

2025 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.

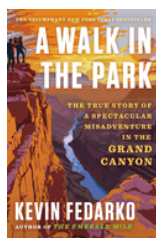
(^) Denotes an enthusiastic recommendation for the audiobook format by the Texas Topaz Adult Sub-Committee.

***A Man of Two Faces** by Viet Thanh Nguyen (Grove Atlantic, 2023)



In an ode to his parents, the author of Pulitzer prize winning and recently television-adapted *The Sympathizers* illuminates life in the United States through the window of his family's refugee experience, exploring vignettes of conversation, family life, food, and childhood angst through the sometimes brutal transition between two cultures.

***^A Walk in the Park: The True Story of a Spectacular Misadventure in the Grand Canyon** by Kevin Fedarko (Scribner, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, LLC, 2024)



Two friends—one a writer, one a photographer—embark on the adventure (or misadventure) of a lifetime. Neither is prepared for the 750 mile “walk” through the Grand Canyon they are about to experience together. This book tells the story of their journey, but also provides a wonderful history lesson on this famous natural treasure, the people who have called it home, and the people who have explored it. It also leaves readers contemplating the future of this enchanting park.

All in Stride: A Journey in Running, Courage, and the Search for the American Dream by Johanna Garton (Rowman & Littlefield, an imprint of Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2024)



Have you ever wondered how one goes from a Kenyan village to running for the United States in the Olympic Trials or even the Olympic Games? Follow the story of Shadrack Kipchirchir and Elvin Kibet as they live and run through this unlikely journey.

****American Girls: One Woman's Journey into the Islamic State and Her Sister's Fight to Bring Her Home*** by Jessica Roy (Scribner, an imprint of Simon and Schuster, Inc., 2024)



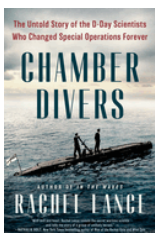
American Girls tells the poignant and often frustrating story of two sisters from a small Arkansas town. It explores how one sister ended up in ISIS-controlled Syria with her jihadist husband and children, while the other sister worked tirelessly to bring her home. The book provides insight into the sisters' upbringing as Jehovah's Witnesses, the consequences of poor decisions, and offers a rare glimpse into the experiences of women who joined ISIS.

****Birdgirl: Looking to the Skies in Search of a Better Future*** by Mya-Rose Craig (Celadon, a division of Macmillan Publishers, 2022)



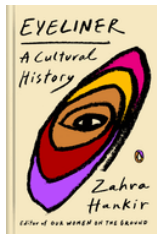
In this memoir, Mya-Rose Craig, a British-Bangladeshi birder known as "Birdgirl", shares her story of growing up in a fascinating family of avid birdwatchers. Not only do they travel the world seeking interesting birds, but they also use birding and time spent outdoors to cope with her mother's worsening mental illness.

****Chamber Divers: The Untold Story of the D-Day Scientists Who Changed Special Operations Forever*** by Rachel Lance (Dutton, an imprint of Penguin Random House, LLC, 2024)



This meticulously researched true story of an eclectic group of brilliant scientists who performed experiments on themselves to aid the World War II effort in London. Initially focused on survival strategies for sinking submariners, they turned their efforts to underwater reconnaissance, ultimately facilitating the D-Day invasion.

***Eyeliner: A Cultural History** by Zahra Hankir (Penguin Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023)



Journalist Zahra Hankir examines how eyeliner, now and historically in cultures throughout the world, is more than just makeup. In desert climates, it has been used as protection from the harsh environment. Eyeliner can be a statement of individualism and dissent for women with limited rights. This is a social and cultural history of an unassuming beauty product used as a means of self-expression, community, and empowerment.

^Fear is Just a Word: A Missing Daughter, a Violent Cartel, and a Mother's Quest for Vengeance by Azam Ahmed (Random House, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2024)



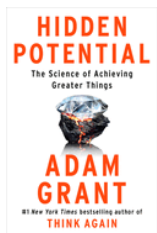
After Miriam Rodríguez's daughter is kidnapped by the local drug cartel, the Zetas, she goes on a quest to find out what happened to her. She risks her life time and time again in her attempts to bring several cartel members to justice, often doing what even the local police aren't willing to do. This story shows how far a mother will go for her child.

***Four Thousand Paws: Caring for the Dogs of the Iditarod: A Veterinarian's Story** by Lee Morgan (Liveright Publishing, an imprint of W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2024)



Veterinarian Lee Morgan gives us a behind the scenes look at one of the most challenging endurance races in the world, the Iditarod- the 1,049 mile Alaskan husky sled dog race which finds canine athletes and humans working together to accomplish the extraordinary.

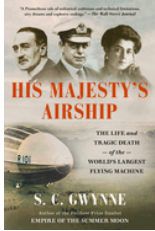
***Hidden Potential: The Science of Achieving Greater Things** by Adam Grant (Viking, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023)



"Hidden Potential" by Adam Grant explores the idea that success is not just about inherent talent but about the potential for growth. Grant argues that with the right mindset, environment, and effort, individuals can unlock abilities they never realized they had. The book emphasizes the importance of perseverance, learning from failures, and the influence of supportive communities. It challenges traditional notions of success, advocating for a focus on personal development and continuous improvement rather than fixed abilities.

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^His Majesty's Airship: The Life and Tragic Death of the World's Largest Flying Machine by S. C. Gwynne (Scribner, An imprint of Simon and Schuster LLC., 2024)



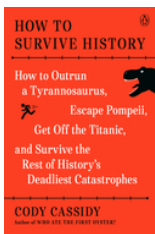
This read details the ups and (very explosive) downs of the trial-and-error history of the airship in the early days of aviation. This account of the ships that came and went, as well as the masterminds behind their successes and many disasters, gives an interesting perspective on the global race to master the skies.

^How to be Perfect: The Correct Answer to Every Moral Question by Michael Schur (Simon and Schuster, 2022)



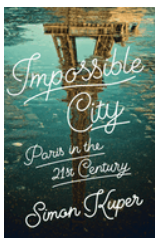
How to Be Perfect is a humorous and insightful exploration of moral philosophy. Drawing from his experience as the creator of The Good Place, Michael Schur delves into complex ethical dilemmas, breaking them down with wit and relatability. The book covers various philosophical concepts, offering practical advice on how to navigate everyday moral decisions. Schur emphasizes that while perfection is unattainable, striving to be better through small, thoughtful choices can lead to a more fulfilling and ethical life.

^How to Survive History: How to Outrun a Tyrannosaurus, Escape Pompeii, Get Off the Titanic, and Survive the Rest of History's Deadliest Catastrophes by Cody Cassidy (Penguin Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023)



What SHOULD you do if a T-rex is chasing you? How about if you find yourself on the Titanic's maiden voyage? Read this book to find out how to survive (if it is even possible) 15 of the most extreme situations you could find yourself in, you know, if time travel was possible!

***Impossible City: Paris in the 21st Century** by Simon Kuper (Public Affairs, an imprint of Hachette Book Group, 2024)



Financial Times journalist and author Simon Kuper takes a look at the City of Light, host city for the 2024 Summer Olympics for the first time since 1924. He sees both perspectives of an insider and an outsider, giving practical insight into life in Paris, living with Parisians, and the challenges this modern and growing city faces.

***^It Starts with One: The Legend and Legacy of Linkin Park** by Jason Lipshutz (Hachette Books, an imprint of Hachette Book Group, 2024)



It starts with one thing... the beginning of Linkin Park. Linkin Park has left a lasting legacy on millennials and others who found joy in the grunge rock era of the early 2000s. This history of the group name drops all of the popular bands, debut albums, hit singles, and the entire journey to fame from the 1990s to the 2010s.

***^Lost in Austin: The Evolution of an American City** by Alex Hannaford (Dey St., an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2024)



Every Texan knows of Austin, and every non-Texan knows of Austin. Those who fall in love with it may not know that there's more to Austin than the lights, the waterfronts, the night life, and the culture. This book touches on the ups and downs of the growth of one of the fastest-growing cities in the nation.

***^Making It So: A Memoir** by Patrick Stewart (Gallery Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2023)



In "Making It So," Patrick Stewart shares his remarkable journey from a humble childhood in England to becoming an iconic actor. With warmth and wit, he recounts his early days in theater, his rise to fame as Captain Jean-Luc Picard in "Star Trek: The Next Generation," and his rich experiences in film and stage. Stewart's memoir is filled with personal anecdotes, behind-the-scenes stories, and reflections on his life and career, offering fans an intimate look at the man behind the legend.

^Not Your China Doll: The Wild and Shimmering Life of Anna May Wong by Katie Gee Salisbury (Dutton, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2024)



In this thoroughly researched biography of Anna May Wong, author Katie Gee Salisbury gives readers a behind-the-scenes look at the life of the first Asian American movie star. Wong's resilience, ambition, and talent are brought to light as we read about the significant challenges and barriers she faced in her lifetime and the legacy she left behind.

One in a Millennial: On Friendship, Feelings, Fangirls, and Fitting In by Kate Kennedy (St. Martin's Press, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2024)



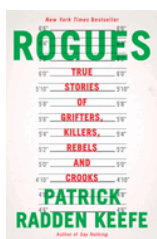
"One in a Millennial" by Kate Kennedy is a witty and relatable exploration of modern life through the lens of a millennial. With a blend of humor and heartfelt insights, Kennedy delves into the unique challenges and triumphs faced by her generation, covering everything from dating and career struggles to navigating social media and mental health. This book is a delightful read for anyone looking to understand the millennial experience or simply enjoy a good laugh at the quirks of contemporary life.

Red Dead's History: A Video Game, an Obsession, and America's Violent Past by Tore C. Olsson (St. Martin's Press, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2024)



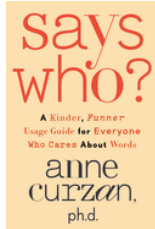
Red Dead's History is the intersection of an American history class and pop culture. The author provides context on the facts and misrepresentations of the Red Dead story while praising its overall accurate sentiment of late nineteenth century America. Gamer or not, this is a digestible read for those who just couldn't get into history books.

Rogues: True Stories of Grifters, Killers, Rebels, and Crooks by Patrick Radden Keefe (Doubleday, Penguin Random House LLC, 2022)



Rogues compiles a dozen articles penned by acclaimed author Patrick Radden Keefe, previously featured in the New Yorker. These narratives delve into the realms of crime and corruption, shining a light on both perpetrators and those who challenge them. From the intricacies of wine forgery to the shadowy realms of arms trading and money laundering, the stories traverse diverse landscapes. One account unravels the downfall of drug kingpin El Chapo, while another peers into the psyche of a prominent lawyer defending condemned criminals. Each meticulously researched tale offers readers a rare glimpse into seldom-explored corners of our world.

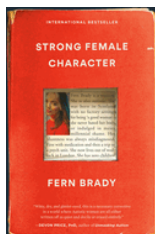
Says Who? A Kinder, Funnier Usage Guide for Everyone that Cares About Words by Anne Curzan, Ph.D (Crown, an imprint of Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2024)



This is a light, easily digestible take on the evolution of language as English speakers use it. Curzan uses both linguistic history and modern context to explain why we say the things we do today, and she examines why some things we say cause people to be "cancelled" or have lasting effects on modern parlance. There is no "left" or "right" side to the discussion, rather it is a fascinating read on both sides of how a speaker's intent doesn't necessarily translate well into meaning.

Non-native English speakers could very well get a kick out of this, too, as it touches on some ridiculous things that we say now.

Strong Female Character by Fern Brady (Harmony Books, an imprint of Random House, 2023)



Many women are not diagnosed as autistic until later in life because "the public perception of autistics is so heavily based on the stereotype of men who love trains or science". As a late diagnosed autistic woman, Fern Brady gives us unflinching insight into her trauma with some hilarious anecdotes that one would expect from a woman who has taken the British comedy scene by storm.

The Age of Magical Overthinking: Notes on Modern Irrationality by Amanda Montell (First One Signal Publishers/ Atria, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2024)



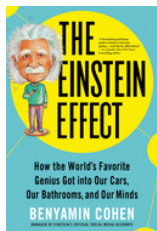
We as humans come up with all kinds of things to make life make sense -- divine intervention, positive vibes, even mercury in retrograde. This read is light and comical while giving much needed validation to anxious thinkers who are trying to understand how complex the human psyche really is. Social culture is weird, and this book tries to make sense of it.

****The Angel Makers: Arsenic, A Midwife, and Modern History's Most Astonishing Murder Ring*** by Patti McCracken (William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2023)



In this true-crime story, set in a rural village in Hungary in the 1920s, the author tells the story of Auntie Suzy, a midwife who assists the women of the village in dealing with problems such as abusive husbands and unwanted pregnancies. Her remedy: vials of a secret solution consisting of arsenic. The crimes took place over fifteen years and resulted in hundreds of deaths.

****The Einstein Effect: How the World's Favorite Genius Got into our Cars, our Bathrooms, and our Minds*** by Benjamin Cohen (Sourcebooks, 2023)



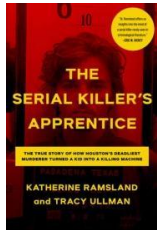
"The Einstein Effect" by Benjamin Cohen is a fascinating dive into how Albert Einstein's genius has permeated our daily lives in surprising ways. Cohen takes readers on a journey through Einstein's impact, from GPS technology in our cars to the theory of relativity's influence on modern conveniences, and even how Einstein's persona shapes popular culture. With engaging stories and humor, this book reveals the many unexpected ways Einstein's legacy continues to shape our World.

****The King of Diamonds*** by Rena Pederson (Pegasus Books, and imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2024)



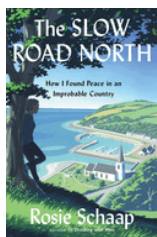
The King of Diamonds unravels a gripping tale of crime and intrigue, set against the backdrop of Dallas during the 1940s to early 1970s. A series of audacious jewelry heists, meticulously planned and executed, left Dallas high society baffled and law enforcement stumped. Rena Pederson delves deep into this notorious case, revealing how the elusive thief targeted affluent homes with precision, knowing exactly which jewels to take and where to find them. Despite years of pursuit by police and the FBI, the stolen jewels remain unrecovered. Join Pederson as she uncovers the secrets of this high-profile investigation, piecing together clues to unmask the identity of the elusive King of Diamonds.

****The Serial Killer's Apprentice: The True Story of How Houston's Deadliest Murderer Turned a Kid Into a Killing Machine*** by Katherine Ramsland and Tracy Ullman (Crime Ink, an imprint of Penzler Publishers, 2024)



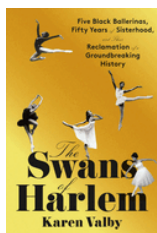
Content warning: contains graphic description of torture and murder of underage boys. What can we learn about grooming from the surviving teenage helpers of Houston serial killer Dean Corll, 50 years after the murders, even as the last victim remains unidentified?

The Slow Road North: How I Found Peace in an Improbable Country by Rosie Schaap (Mariner Books, an imprint of HarperCollins, 2024)



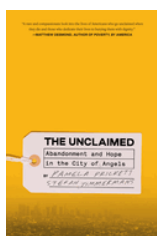
The Slow Road North is both a powerful memoir and social history. After experiencing the profound losses of her husband and mother within a short span of time, Schaap embarks on a journey to a small village in North Ireland, far from her life in New York City. The book explores themes of grief, love, and healing, offering a candid look at how a community can play a crucial role in one's recovery.

****The Swans of Harlem: Five Black Ballerinas, Fifty Years of Sisterhood, and Their Reclamation of a Groundbreaking History*** by Karen Valby (Pantheon Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2024)



In *The Swans of Harlem*, author Karen Valby brings to light the story of the Dance Theatre of Harlem and the five Black ballerinas who were its founding members. The book traces the challenges these pioneering dancers faced in a world that didn't believe Black people had a place in the classical art form of ballet and how together, they triumphed.

The Unclaimed: Abandonment and Hope in the City of Angels by Pamela Prickett, Stefan Timmermans (Crown, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2024)



When we die, we expect that our loved ones will handle the after — funerals, burials, and remembrance. But what happens to those who die and go unclaimed by family or friends? The authors tell the stories of individuals resting in unmarked graves in Los Angeles, California and discuss the inequity in even death.

^*The Wager: A Tale of Shipwreck, Mutiny, and Murder by David Grann (Doubleday, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2023)



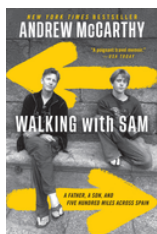
Beating the odds, a few bedraggled survivors of a British piracy attempt against the Spanish that included typhus, scurvy, navigational problems, and shipwreck return home to accuse each other of mutiny.

****Twelve Trees: The Deep Roots of our Future*** by Daniel Lewis, Illustrated by Eric Nyquist (Avid Reader Press, an imprint of Simon & Schuster LLC, 2024)



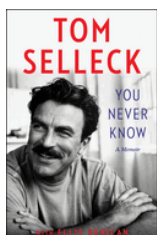
Author Lewis, a curator at the Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, focuses on 12 tree species, such as the redwood, baobab, and longleaf pine, to spotlight the importance of all arboreal life to Earth and its inhabitants.

^*Walking With Sam: A Father, A Son, and 500 Miles Across Spain by Andrew McCarthy (Grand Central Publishing, an imprint of Hachette Publishing, 2023)



Walking with Sam chronicles Andrew McCarthy's journey across Spain's Camino de Santiago with his 19-year old son Sam. It is not just about the trek itself, but is a touching story of self-discovery and a father and son building a meaningful connection.

You Never Know: A memoir by Tom Selleck (Dey Street Books, an imprint of William Morrow, 2024)



You Never Know is a reflective memoir where Tom Selleck shares personal stories, life lessons, and insights from his career in Hollywood. Through anecdotes and experiences, Selleck explores the unpredictable nature of life, the value of perseverance, and the importance of staying grounded. The book offers readers a glimpse into his journey, emphasizing that success often comes with unexpected twists and turns, and that embracing uncertainty can lead to growth and

fulfillment.