

2024 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.

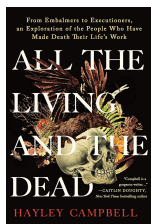
(^) Denotes an enthusiastic recommendation for the audiobook format by the Texas Topaz Adult Sub-Committee.

***A Fever in the Heartland: The Ku Klux Klan's Plot to Take Over America, and the Woman Who Stopped Them** by Timothy Egan (Viking, An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023)



The story of the rise and fall of a predatory, violent huckster who rose to power during 1920s Indiana as grand master of the KKK, and the politicians, clergymen, and community leaders who followed him. Their efforts led to wide swept political and legal change that can still be felt today.

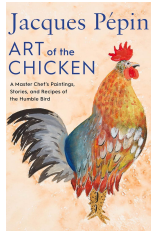
***All the Living and the Dead: From Embalmers to Executioners, an Exploration of the People Who Have Made Death Their Life's Work** by Hayley Campbell (St. Martin's Press, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2022)



On one level, this book describes what happens to a person's body after death, and the professionals who spend their careers working closely with death such as funeral directors, bereavement counselors, and cemetery employees. It also shows the great empathy and compassion which develops in these professions. The topic

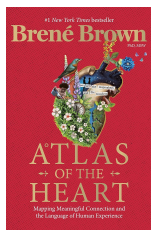
of death is often difficult and avoided, and this work enlightens us on a subject often unknown.

****Art of the Chicken: A Master Chef's Recipes and Stories of the Humble Bird*** by Jacques Pépin (Harvest, an imprint of William Morrow, 2022)



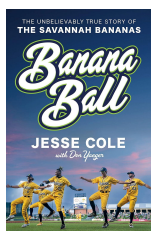
World-renowned chef Jacques Pépin writes a culinary and artistic memoir celebrating the chicken. There are no detailed recipes with ingredients and precise measurements. Instead, there are delicious descriptions of memorable meals starring the chicken, and throughout are Chef's charming drawings of the bird.

****Atlas of the Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience*** by Brené Brown (Random House, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2021)



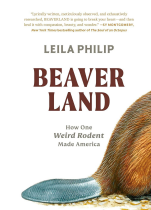
Atlas of the Heart by Brené Brown is a book that delves into the intricacies of human emotions and relationships. Brown, a research professor, uses her expertise to provide insights into different emotions, helping readers better understand and navigate their emotional landscapes. The book offers guidance on building more meaningful connections and leading a more authentic, wholehearted life by exploring various emotional experiences and responses.

****Banana Ball: The Unbelievably True Story of the Savannah Bananas*** by Jesse Cole (Dutton, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023)



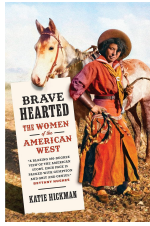
The popularity of the Savannah Bananas is spreading worldwide and it is easy to see why in Jesse Cole's newest book. He covers the birth of the Bananas as well as his philosophy of "fans first" which has led him to great success. The book is part personal memoir, part baseball history, part leadership advice, and wholly entertaining.

Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America by Leila Philip (Twelve, an imprint of Grand Central Publishing, 2022)



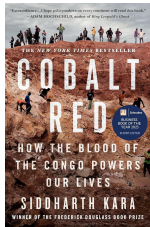
Philip writes an informative and entertaining nature book about the beaver. This hard-working semi-aquatic mammal is part of the economic history of the United States, and it continues to make positive contributions to our environment.

Brave Hearted: The Women of the American West by Katie Hickman (Spiegel and Grau, 2022)



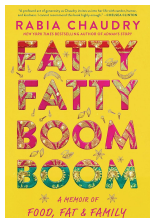
In *Brave Hearted*, author Katie Hickman not only delivers a riveting account of the greatest mass migration in American history, but she also tells the stories of the courageous and diverse women who journeyed West. Told through a combination of letters, diaries, and other personal accounts, these stories, many of them about women who were previously unknown, convey the very important role women played in shaping the American West.

****Cobalt Red: How the Blood of the Congo Powers Our Lives*** by Siddharth Kara (St. Martin's Press, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2023)



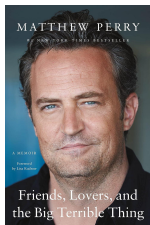
Cobalt is an essential component of rechargeable batteries, used in smartphones, laptops, and tablets. Siddharth Kara's book describes the terrible human rights and child abuse occurring right now in the Democratic Republic of Congo because of cobalt mining, while the tech companies who rely on this mineral basically ignore the reality of what is happening.

****Fatty Fatty Boom Boom: A Memoir of Food, Fat, and Family*** by Rabia Chaudry (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, an imprint of Workman Publishing Co., Inc., 2022)



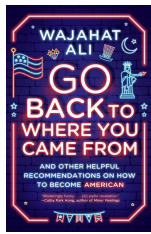
Rabia Chaudry candidly shares her relationships with food, her family, and herself in this humorous and honest memoir. She chronicles the ups and downs of her lifelong struggle with her weight, which is always thwarted by her love of delicious food. Recipes are included so that readers can share in her appreciation of South Asian cuisine.

^*Friends, Lovers, and the Big Terrible Thing: A Memoir* by Matthew Perry (Flatiron Books, 2022)



Go behind the scenes with the beloved star of *Friends*, Matthew Perry, as he opens up about his struggles with addiction. The memoir told from his trademark sense of humor is candid and very open about the struggles he faced trying to battle the disease.

***Go Back to Where You Came From: And Other Helpful Recommendations on How to Become an American* by Wajahat Ali (W.W. Norton & Company, 2022)**



How should one handle the "Pakistani American immigrant experience" when one is BORN in America? With intelligence, heart, and a good dose of humor.

****Hijab Butch Blues: A Memoir* by Lamya H (The Dial Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023)**



Born in South Asia, raised in the Middle East, and an immigrant in America, Lamya feels like a fish out of water culturally and as a queer Muslim woman. Her faith never wavers, and this memoir intersperses stories from the Quran with her own quest for understanding herself, her faith, and her place in the world.

****How to Speak Whale: A Voyage into the Future of Animal Communication* by Tom Mustill (Grand Central Publishing, a division of Hachette Book Group, 2022)**



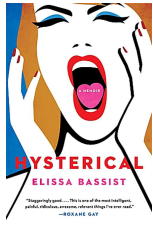
What if you almost died when a whale breaches onto your kayak, but it appears that the whale shifted its trajectory midflight to avoid the fatal blow? Was it on purpose? How can we know? Join Tom Mustill as he explores the depths of the current science surrounding animal communication. Listen to the audiobook for whale songs!

***How to Take Over the World: Practical Schemes and Scientific Solutions for the Aspiring Supervillain* by Ryan North (Riverhead Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2022)**



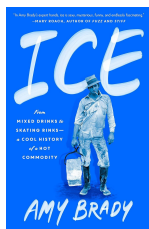
It turns out that comic book writers need to know a lot of science in order to create believable supervillains - enjoy your science with a side of humor, whether you are an aspiring supervillain, or trying to save the world!

Hysterical: A Memoir by Elissa Bassist (Hachette Books, 2022)



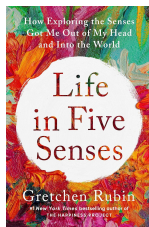
Women's voices are silenced in a myriad of subtle and not so subtle ways, with dire consequences. Elissa Bassist unmutes herself in this powerful and personal call to action.

****Ice: From Mixed Drinks to Skating Rinks, a Cool History of a Hot Commodity*** by Amy Brady (G.P. Putnam's Sons, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023)



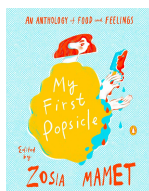
Ice is such a part of our everyday lives that we probably have never thought to wonder about its history and what life was like when ice wasn't just a normal thing. There is a vast history of ice and how it has been used all over the world for many different things, but its use specifically in America is a fairly modern tale. Brady's book takes you on a journey through the history of ice and how it has transformed everything from health, food, sports, and even travel.

Life in Five Senses: How Exploring the Senses Got Me Out of My Head and into the World by Gretchen Rubin (Crown, an imprint of Random House, 2023)



During a trip to the eye doctor, a passing comment sends Rubin reeling and causes her to dive into understanding the five senses. Part memoir and part information study into each of the five senses and how they impact our life. Through each of the senses Rubin shows how we can get out of our heads and savor the life we are living.

My First Popsicle: An Anthology of Food and Feelings by Zosia Mamet (Penguin Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2022)



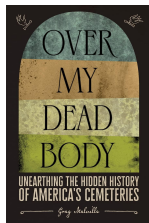
Everyone has at least one memory that is associated with food. In My First Popsicle, Mamet gathers essays from actors, writers, comedians, and many others. Some essays are hilarious while others may be emotional, but they are all relatable to the powerful role food has in our lives.

Now Let Me Fly: A Portrait of Eugene Bullard (Adult for YA nomination) by Ronald Wimberly and and Brahm Revel (First Second, 2023)



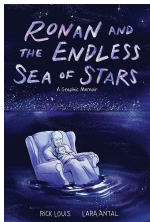
Born in the Deep South in 1895, Eugene Bullard deplored the world that oppressed and despised Black men and women. Determined not to allow the color of his skin to dictate his future, Bullard ran away from home, joined a band of Romani, stowed away on a ship bound for Germany, became a prize fighter, fought for France in World War I, and became the first African American fighter pilot - among other exploits.

****Over My Dead Body: Unearthing the Hidden History of America's Cemeteries*** by Greg Melville (Abrams Press, an imprint of Abrams, 2022)



Melville takes you on a tour through the history of America's cemeteries and the how, why, and where we bury our dead. Cemeteries have changed over the centuries as our country has grown and people have changed. This is a fascinating look at how cemeteries gave birth to landscape architecture and famous parks, inspired numerous authors and poets, and played a role in political battles throughout our country's history. Melville leaves you thinking about the future of cemeteries and how we bury our loved ones as our population continues to grow.

Ronan and the Endless Sea of Stars: A Graphic Memoir by Rick Louis (Abrams ComicArts, an imprint of Abrams, 2022)



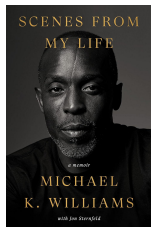
Rick Louis shares his most loving life moment of becoming a dad and also his most heartbreaking moment as his child is diagnosed with a terminal illness. This graphic memoir is filled with pain, frankness, but ultimately love.

****Rough Sleepers: Dr. Jim O'Connell's Urgent Mission to Bring Healing to Homeless People*** by Tracy Kidder (Random House, an imprint and division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023)



A look into the life of Dr. Jim O'Connell as he strives to help and offer compassion to Boston's population of people struggling with homelessness.

****Scenes from My Life: A Memoir*** by Michael K. Williams (Crown, an imprint of Random House, 2022)



This bittersweet memoir chronicles Michael K. Williams's life as an artist and activist. It demonstrates how art and music can change a person's life and inspire them to be better, and it's also an honest look at how difficult it is to struggle with addiction.

Stay True: A Memoir by Hua Hsu (Doubleday, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2022)



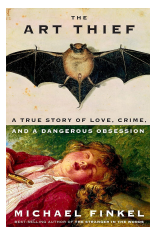
Hua Hsu's memoir takes readers to his childhood growing up in California as the child of Taiwanese immigrants, and to UC- Berkeley where we are introduced to his friend group and his best friend Ken. This is a beautifully written elegy to a lost friend.

Tell Me Everything: The Story of a Private Investigation by Erika Krouse (Flatiron Books, 2022)



Private investigator Erika Krouse tells the story of how she helped solve a landmark sexual assault case centered around a university football program and the challenges she faced along the way as she continued to reckon with her own history with sexual violence.

The Art Thief: A True Story of Love, Crime, and a Dangerous Obsession by Michael Finkel (Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023)



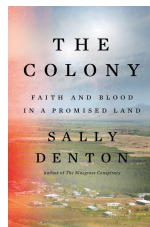
The Art Thief tells the tale of Stephane Breitwieser and his almost obsessive need to steal art from all over Europe. Breitwieser isn't your ordinary thief. He did not steal for money or notoriety. Taking priceless works of art became an obsession and allowed him to amass over three hundred pieces of art in nearly ten years until it all fell apart in spectacular fashion.

****The Barbizon: The Hotel That Set Women Free*** by Paulina Bren (Simon & Schuster, 2021)



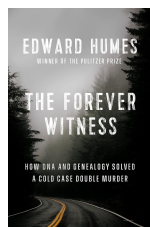
The Barbizon: The Hotel That Set Women Free by Paulina Bren is a historical account of the Barbizon, a women-only hotel in New York that operated during the 20th century. The book explores the lives of the women who stayed at the hotel and the social changes it represented, including the evolving roles and freedoms of women. It sheds light on the experiences of female artists, writers, and other guests who found independence and camaraderie within the hotel's walls, making it a symbol of women's liberation during a pivotal period in history.

The Colony: Faith and Blood in a Promised Land by Sally Denton (Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2022)



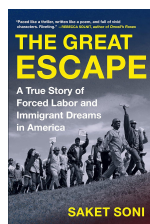
When nine women and children are ambushed and murdered in northern Mexico in 2019, two nearby polygamist Mormon communities find themselves under the international spotlight. Author Sally Denton, a descendent of polygamous Mormons herself, tells the story of this horrendous event while also exploring the complicated history of fundamentalist Mormons in the US and Mexico and the events leading up to the massacre.

****The Forever Witness: How Genetic Genealogy Solved a Cold Case Double Murder*** by Edward Humes (Dutton, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2022)



Decades after a young couple is murdered, a cold case detective and genetic genealogist work together to bring answers to the victims' families. This is an informative, suspenseful, and compassionate look at a tragedy that shows just how much data can be obtained from our DNA.

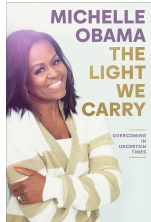
The Great Escape: A True Story of Forced Labor and Immigrant Dreams in America by Saket Soni (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, an imprint of Workman Publishing Co., Inc., 2023)



In 2006, the author, Saket Soni, received an anonymous call from a migrant worker in Mississippi saying that he was one of 500 or more migrant workers living in squalid conditions, watched by guards 24/7, and forced to work for the false promise of a green card. Soni starts to secretly meet with the men and uncovers a modern-day human trafficking case tied to immigrant workers brought over to

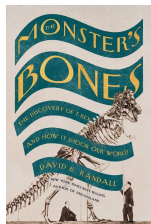
rebuild after Hurricane Katrina. Saket rallies the men and leads them on a march to Washington, D.C. to fight for their rights and their dignity.

****The Light We Carry: Overcoming in Uncertain Times* by Michelle Obama (Crown, an imprint of Random House, 2022)**



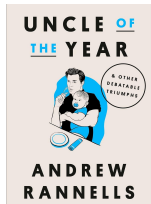
How do you stay hopeful and balanced in today's highly changing world? Through a series of stories and reflections, Michelle Obama offers ways for one to navigate the challenges they are facing offering habits and principles that have helped her navigate through troubling times.

****The Monster's Bones: The Discovery of T. Rex and How It Shook Our World* by David K. Randall (W.W. Norton & Company, 2022)**



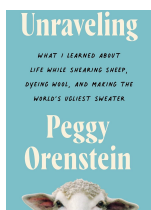
David K. Randall writes of the early days of fossil hunting, and paleontologist Barnum Brown who first discovered a tyrannosaurus rex fossil. This t-rex is still standing today at the American Museum of Natural History.

^*Uncle of the Year: & Other Debatable Triumphs* by Andrew Rannells (Crown, an imprint of Random House, 2023)



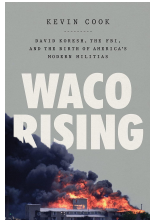
What does it mean to be an adult? Balancing humor and self-reflection, Broadway and TV star Andrew Rannells navigates work, family, anxiety, and relationships in this collection of essays.

***Unraveling: What I Learned About Life While Shearing Sheep, Dyeing Wool, and Making the World's Ugliest Sweater* by Peggy Orenstein (Harper, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2023)**



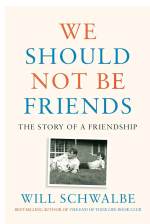
During COVID Peggy Orenstein decides to take on knitting a sweater, including shearing sheep, dyeing wool, and knitting. While on this journey she reflects on growing older, sustainability, and her relationship with her parents and the changing dynamic with her daughter as she gets older.

****Waco Rising: David Koresh, the FBI, and the Birth of America's Modern Militias* by Kevin Cook (Henry Holt and Company, 2023)**



This detailed and fast-paced narrative of the 51-day siege of the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas draws on interviews with survivors and never reported material to paint a picture of what it was like inside and outside the compound during this tragic event 30 years ago.

****We Should Not Be Friends: The Story of a Friendship* by Will Schwalbe (Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023)**



The story of a decades-long friendship that lasts through all of life's ups and downs. But before their long-lasting friendship could blossom, Will Schwalbe and Chris Maxey first had to get past their own personal biases and lackluster first impressions.

***You Could Make This Place Beautiful: A Memoir* by Maggie Smith (One Signal Publishers/Atria, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2023)**



Poet Maggie Smith describes her memoir as a "tell-mine" instead of a "tell-all" since she can only share her side of the story: the story of her marriage as it unravels and how she goes about trying to understand her divorce and reinvent herself at the same time. In this uniquely written memoir, Smith also addresses the topics of motherhood, gender roles, writing, and work.