

2026 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.

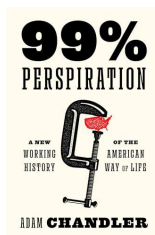
(^) Denotes an enthusiastic recommendation for the audiobook format by the Texas Topaz Adult Sub-Committee.

The 10: A Memoir of Family and the Open Road by E.A. Hanks (Gallery Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, LLC, 2025)



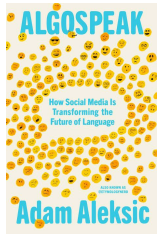
This personal and moving memoir by E.A. Hanks recounts her cross-country journey along Interstate 10 to not only explore the Southern United States, but also to uncover the mysteries surrounding her late mother, who had a troubled past and died from lung cancer in 2002. This book intertwines geography, culture, and memory while exploring family secrets and self-discovery. It's a personal look at the author's life, but also a revealing glimpse of America along I-10.

^99% Perspiration: A New Working History of the American Way of Life by Adam Chandler (Pantheon Books, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2025)



Side gigs, hustles, and 5-to-9s are badges of honor in modern USA. But why they are necessary tends to fly over some heads - they shouldn't be necessary. Chandler explains the foundations of how this modern mindset came to be (thanks, Chris Columbus) and goes on to discuss the current economic state that makes these side jobs necessary for low-income families.

Algospeak: How Social Media is Transforming the Future of Language by Adam Aleksic (Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Penguin Random House, 2025)



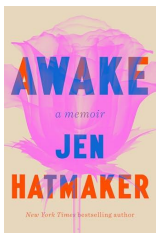
Algospeak explains how social media is changing the way we talk, as people shorten phrases, invent new slang, and adjust their tone to keep viewers' attention. Aleksic shows how influencers, online groups, and even content rules on platforms are shaping our language more than ever before. He points out that these shifts create lots of new mini-languages online, each with its own style and vibe. Overall, the book breaks down a confusing trend in a way that makes it easy to understand.

The Art Spy: The Extraordinary Untold Tale of WWII Resistance Hero Rose Valland by Michelle Young (HarperOne, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2025)



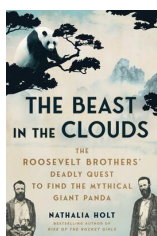
The Art Spy by Michelle Young tells the story of Rose Valland, a French museum curator who secretly tracked Nazi art theft during World War II. Working inside the Musée du Jeu de Paume in Paris, she recorded details about thousands of stolen works and passed that information to the Resistance. Her quiet, careful work helped recover major pieces of art after the war. It's a story about courage, persistence, and how one person's quiet actions made a lasting impact on history.

Awake: A Memoir by Jen Hatmaker (Avid Reader Press, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2025)



Awake by Jen Hatmaker is her story of rebuilding after her marriage ended in 2020. She reflects on her life growing up, raising kids, and the roles she played in faith and family. How she had to take those apart to figure out who she really was. It's about loss, honesty, and learning to live differently in midlife. Hatmaker writes openly about how she woke up to herself and what it means to start over with clarity and purpose.

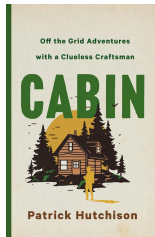
The Beast in the Clouds: The Roosevelt Brothers' Deadly Quest to Find the Mythical Giant Panda by Nathalia Holt (Atria, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, LLC, 2025)



In *The Beast in the Clouds*, Nathalia Holt recounts the harrowing and little-known expedition of Theodore Roosevelt's sons, Kermit and Ted, as they journeyed into the remote mountains of China in the 1920s in search of the elusive giant panda. Backed by the American Museum of Natural History, the brothers faced brutal

weather, starvation, and personal missteps in a quest driven by scientific curiosity and national pride. What began as a bold adventure turned tragic and disillusioning, ultimately straining their relationship and leaving a haunting legacy of ambition, loss, and the ethical complexities of early wildlife exploration.

^Cabin: Off the Grid Adventures with a Clueless Craftsman by Patrick Hutchison (St. Martin's Press, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2024)



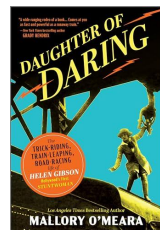
After impulse buying a run-down cabin in the woods of the Cascade Mountains, Patrick Hutchison begins an off-the-grid journey to renovate it. The problem? He has almost no idea what he is doing. From an office job that doesn't feel meaningful to an outdoors adventure filled with purpose, Hutchison reflects on his experience connecting with nature, learning new skills, and navigating through life.

Code Dependent: Living in the Shadow of AI by Madhumita Murgia (Henry Holt and Company, a registered trademark of Macmillan Publishing Group, LLC., 2024)



This book covers a variety of applications of AI in real word contexts. These scenarios are not limited by generative AI, like Chat GPT, but instead cover a wide range of uses from diagnosing patients in remote areas of India, to calculating the likelihood that juvenile delinquents will become hardened criminals in the Netherlands. Some of these test cases show promising results, while others cause chaos. An interesting look at how AI has been actually adapted around the world.

Daughter of Daring: The Trick-Riding, Train-Leaping, Road Racing Life of Helen Gibson, Hollywood's First Stuntwoman by Mallory O'Meara (Hanover Square Press, 2025)



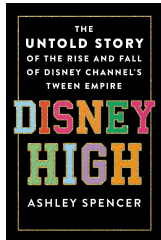
This fast-paced biography not only shares the story of Helen Gibson's exhilarating career as a stuntwoman, but also discusses the golden age of Hollywood where women called the shots. The history of Hollywood is just as engaging as Helen's story.

****Dinner for Vampires: Life on a Cult TV Show (While Also in an Actual Cult!)*** by Bethany Joy Lenz (Simon & Schuster, 2024)



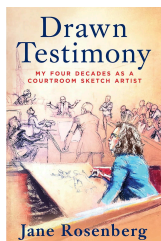
The author Bethany Joy Lenz, actress from the early 2000s hit show *One Tree Hill*, shares her experience of joining a cult through the guise of a Bible Study group in Hollywood. What appears to be a safe haven to share faith with one another begins to turn into something more foreboding. While playing a loving couple on TV, she is married to the leader's son and is taken advantage of financially. She then decides to leave once she is pregnant; later, she is able to find her own sense of faith again.

****Disney High: The Untold Story of the Rise and Fall of Disney Channel's Tween Empire*** by Ashley Spencer (St. Martin's Press, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2024)



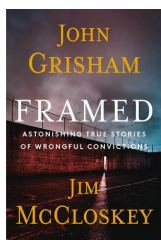
The Disney Channel is a touchstone of many children of the 2000's. This eye-opening book takes an inside look at what happened behind the scenes with both the stars and the Disney executives.

****Drawn Testimony: My Four Decades as a Courtroom Sketch Artist*** by Jane Rosenberg (Hanover Square Press, 2024)



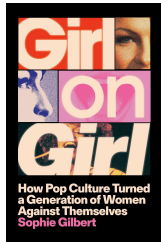
Drawn Testimony covers the author's career in being a courtroom sketch artist. She discusses how she tries to capture the emotion of those she sketches during high profile cases such as Donald Trump, El Chapo, and Tom Brady as well as cases involving the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements. She provides insight on a career that many may overlook but is essential when cameras are not allowed in courtrooms.

Framed: Astonishing True Stories of Wrongful Convictions by John Grisham and Jim McCloskey (Vintage, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2025)



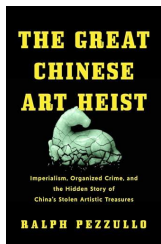
The amount of wrongly convicted people in jail for crimes they didn't commit is astounding. This book of 10 cases of those wrongly convicted is eye-opening. The authors write alternating in-depth gripping stories of these cases.

Girl on Girl: How Pop Culture Turned a Generation of Women Against Themselves by Sophie Gilbert (Penguin Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House, 2025)



Girl on Girl is an analytical piece on pop culture during the late 90s and early aughts that affected women's representation and the treatment that they received. It discusses everything from television and music to porn culture and the internet trolls that attacked women in politics from Sarah Palin to Kamala Harris. It focuses on women who were empowered with their sexual identity to women who were sexualized at a young age in the media by men in power for men's desire. Sophie Gilbert provides a cultural criticism of the time and how it has an impact on women today.

The Great Chinese Art Heist: Imperialism, Organized Crime, and the Hidden Story of China's Stolen Artistic Treasures by Ralph Pezzullo (Pegasus Crime, an imprint of Pegasus Books, Ltd., 2025)



The Great Chinese Art Heist is a gripping narrative about a series of museum thefts across Europe that all have one thing in common: priceless Chinese artifacts that were originally looted from China during the Second Opium War in 1860. Pezzullo connects these modern-day heists to the historical sacking of the Old Summer Palace, weaving together imperialism, organized crime, and cultural restitution. The book raises questions about ownership, justice, and the lingering wounds of colonial exploitation.

****Grief is for People*** by Sloane Crosley (MCD, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2024)



This book is about grief, in particular, how the author moves through the world without her loved one. The book explores what it feels like to lose someone that isn't an intimate partner or blood relative, but instead, a close friend. The writing is very original, poetic, and tough.

Hey Hun: Sales, Sisterhood, Supremacy, and the Other Lies Behind Multilevel Marketing by Emily Lynn Paulson (Row House Publishing, 2023)



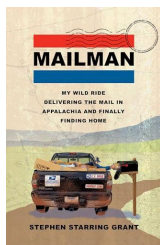
Hey, Hun shares the story of Paulson rising up the pyramid scheme in Multilevel Marketing to receive her "FREE" car (and a DUI in the same evening) to her departure from Rejuvenate. She explores how different people get roped into MLMs, the drastic actions one will take to receive accolades in a MLM, why they stay, and what happens when someone leaves.

If You Can't Take the Heat: Tales of Food, Feminism, and Fury by Geraldine DeRuiter (Crown, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2024)



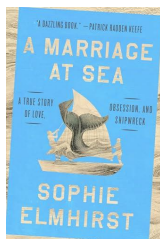
A series of essays from food writer Geraldine DeRuiter that covers food in a variety of ways - through love, through anger, and through comedy of errors. Highlights include the viral essay she wrote in 2018 regarding Mario Batali's bizarre Me Too era apology that oddly included a recipe (with an updated section), a defense of Red Lobster (RIP), and a comedic piece about a Michelin starred restaurant that did not live up to its promise.

****Mailman: My Wild Ride Delivering the Mail in Appalachia and Finally Finding Home*** by Stephen Starring Grant (Stardust73, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, 2025)



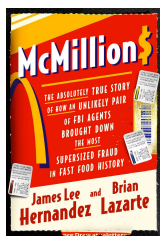
After losing his job during the pandemic and facing cancer, Stephen Starring Grant becomes a rural mail carrier in his hometown of Blacksburg, Virginia. What starts as a bid for health insurance turns into a journey of reconnection and purpose. Through Appalachian routes and eccentric coworkers, Grant blends memoir and social commentary, exploring identity, resilience, and the meaning of home with humor and heart.

A Marriage at Sea: A True Story of Love, Obsession, and Shipwreck by Sophie Elmhirst (Riverhead Books, and imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2025)



An idiosyncratic, newlywed couple plans to make their new life at sea, until they are shipwrecked, and have to spend four months on their life rafts trying to survive. A vivid and exciting story of survival and marriage.

McMillions: The Absolutely True Story of How an Unlikely Pair of FBI Agents Brought Down the Most Supersized Fraud in Fast Food History by James Lee Hernandez and Brian Lazarte (Grand Central Publishing, a division of Hachette Book Group, Inc., 2024)



McMillions uncovers the massive fraud behind McDonald's Monopoly game (1989–2001), led by ex-cop Jerome Jacobson, who stole winning pieces and built a kickback network. Nearly every major prize was rigged. Following the FBI's quirky

investigation—wiretaps, stings, and undercover ops—the book blends suspense and absurdity to reveal one of history’s most outrageous corporate scams.

***No More Tears: The Dark Secrets of Johnson & Johnson** by Gardiner Harris (Random House, an imprint and division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2025)



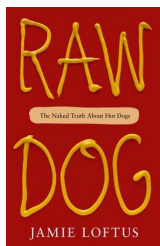
The book reveals how Johnson & Johnson covered up health risks tied to its products, like asbestos in baby powder and baby Tylenol, while manipulating regulators and doctors to protect profits. It exposes a pattern of deception and corporate misconduct across decades, showing the darker side of the healthcare industry.

***Raising Hare: A Memoir** by Chloe Dalton (Pantheon Books, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2025)



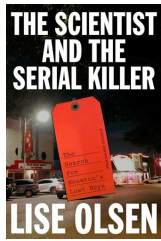
A quaint telling of a hare entering the author’s life out of seemingly a chance of fate. This is a moving meditation on life, nature, and the honor of being chosen by such an evasive piece of the natural world. Dalton brings a whole new understanding of the value of animals, the circle of life, and how humanity just makes it so much more complicated.

^Raw Dog: The Naked Truth About Hotdogs by Jamie Loftus (Forge, an imprint of Tor, 2023)



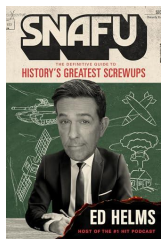
With equal parts micro-history, memoir, and travelogue, podcaster Jamie Loftus (My Year in Mensa) takes readers on a mission to find the best hot dog in the contiguous United States. Stories of the origin of the food and its many cultural touchstones, including the famous Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Championship and the Oscar Mayer Weinermobile, are interspersed between reviews of good (and not-so-good) meat tubes slathered with a variety of condiments.

The Scientist and the Serial Killer by Lise Olsen (Random House, an imprint and division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2025)



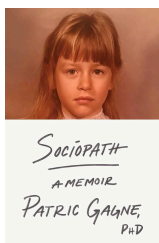
The Scientist and the Serial Killer by Lise Olsen recounts the chilling true story of Dean Corll, a Houston sweet shop owner who, with the help of two teenage accomplices, abducted, tortured, and murdered over two dozen boys in the early 1970s. Decades later, forensic anthropologist Sharon Derrick discovered a box labeled "1973 Murders" in the Harris County Medical Examiner's office and embarked on a mission to identify the long-forgotten victims, known as the "Lost Boys." Through meticulous research, prison interviews, and advanced forensic techniques, Derrick worked to restore the identities and dignity of these young men. Olsen's narrative intertwines the harrowing crimes with Derrick's relentless pursuit of justice, shedding light on a dark chapter in Houston's history.

Snafu: The Definitive Guide to History's Greatest Screwups by Ed Helms (Grand Central Publishing, an imprint of Hachette Book Group, 2025)



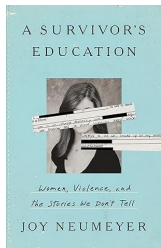
Snafu: The Definitive Guide to History's Greatest Screwups by Ed Helms is a humorous and insightful look at some of the most outrageous blunders in history. Expanding on his hit podcast, Helms explores real-life misadventures—from the CIA's failed attempt to train spy cats to government-led weather manipulation schemes. With sharp wit and thorough research, the book highlights how even well-intentioned plans can go wildly wrong. It's a fascinating reminder that history is often stranger—and funnier—than fiction.

Sociopath: A Memoir by Patric Gagne (Simon & Schuster, LLC, 2024)



A personal and vulnerable telling of living with sociopathy in a time when sociopathy was basically undefined, instead grouped with psychopathy and associated with emotionless criminals. Gagne is able to display her emotions in her writing - yes, she does in fact have them - and illustrates her struggle with the "building pressure" feeling she gets.

A Survivor's Education: Women, Violence, and the Stories We Don't Tell by Joy Neumeyer (Public Affairs, 2024)



A personal look into the author's story of intimate partner violence, how her institution dealt with it through the procedures of Title IX, and the history of women being abused by partners in higher education. This book weaves her own story along with those of other women, including other students who attended her alma mater in the past and also the subjects of her doctoral research, and includes how Title IX is under intense scrutiny today and has shaped how students experience abuse and the ordeal of reporting it.

****Taking Care: The Story of Nursing and Its Power to Change Our World*** by Sarah DiGregorio (Harper Perennial, an imprint of HarperCollins, 2023)



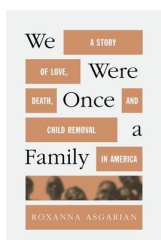
A tribute to the nursing profession, tracing its evolution from ancient times to today while highlighting the critical, often overlooked role nurses play in healthcare and society.

Vanishing Treasures: A Bestiary of Extraordinary Endangered Creatures by Katherine Rundell (Doubleday, a division of Penguin Random House, LLC, 2024)



A very mellow narrative of some of the most interesting animals you've never heard of and some you don't think of too much. Through her essays, Randell describes extraordinary creatures from land, sea, and air, how they are slowly disappearing, and why. It's a great way to read, learn, and understand nature a bit more.

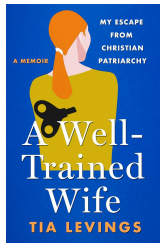
****We Were Once a Family: A Story of Love, Death, and Child Removal in America*** by Roxanna Asgarian (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Group, 2023)



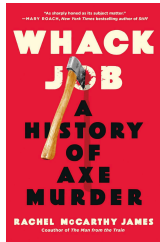
Journalist Roxanna Asgarian chronicles the current state of the child welfare system, primarily in Texas, through the infamous case of Jennifer and Sarah Hart. The couple made national headlines when they plunged their car over the side of a cliff in California, leading to their deaths and that of their 6 adopted children.

When it was later uncovered that the children may have been abused by their adopted mothers, the nation was shocked. Asgarian details how this and other tragedies have been perpetuated on struggling families, particular those in minority communities.

A Well Trained Wife: My Escape from Christian Patriarchy by Tia Levings (St. Martin's Press, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2024)



Tia Levings tells her story of her escape from the Quiverfull Christian Fundamentalist group. She makes the harrowing decision to flee with her children, reclaim her identity, and expose the destructive power of Christian patriarchy through her courageous memoir



Whack Job: A History of Axe Murder by Rachel MacCarthy James (St. Martin's Press, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2025)

The book explores the chilling and often bizarre stories surrounding axe murders throughout history. The book explores the cultural, social, and psychological factors that have contributed to these violent acts, revealing how they reflect the darker aspects of human nature and society.