared to come from within their ranks. This suspenseful book reads like a novel. Historically erased queer protagonists using subversive propaganda to fight the Nazis from an obscure island off the coast of England makes for a great story, and yet this book is the best kind of nonfiction--it's just wild enough to be completely true.

**\**Sandy Hook: An American Tragedy and the Battle for Truth* by Elizabeth Williamson (Dutton, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2022)**



Ten years after a gunman killed twenty first-graders and six educators at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, journalist Elizabeth Williamson chronicles the aftermath of the tragedy. After conspiracy theorists, led by Alex Jones and others, spread lies and misinformation about the event and claimed

that it was a hoax, the families dealt with threats, abuse, and harassment. Some of the parents fought back and their experiences foreshadowed the many conspiracies that proliferated online after several major events in recent history.

***Seek You: A Journey Through American Loneliness*** by Kristen Radtke (Pantheon Books, 2021)



In the nonfiction graphic novel *Seek You* by Kristen Radtke a topic that still doesn't get discussed as openly as it should, loneliness, is put front and center. She discussed how and why we engage with each other and what it means as a society when loneliness spreads.

***She Memes Well: Essays*** by Quinta Brunson (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2021)



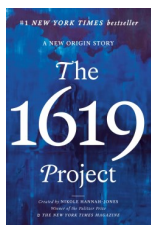
The actor, writer, and producer chronicles her childhood and her rise in comedy, from making funny videos for BuzzFeed to her career as a television writer.

***Slaying the Dragon: A Secret History of Dungeons & Dragons*** by Ben Riggs (St. Martin's Press, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2022)



Author and RPGer, Ben Riggs takes an in-depth look into the company TSR (Tactical Studies Rules) and people that created role-playing games.

***The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*** by Nikole Hannah-Jones, creator and editor (One World, an imprint of Random House, 2021)

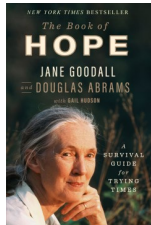


*The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* is a substantial expansion of the New York Times Magazine's 2019 special issue commemorating the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in America. It is edited by Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones, who updates the original essays with new contributions from historians, journalists, poets, novelists, and cultural critics to



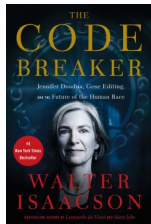
review the impact of African slavery on American society. Readers are asked to consider who shapes, or is allowed to shape, a country's collective memory and history.

***The Book of Hope : A Survival Guide for Trying Times*** by Jane Goodall and Douglas Abrams with Gail Hudson (Celadon Books, 2021)



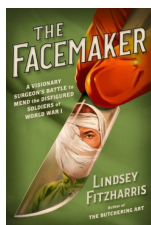
The Book of Hope is a conversation with the authors Jane Goodall and Douglas Abrams. Goodall is one of the top environmentalists in the world. She has traveled the world and has seen how people are wrongly impacting it. In the book she discusses how she has hope for the future (even when everything seems futile), how nature and people are resilient, and how moments in her life have helped her tackle moments of doubt.

***The Code Breaker: Jennifer Doudna, Gene Editing, and the Future of the Human Race*** by Walter Isaacson (Simon & Schuster, 2021)



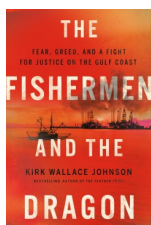
A compelling and thorough account of how Nobel Prize winning scientist Jennifer Doudna and her colleagues made revolutionary discoveries in genetics that are transforming how we cure diseases and fend off viruses like COVID-19. Part science history, part detective story, this captivating read also poses thought experiments on the moral and ethical questions surrounding genetic editing and where it might one day lead humanity.

***\*The Facemaker: A Visionary Surgeon's Battle to Mend the Disfigured Soldiers of World War I*** by Lindsey Fitzharris (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2022)



This book tells the story of Dr. Harold Gillies, a pioneering plastic surgeon, and the soldiers he so compassionately cared for. As a result of the new technologies used in World War I, including chemical weapons and machine guns, thousands of men suffered devastating facial trauma. Through his innovative techniques, Dr. Gillies was able to restore not only the faces of many disfigured young men, but their spirits as well.

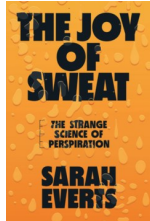
***\*The Fishermen and the Dragon: Fear, Greed, and a Fight for Justice on the Gulf Coast*** by Kirk Wallace Johnson (Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2022)



This examination of issues affecting the Galveston-area fishing community in the 1970s and 80s focuses on the proliferation of the KKK in the area and the

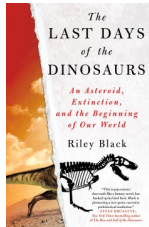
Vietnamese community who fought back, as well as the woman who took on Gulf Coast chemical industries to make the bay safer.

***The Joy of Sweat: The Strange Science of Perspiration*** by Sarah Everts (W. W. Norton & Company, 2021)



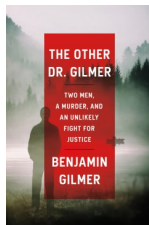
In *The Joy of Sweat*, author Sarah Everts tells the story of perspiration--from the vital role it plays in the human body to how it factors into a number of industries. Divided into three parts, *The Science of Sweat*, *Sweat and Society*, and *The War on Sweat*, the author answers questions such as: Why is sweat salty? Why do some people sweat more than others? What does our sweat reveal about our diet? and What role does sweat play in finding a partner? Everts infuses humor and storytelling into her detailed investigation of this very relatable topic.

***The Last Days of the Dinosaurs: An Asteroid, Extinction, and the Beginning of Our World*** by Riley Black (St. Martin's Press, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2022)



Science writer Riley Black describes what life on Earth experienced just before, the day of, and after (1st month, 1 year, 100 years, 1000 years, 100 thousand years, 1 million years) the asteroid impact 66 million years ago. Readers meet armored Ankylosaurus, herbivore Edmontosaurus, and top predator Tyrannosaurus rex as the global disaster reaches them. Almost all of the terrestrial, non-avian dinosaurs died that day. This mass extinction and the struggle of the surviving animals and plants eventually gave rise to the Age of Mammals.

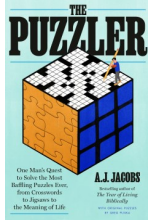
***\*The Other Dr. Gilmer: Two Men, a Murder, and an Unlikely Fight for Justice*** by Benjamin Gilmer (Ballantine Books, an imprint of Random House, 2022)



In this blend of true crime, medical mystery, and memoir, physician Benjamin Gilmer begins a new job at a small clinic in rural North Carolina, taking over for its previous doctor, Vince Gilmer, who was sentenced to life in prison for murdering his own father. As Benjamin investigates the circumstances that led to Vince's murder conviction, he becomes an advocate for those in prison suffering from mental illness.

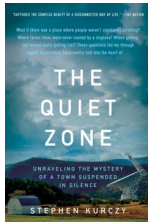


***The Puzzler: One Man's Quest to Solve the Most Baffling Puzzles Ever, from Crosswords to Jigsaws to the Meaning of Life*** by A. J. Jacobs (Crown, an imprint of Random House, 2022)



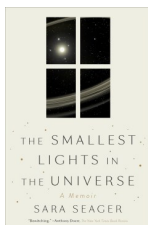
You don't have to enjoy doing puzzles to appreciate their complexity, construction, and contributions. In *The Puzzler*, Jacobs immerses himself in all things puzzles, determined to identify their myriad benefits and discover how puzzles make us better thinkers and problem solvers, give us fresh perspective, and can help shape our world. Take a shot at some challenging puzzles as you enjoy Jacobs' journey from the crosswords and anagrams to ciphers, mazes, and more.

***The Quiet Zone: Unraveling the Mystery of a Town Suspended in Silence*** by Stephen Kurczy (Dey St., an imprint of William Morrow, 2021)



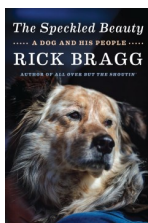
Green Bank, West Virginia--an area deep in the Appalachian Mountains known as the Quiet Zone. It's a place where devices emitting radio frequencies such as cell phones and wifi are banned so that astronomers at the Green Bank Observatory can search the depths of space without interference. Individuals flock to the Quiet Zone seeking the idyllic isolation and silence, but are things in Green Bank really as they seem? Kurczy introduces the reader to an eclectic cast of characters, explores what lies behind the veil of silence, and examines the role technology plays in all our lives.

***The Smallest Lights in the Universe: A Memoir*** by Sara Seager (Crown, an imprint of Random House, 2020)



MIT astrophysicist Sara Seager lives a charmed life with a devoted husband, two little boys, and a successful career as a planetary scientist searching for elusive life on distant planets. But in the wake of an unexpected tragedy, she begins to question the purpose and trajectory of her life and must learn to rely on others to help her and her boys navigate their new reality. Part memoir, part astronomy lesson, Seager's story beautifully entwines the wonders of the stars and the ties that bind here on Earth.

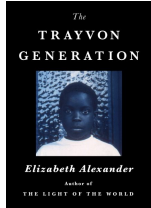
**\*^ *The Speckled Beauty: A Dog and His People*** by Rick Bragg (Alfred A. Knopf, 2021)



While dealing with several physical and mental health issues, the author takes in a starving, sick, stray dog that shows up on his property. After the dog, Speck, is nursed back to health, his true personality comes out, which is a combination of messy, rambunctious, and mischievous. Speck's antics serve as a distraction for the

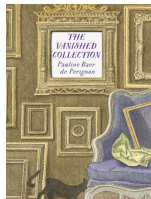
author, and the relationship between Rick and Speck is a heartwarming example of the human-animal bond.

***The Trayvon Generation*** by Elizabeth Alexander (Grand Central Publishing, 2022)



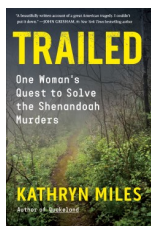
Lyrical language interweaves art, music, and poetry to poignantly capture the intergenerational trauma of racism in America in a way that inspires the reader to do further research and ultimately offers hope.

***The Vanished Collection*** by Pauline Baer de Perignon, translation by Natasha Lehrer (New Vessel Press, 2022)



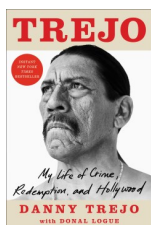
Baer de Perignon's family memoir and art history mystery describes her search to recover the art collection owned by her great-grandfather Jules Strauss which was seized by the Nazis during the World War II occupation of France. A cousin's suggestion prompts her to investigate what happened to the world-renowned collection, which leads her to learn more about Jules, her family, and the intricate and arduous process of restitution.

***\*Trailed: One Woman's Quest to Solve the Shenandoah Murders*** by Kathryn Miles (Algonquin Books, 2022)



In 1996, Julie Williams and Lollie Winans, both experienced hikers, were murdered at their campsite while backpacking together in Virginia's Shenandoah National Park. On the 20th anniversary of the murder, journalist and outdoors expert Kathryn Miles began investigating the unsolved crime. She soon discovers evidence of corruption that existed during the investigation and determines to bring the killer to justice. In this book, Miles not only recounts her endeavor to solve the case but brings to life the remarkable young women at the center.

***Trejo: My Life of Crime, Redemption, and Hollywood*** by Danny Trejo with Donal Logue (Atria Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2021)



In this memoir, famous Hollywood bad guy, Danny Trejo, shares his painful yet inspirational journey from an abusive childhood home, to life behind prison walls, and finally to the big screen. The story is gritty and raw and honest as Trejo shares details about the crimes he committed in his young life, his struggles with drugs,

and his many broken relationships along the way. Ultimately, though, Trejo's recovery and the priority he places on helping others recover is truly inspiring and hopeful.

**\*^ *You'll Never Believe What Happened to Lacey: Crazy Stories about Racism* by Amber Ruffin and Lacey Lamar (Grand Central Publishing, 2021)**



With vivid honesty and humorous insight, comedian Amber Ruffin helps her sister Lacey share her encounters with racism that she experiences throughout her life, on the daily, while living in their home state of Nebraska. The sisters' entertainingly appalling stories, balanced with their laugh-out-loud sisterly banter, will either be unfortunately relatable or necessarily eye-opening.