

2024 Texas Topaz Nonfiction Reading List

Titles for Youth



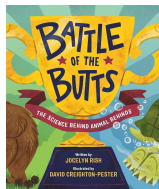
The purpose of the Texas Topaz Reading List is to provide children, teens, and adults with recommended nonfiction titles that stimulate reading for pleasure and personal learning. It is intended for recreational reading and is not designed to support any particular curriculum. Due to the diversity in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

[Grades 3-5](#) [Grades 6-8](#) [Grades 9-12](#) [Adult for Young Adult](#)

GRADES K-2

****Battle of the Butts: The Science Behind Animal Behinds*** by Jocelyn Rish, illustrated by David Creighton-Pester (Running Press Kids, an imprint of Perseus Books, LLC, 2021)



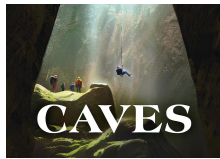
Science meets fun in this hilarious book about animal behinds. Ten animals that use their derriere to breathe, defend themselves, and more are featured alongside colorful illustrations and fun facts.

Butt or Face?: Can You Tell Which End You're Looking At? by Kari Lavelle (Sourcebooks eXplore, an imprint of Scholastic Kids, 2023)



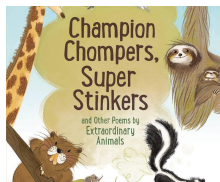
Butt or Face offers kids a challenge: examine a close-up photo of an animal, and then guess whether you're looking at the top or the bottom. The answer is revealed on the next page with a complete photo of the animal, including factual animal details along with how these animals use camouflage or other trickery to engage with their home.

****Caves*** by Nell Cross Beckerman, illustrated by Kalen Chock (Orchard Books, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 2022)



Embark on an awe-inspiring exploration of one of the world's most remarkable ecosystems: caves! Descend into the depths alongside courageous adventurers as they unveil the wonders of these extraordinary underground realms across the globe.

Champion Chompers, Super Stinkers and Other Poems by Extraordinary Animals by Linda Ashman, illustrated by Aparna Varma (Kids Can Press, 2023)



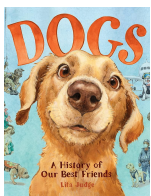
“Think you’re tops? The most? The best?” An opening call to animal contestants moves right into a guessing game for readers, featuring 19 familiar and lesser-known air, land, and water animals. Poetry meets nonfiction.

Darwin's Super Pooping Worm Spectacular by Polly Owen, illustrated by Gwen Millward (Wide Eyed Edition, an imprint of The Quarto Group, 2023)



After Charles Darwin became famed for *Origin of the Species*, he turned to a much smaller topic: earthworms! People during that time thought worms were pests, but Darwin was determined to prove they were useful. After numerous scientific experiments, Darwin finally discovered what makes worms so useful, and the world has never looked at them the same way since.

****Dogs: A History of our Best Friends*** by Lita Judge (Abrams Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Abrams, 2023)



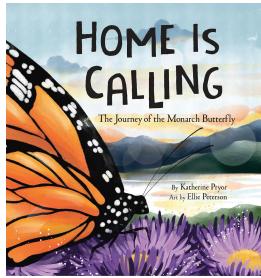
Follow the journey of the dog from its beginning as a wolf to man's best friend.

****Glitter Everywhere!: Where It Came From, Where It's Found & Where It's Going*** by Chris Barton, illustrated by Chaaya Prabhat (Charlesbridge, 2023)



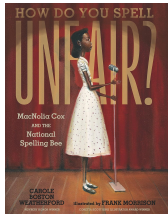
Shiny, sparkling, beautiful glitter! Love it or hate it, learn what makes it sparkle, its history and uses, how it's made, environmental impact and the future of this all purpose iridescent material.

Home is Calling: The Journey of the Monarch Butterfly by Katherine Pryor, illustrated by Ellie Peterson (Worthy Kids, 2023)



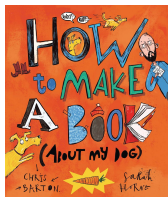
Follow the migration path of monarch butterflies from the United States and Canada all the way to Central Mexico. Along the way, learn how these beautiful insects search for food and shelter, which is becoming more difficult to find each year. Readers will also learn about ways they can help monarchs, which are now an endangered species.

****How Do You Spell Unfair? MacNolia Cox and the National Spelling Bee*** by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Frank Morrison (Candlewick Press, 2023)



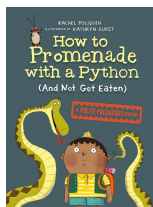
Can you spell groundbreaking? Meet MacNolia Cox who, in 1936, became the first African American finalist in the National Spelling Bee. Cheer for MacNolia as she perseveres and makes history in the face of discrimination. R-i-v-e-t-i-n-g.

****How to Make a Book (about My Dog)*** by Chris Barton, illustrated by Sarah Horne (Millbrook Press, an imprint of Lerner Publishing Group, 2021)



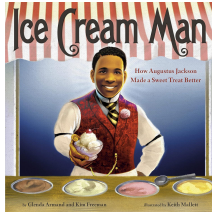
Ever wonder how a book is made? Follow along and meet all the people responsible for bringing a book into the world. The journey begins with the author's inspiration, continues through the writing, illustrating, and publishing process, and ends with the reader. A quick primer for curious kids and aspiring writers.

****How to Promenade with a Python (And Not Get Eaten)*** by Rachel Poliquin, illustrated by Kathryn Durst with Jeff Sayre (Tundra Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House Canada Young Readers, 2022)



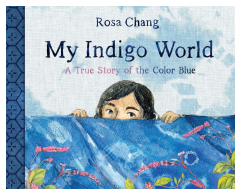
As our narrator Celeste the cockroach points out, promenading with a python is a bad idea. But why? Join Celeste as she points out exactly why taking a walk with a reticulated python is a VERY BAD IDEA.

****Ice Cream Man: How Augustus Jackson Made a Sweet Treat Better***, by Glenda Armand and Kim Freeman illustrated by Keith Mallet (Crown Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Random House Children's Books, 2023)



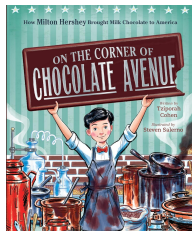
Augustus Jackson was born free during the slavery era and spent his early years making desserts like ice cream that only the wealthy could afford. He loved ice cream and wanted to make it available for everyone to enjoy. After many failures, he finally invented a successful way to make the sweet treat faster and stay frozen longer. Eureka! Suddenly ice cream was more affordable and could be served in ice cream parlors near and far.

My Indigo World: A True Story of the Color Blue by Rosa Chang (minedition, an imprint of Astra Books for Young Readers, 2023)



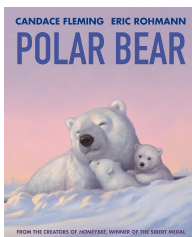
Korean American author-illustrator Rosa Chang pays tribute to the science and art of growing the indigo plant and making indigo dye.

On the Corner of Chocolate Avenue by Tziporah Cohen, illustrated by Steven Salerno (Clarion Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2022)



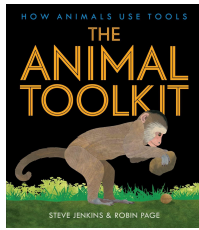
Picture book biography that tells the story of Milton Hersey's life from his humble beginnings to becoming the man that brought milk chocolate to everyone.

Polar Bear by Candace Fleming, illustrated by Eric Rohmann (Holiday House, 2022)



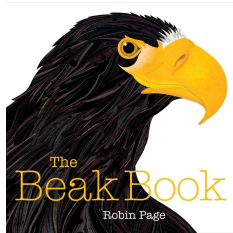
Picture book of a mother polar bear and her young cubs trying to navigate feedings with the melting ice.

The Animal Toolkit: How Animals Use Tools by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page, illustrated by Steve Jenkins (Clarion Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2022)



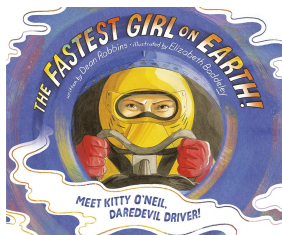
Sticks, stones, leaves and other objects become tools in the hands of clever animals. Learn how and why a wide variety of animals use tools to make their lives easier.

The Beak Book by Robin Page (Beach Lane Books, an imprint of Simon and Schuster Children's Publishing Division, 2022)



Beautiful illustrations show a variety of birds and their beaks close up with simple, descriptive phrases explaining the main way they use their beak. Simple terms make it easy for younger children to understand the way the beaks are used, while descriptive sentences describe context. The back of the book contains additional geographical and size information about each bird, as well as suggested further reading.

The Fastest Girl on Earth! Meet Kitty O'Neil, Daredevil Driver! by Dean Robbins, illustrated by Elizabeth Baddeley (Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of Random House Children's Books, 2021)



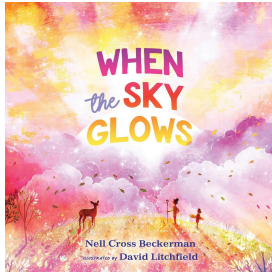
Kitty O'Neil became deaf as a child, but that didn't stop her from loving sports and daredevil action throughout her life. She worked as a Hollywood stunt performer, set watersports speed records and ultimately set the women's land speed record! Her unstoppable attitude proved to the world that women and deaf people can do anything.

This is Tap: Savion Glover Finds His Funk by Selene Castrovilla, illustrated by Laura Freeman (Holiday House, 2023)



This biographical picture book highlights Savion Glover's passion for tap starting as a young kid up until adulthood. Glover brought together two types of dance: hip hop and tap. Through this he transformed how we view tap.

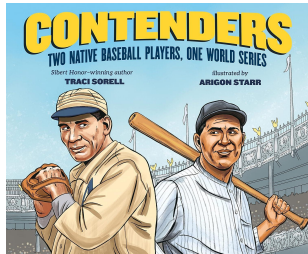
When the Sky Glows by Nell Cross Beckerman, illustrated by David Litchfield (Beach Lane Books an imprint of Simon and Schuster Children's Publishing Division, 2022)



There are many reasons why the sky glows. It glows from the morning sunrise, to a solar eclipse, and even a rainbow. Learn the different ways and science behind the sky glowing.

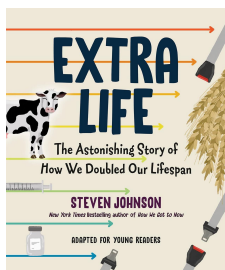
GRADES 3-5

****Contenders: Two Native Baseball Players, One World Series*** by Traci Sorell, illustrated by Arigon Starr (Kokila, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023)



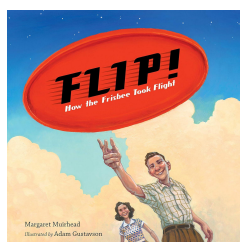
John Meyers and Charles Bender were the first Native pro baseball players to face off in a World Series in 1911. Despite the media pitting them against each other, they never gave up on their dreams and went on to play a combined total of nine championships.

****Extra Life: The Astonishing Story of How We Doubled Our Lifespan*** by Steven Johnson (Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023)



In the past 100 years, Earth's population has quadrupled from 2 billion to 8 billion and the average person's lifespan has greatly increased. What factors contributed to this astronomical growth? Author Stephen Johnson celebrates the breakthroughs that have increased life expectancy and decreased childhood mortality while also exploring the societal, environmental, and ethical considerations that accompany them.

Flip! How the Frisbee Took Flight by Margaret Muirhead, illustrated by Adam Gustavson (Charlesbridge, 2021)



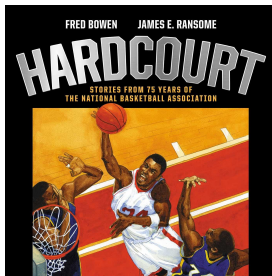
Follow the history of the Frisbee and how one high school kid with some grit made it a fast growing toy.

From Shore to the Ocean Floor: The Human Journey to the Deep by Gill Arbuthnott, illustrated by Christopher Nielsen (Big Picture Press, 2023)



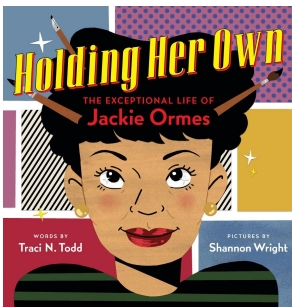
Embark on an exhilarating journey through Earth's oceans, from the surface to the deepest part of the sea. Uncover the untold history of ocean exploration and its pioneering heroes like never before in this captivating book!

****Hardcourt: Stories from 75 Years of the National Basketball Association*** by Fred Bowen, illustrated by James E. Ransome (Margaret K. McElderry Books, an imprint of Simon and Schuster Children's Publishing Division, 2022)



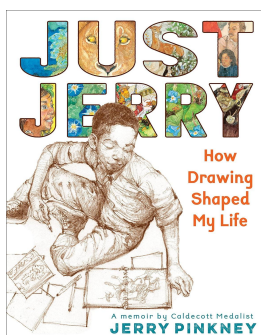
This illustrated book looks back at the history of basketball, particularly within the confines of the National Basketball Association. Far from the hugely popular sport with highly compensated players that it is now, the league struggled to attract fans and relied on rising stellar players, innovative rule changes, and epic rivalries to become the global brand that it is today.

Holding Her Own: The Exceptional Life of Jackie Ormes by Traci N. Todd, illustrated by Shannon Wright (Orchard Books, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 2023)



Jackie Ormes was the first African American woman syndicated cartoonist as well as a journalist, social activist, and philanthropist. This inviting biography depicts how she used her humor, fame, and comic strips to bring joy to people and comment on the social and racial injustices of the time.

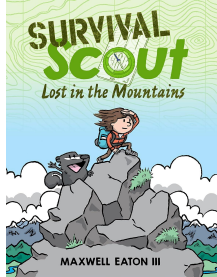
Just Jerry: How Drawing Shaped My Life by Jerry Pinkney (Little, Brown and Company, 2023)



Jerry Pinkney's vivid recollections and lively sketchbook drawings of his youth tell an inspiring story of how a hardworking boy pursued his passion

in less-than-ideal circumstances and became a legendary artist against all odds.

****Survival Scout: Lost in the Mountains*** by Maxwell Eaton III (Roaring Brook Press, 2023)



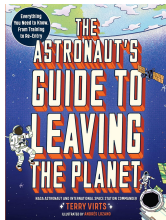
Scout gets left behind by an inexperienced mountain guide. She has to use her skills and knowledge in order to survive. This nonfiction graphic novel uses humor together with survival lessons to display skills needed if one is ever stranded in the wilderness.

The Adventures of Dr. Sloth: Rebecca Cliffe and Her Quest to Protect Sloths by Suzi Eszterhas, (Millbrook Press, an imprint of Lerner Publishing Group, Inc., 2022)



Meet Dr. Rebecca Cliffe and follow along as she studies these shy and mysterious animals. Stunning photographs reveal the secret and fascinating lives of sloths and why conservation efforts are so important.

The Astronaut's Guide to Leaving the Planet: Everything You Need to Know, from Training to Re-entry by Terry Virts, illustrated by Andrés Lozano (Workman Publishing Company, 2023)



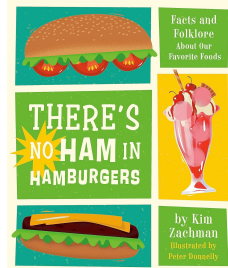
NASA Astronaut Colonel Terry Virts combines his own experiences with interesting facts and photos to show aspiring astronauts what it takes to reach the stars. Readers learn about the training process, the types of spacecraft used to reach space, and what it's like to live and work in space. Included with the book are activities kids can do at home to learn more about science and space.

The Little Spacecraft That Could: New Horizons' Amazing Journey to Pluto and Arrokoth by Joyce Lapin, illustrated by Simona Ceccarelli (Union Square Kids, 2021)



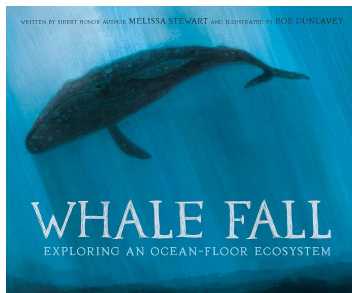
Follow the journey of New Horizon as it leaves Earth for its destination of Pluto.

There's No Ham in Hamburgers: Facts and Folklore About Our Favorite Foods by Kim Zachman, illustrated by Peter Donnelly (Running Press Kids, an imprint of Perseus Books, LLC, 2023)



This book provides a thorough explanation of certain food histories for kids. The illustrations and fun facts keep the book interesting. Each chapter is short enough to be digested individually so the reader can put the book down and come back to it, or read the entire book in one sitting.

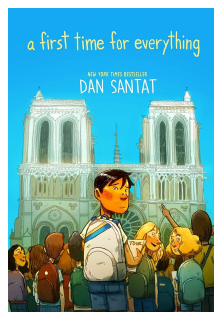
****Whale Fall: Exploring an Ocean-Floor Ecosystem*** by Melissa Stewart (Random House Studio, an imprint of Random House Children's Books, 2023)



What happens when a whale dies and falls to the bottom of the ocean? Discover the fascinating deep sea ecosystem that develops and the various creatures that are nourished by a whale fall.

GRADES 6-8

****A First Time For Everything*** by Dan Santat (First Second, an imprint of Roaring Brook Press, 2023)



Dan Santat's *A First Time for Everything* is a feel-good coming-of-age memoir based on his awkward middle school years. It celebrates a time that is universally challenging, but also life-changing. It includes Fanta, fondue, stealing a bike, and first love.

***Agent Most Wanted: The Never-Before-Told Story of the Most Dangerous Spy of World War II** by Sonia Purnell (Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2022)



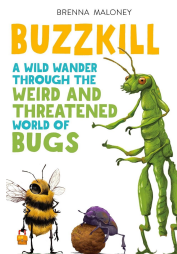
Virginia Hall was the most wanted Allied spy in World War II. This thrilling biography of the first American female secret agent deployed behind enemy lines is filled with spycraft, persistence and heroism.

***A Long Time Coming: A Lyrical Biography of Race in America from Ona Judge to Barack Obama** by James Tobin (Calkins Creek, an imprint of Astra Books for Young Readers, 2023)



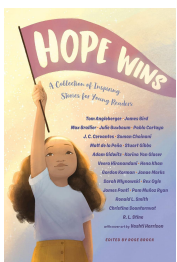
A biography-in-verse of six important Black Americans from different eras, including Ona Judge, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells, Martin Luther King Jr., and Barack Obama, that chronicles the diverse ways each fought racism and shows how much—and how little—has changed for Black Americans since our country's founding.

Buzzkill: A Wild Wander Through the Weird and Threatened World of Bugs by Brenna Maloney, illustrated by Dave Mottram (Henry Holt and Company, 2022)



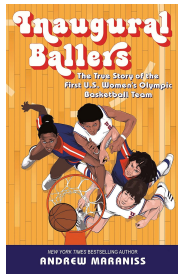
In the vein of Mary Roach, Maloney tackles a topic that many people might find disturbing and explains exactly why said topic is not only interesting but critical to understanding the world around us. Solid facts and funny stories impart to the reader the roles that our many six-legged friends play in the environment and why their survival matters.

Hope Wins: A Collection of Inspiring Stories for Young Readers, edited by Rose Brock (Philomel Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023)



Collection of short essays from famous children's authors and their memories which inspired hope.

Inaugural Ballers: The True Story of the First US Women's Olympic Basketball Team by Andrew Maraniss (Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2022)



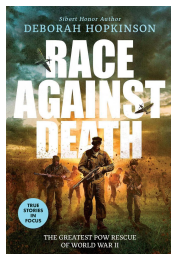
While we frequently take the dominance of US basketball for granted, it wasn't so long ago when the women's team was a significant underdog to even compete in the Olympics. Yet one team focused on the 1976 Olympic Games paved the way for generations of girls who would pick up a basketball, shatter expectations and stereotypes, and take the game to the next level. This is the story of that first Olympic team - the one with a dream.

****Mexikid: A Graphic Memoir*** by Pedro Martin (Dial Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2023)



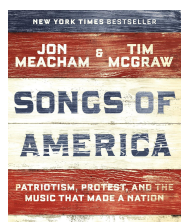
Follow Pedro Martin's adventures with his family as they travel to Mexico to bring his Abuelito back to the US in this graphic novel memoir.

Race Against Death: The Greatest POW Rescue of World War II by Deborah Hopkinson (Scholastic Focus, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 2023)



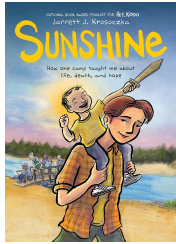
The US Army Rangers undertook one of the most daring and dangerous rescue missions of all time after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in World War II. This mission was to rescue American and Filipino prisoners of war who were held captive by the Japanese military in Cabanatuan Camp and others in the Philippines. The POWs faced beatings, starvation, and tropical diseases, and lived constantly under the threat of death.

Songs of America: Patriotism, Protest, and the Music that Made a Nation (Young Readers Edition) by Jon Meacham and Tim McGraw (Delacorte Press, an imprint of Random House Children's Books 2023)



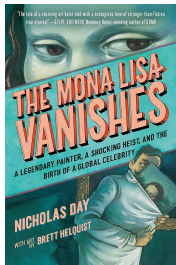
Meacham and McGraw explore the songs that define American eras and generations, including songs that protest a rosy vision of America widely propagated but not experienced by all her citizens.

****Sunshine: How One Camp Taught Me About Life, Death, and Hope* by Jarrett J. Krosoczka** (Graphix, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 2023)



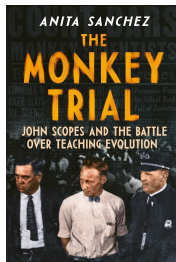
In this autobiographical graphic novel, Jarrett Krosoczka tells of a summer he spent as a counselor at a camp for seriously ill youth and their families. At times joyful and humorous, at other times gut-wrenching and devastating, it's a story of challenges, hope, and living each day.

****The Mona Lisa Vanishes: A Legendary Painter, a Shocking Heist, and the Birth of a Global Celebrity* by Nicholas Day, illustrated by Brett Helquist** (Random House Studio, an imprint of Random House Children's Books, 2023)



Over 100 years ago the Mona Lisa was a relatively unknown work of art until a thief stole the painting from the Louvre Museum. Headlines around the world announced the robbery and followed the story of the investigation. Go back in time even further to learn about the fascinating life of Leonardo da Vinci and how the Mona Lisa was almost never made. Fans of heists, art, biographies and history will appreciate this wonderfully illustrated book.

****The Monkey Trial: John Scopes and the Battle Over Teaching Evolution* by Anita Sanchez** (Clarion Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2023)

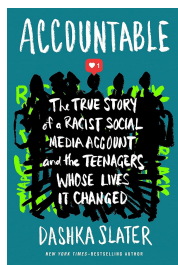


The Monkey Trial by Anita Sanchez explores the landmark 1925 court case of John Scopes, a high school teacher accused of illegally teaching evolution in Tennessee. The book delves into the clash between science and religion, the legal drama that unfolded, and its lasting impact on education and the public's perception of evolution.

GRADES 9-12

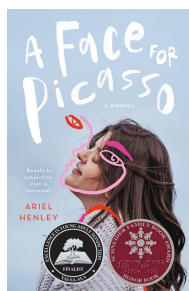
Accountable: The True Story of a Racist Social Media Account and the Teenagers

Whose Lives It Changed by Dashka Slater (Farrar Straus Giroux Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Group, LLC, 2023)



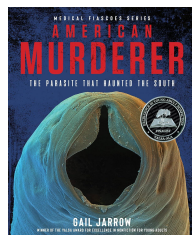
The book chronicles the discovery and its aftermath of a racist Instagram account at an affluent California high school. Slater examines the story from the angles of the perpetrators, the victims, their families, and school and district personnel.

A Face for Picasso: Coming of Age with Crouzon Syndrome by Ariel Henley (Farrar Straus Giroux Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Group, LLC, 2021)



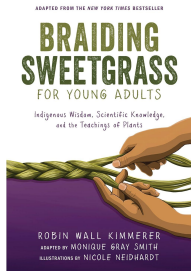
Ariel Henley and her twin sister Zan were born with Crouzon Syndrome, a condition in which the bones of the skull fuse together prematurely, leading to abnormalities in the appearance of the face and head. This necessitated multiple painful surgeries and, just as painfully, led to frequent comments about appearance and even assumptions about cognitive abilities. Henley's memoir is a testament to inner strength and courage to face discrimination when it comes to societal norms and beauty.

****American Murderer: The Parasite that Haunted the South*** by Gail Jarrow (Calkins Creek, an imprint of Astra Books for Young Readers, 2022)



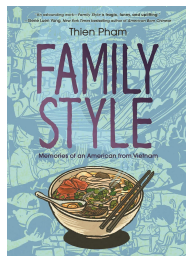
Follow Charles Wardell Stiles as he solves the mystery of the American Murderer and leads the public health campaign to eradicate the deadly and terrifying hookworm that for generations plagued the South infecting and killing millions.

Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants Robin Wall Kimmerer, adapted by Monique Gray Smith, illustrated by Nicole Neidhardt (Zest Books, an imprint of Lerner Publishing Group, Inc., 2022)



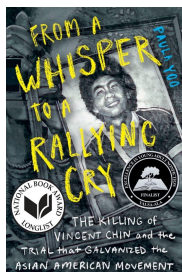
Among Indigenous peoples, wisdom can be gained from the earth, from plants and animals. This book blends history, legends, personal stories, and observable truths about nature, making readers consider their place in the world and their connection to nature.

****Family Style: Memories of an American from Vietnam*** by Thien Pham (First Second, an imprint of Roaring Brook Press, 2023)



Thien Pham tells the story of his family's journey as refugees from Vietnam to the United States using food memories. Each chapter of the story presents a thematic dish that captures Pham's experience at the time: fear, hunger, family, diaspora, teenage angst and assimilation into life in San Jose.

From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial That Galvanized the Asian American Movement by Paula Yoo (Norton Young Readers, an imprint of W.W. Norton & Company, 2021)



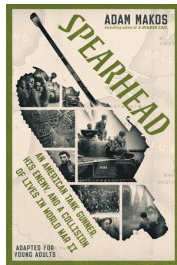
In 1982 in Detroit, Vincent Chin was beaten to death after an altercation with two white men. This set off an unprecedented series of legal steps and missteps that led to the first federal civil rights trial for a crime against an Asian American. These events marked the beginning of the movement to recognize racism, discrimination, and hate crimes against Asian Americans.

****Money Out Loud: All the Financial Stuff No One Taught Us*** by Berna Anat, illustrated by Monique Sterling (Quill Tree Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2023)

Money Out Loud is a humorous personal guide to all things financial. It's the book you probably didn't know you needed. Anat puts personal finance front and center, and her examples, guest spotlights, and entertaining approach make challenging concepts accessible to any reader.

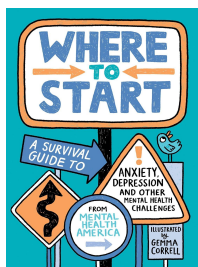


****Spearhead: An American Tank Gunner, His Enemy, and a Collision of Lives in World War II (adapted for young adults)*** by Adam Makos (Delacorte Press, an imprint of Random House Children's Books, 2022)



An American tank gunner in the Spearhead division of the Army battles German tanks and gunners to keep his crew alive, but war is brutal. Meet Clarence Smoyer and his German counterpart Gustav Schaefer as they engage in a deadly dance on battlefields and city streets. Though their story is almost 80 years old, it's not so very different from wars being fought today.

****Where to Start: A Survival Guide to Anxiety, Depression, and Other Mental Health Challenges*** by Mental Health America, illustrated by Gemma Correll (Rocky Pond Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023)



This book offers valuable assistance for those struggling with their inner demons. It provides straightforward, jargon-free insights into common mental illnesses, a self-assessment tool, guidance on seeking support, and advice on discussing mental health with loved ones and professionals, ultimately equipping you with tools to maintain well-being.

Work with What You Got: A Memoir by Zion Clark and James S. Hirsch (Candlewick Press, 2023)



Tattooed across Zion Clark's back are the words NO EXCUSES. While Zion could certainly claim as excuses the challenges he's faced throughout his life, he has repeatedly rejected many of the expectations others have placed on him and has become a champion athlete and an inspiration to many. His story is one of hardships, but more importantly, it's the story of family, friendship, faith, and determination.

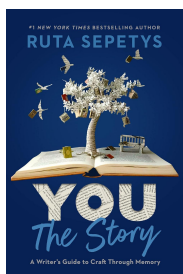
ADULT FOR YOUNG ADULT

Now Let Me Fly: A Portrait of Eugene Bullard by Ronald Wimberly, illustrated by 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 group 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.

You: The Story : A Writer's Guide to Craft Through Memory by Ruta Sepetys (Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023)



Ruta Sepetys, best known as an author of historical fiction for young adults, provides tips and examples for young writers, guiding them through important aspects and stages of writing. Sepetys shares many of her own stories as she demonstrates how to use personal memories and experiences to craft a body of meaningful and memorable written work.