

# 2026 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](#)

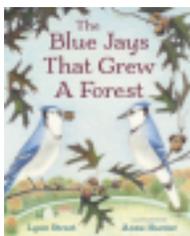
### GRADES K-2

***Bats Beneath the Bridge*** by Janet Nolan, illustrated by Emily Cox (Albert Whitman & Company, 2024)



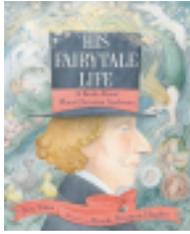
The bats under the Congress Avenue Bridge are famous in Texas and beyond. How did the largest bat colony in North America wind up in Austin? Learn to appreciate these wonderful and misunderstood animals.

***\*The Blue Jays That Grew a Forest*** by Lynn Street, illustrated by Anne Hunter (Margaret Quinlin Books, an imprint of Peachtree Publishing Company Inc., 2025)



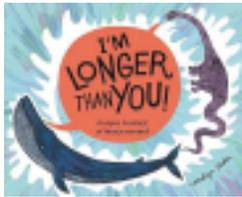
How an oak tree grows more oak trees is gently told as the Blue Jays hide acorns for the winter ahead. What a sweet book which shows the jays as they fly from tree to ground to any place where they might come back to find the yummy treat of an acorn in the winter. This book also tells of so many acorns that are never found that then grow and grow into another mighty oak tree.

***His Fairytale Life: A Book About Hans Christian Andersen*** by Jane Yolen, illustrated by Brooke Boynton-Hughes (Neal Porter Books, an imprint of Holiday House Publishing, Inc., 2025)



This book takes young readers on a ride through fairy tale author Hans Christian Andersen's life from childhood where he yearned to learn his claim to fame as the author who brought fairy tales to the mainstream.

***I'm Longer Than You: An Epic Contest of Measurement*** by Carolyn Fisher (Kids Can Press, a Corus Entertainment Inc. Company, 2025)



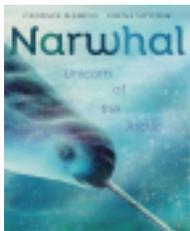
A dinosaur and a blue whale, two giants embark on a hilarious duel of measurement, enlisting Inchworm (who measures in inches) and Centipede (who measures in centimeters) to settle the score. But when inches and centimeters don't match up, the contest becomes tricky. With quirky creatures, fun conversation and a lot of facts about units of measurement, this picture-book adds STEM learning (both metric and customary systems) into a playful showdown of size.

***\*Meet the Mini-Mammals: A Night at the Natural History Museum*** by Melissa Stewart, illustrated by Brian Lies (Beach Lane Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, 2025)



The author and illustrator give readers a glimpse at ten of the tiniest mammals using life-size illustrations and unique basic facts. The book takes you on a pretend journey through a Natural History Museum as it brings the animals to life while the museum is closed. Adorably fascinating!

***Narwhal: Unicorn of the Arctic*** by Candace Fleming, illustrated by Deena So'oteh (Anne Schwartz Books, an imprint of Random House Children's Books, 2024)



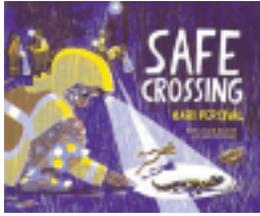
Lyrical text and impressive illustrations guide readers along the migration journey of a Narwhal pod as they journey through Arctic waters, search for food, and protect their young.

***Over and Under the Coral Reef*** by Kate Messner, illustrated Christopher Silas Neal (Chronicle Books, 2025)



This book showcases the amazing world above and below a tropical coral reef. The illustrations and back matter information about the animals depicted, this book will make you want to go snorkeling in the Caribbean!

**\*Safe Crossing** by Kari Percival (Chronicle Books, 2025)



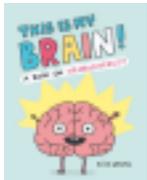
On a rainy night, a child and other citizen scientists help amphibians cross a busy road to reach their breeding grounds. Moved by the number that don't survive, the child inspires their community to build a safe wildlife crossing under the road. Based on real conservation efforts, this story shows how one small act can spark big change.

**Tell Me About Juneteenth** by Kortney Nash, illustrated by DeAndrea Hodge (Henry Holt Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Group, 2025)



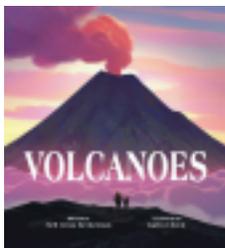
A young girl is celebrating Juneteenth at a block party but wonders what the first Juneteenth celebration looked like. As she goes to other people at the block party she learns what their 1st Juneteenth looked like and what it means to them. Finally, a party goer helps explain what the first Juneteenth celebration was about and how important it is to remember.

**This is my Brain! A Book on Neurodiversity** by Elise Gravel (Chronicle Books, 2024)



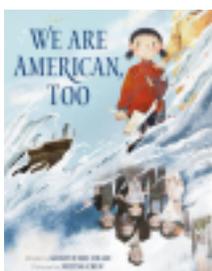
Brains are wonderful and do a lot for you. Each brain is the same but also different and that keeps the world interesting.

**Volcanoes** by Nell Cross Beckerman, illustrated by Kalen Chock (Orchard Books, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 2024)



Nell Cross Beckerman takes readers on a thrilling journey through the explosive world of volcanoes, using vivid, poetic storytelling paired with informative nonfiction text. Kalen Chock's striking, atmospheric illustrations bring each page to life with dramatic visuals. Extensive additional information offers further details into volcanic eruptions, scientific exploration, and fascinating facts for curious minds.

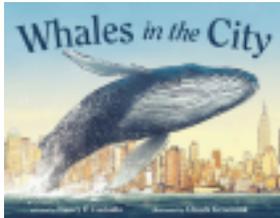
**We Are American, Too** by Kristen Mei Chase, illustrated by JiETING Chen (Farrar Straus Giroux Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Group, 2025)



We Are American, Too is a beautifully illustrated picture book that follows Mei, a young Chinese American girl, as she uncovers her family's courageous

history and embraces her cultural identity. Inspired by her ancestors' resilience, Mei finds her voice at a rally against Asian hate and leads a powerful chant: "We are American, too!" This uplifting story celebrates heritage, pride, and the unifying power of standing up for justice.

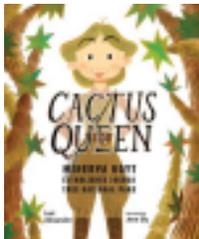
***Whales in the City*** by Nancy F. Castaldo, illustrated by Chuck Groenink (Farrar Straus Giroux Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Group, 2025)



This inspiring picture book tells the true story of how community action helped clean up New York Harbor and bring whales back after more than a century. Spanning from pre-colonization to modern times, it explores the environmental damage caused by industrialization and the power of activism to reverse it. With dramatic storytelling, additional relevant information, and references, it shows readers of all ages that collective efforts can make a real difference.

Grades 3-5

***Cactus Queen: Minerva Hoyt Establishes Joshua Tree National Park*** by Lori Alexander, illustrated by Jenn Ely (Calkins Creek, an imprint of Astra Books for Young Readers, 2024)



Minerva Hoyt recognized the beauty of the Mojave Desert and created a traveling landscape exhibit to raise awareness about the importance of its preservation. After an initial denial, she rallied support for reconsideration, ultimately leading to the establishment of Joshua Tree National Park and earning her the nickname "Cactus Queen."

***The Crane and the Keeper*** by Meeg Pincus, illustrated by Gillian Eilidh O'Mara (Candlewick Entertainment, an imprint of Candlewick Press, 2025)



Walnut the White-Naped Crane didn't think she was a crane but a human! Chris Crowe, her crane keeper, worked hard to help Walnut at the Conservation Biology Institute. With time and patience a bond grew between the crane and her keeper.

***Dancing Through Space: Dr. Mae Jemison Soars to New Heights*** by Lydia Lukidis, illustrated by Sawyer Cloud (Albert Whitman & Co., 2024)



Lydia Lukidis introduces us to Mae Jemison as both a budding scientist and an aspiring dancer. Each endeavor is detailed through Mae's life until they come

together to represent Ms. Jemison's ability to excel in both. A strong theme of determination is present to encourage readers to strive for their highest goals.

***The Danger Files: Real-Life Disasters*** by Anna Crowley Redding (Candlewick Press, 2025)



Readers get to become detectives or investigative reporters as they read about real disasters that have occurred. The stories are given, but with Danger Clue(s)! and Fact Files mixed into the story. The who, what, where, when, and how the disasters are given in a fun way to the reader. The disasters are seen as not being just stories but being real as the events are told through the eyewitness accounts of children their ages. The narrow escapes, mysteries, tales of survival, and disasters make finding out what really happened a truly exciting read.

***\*Dragonflies of Glass: The Story of Clara Driscoll and the Tiffany Girls*** by Susan Goldman Ruben, illustrated by Susanna Chapman (Abrams Books for Young Readers, an imprint of ABRAMS, 2025)



In a time when most women stayed at home with their families, Clara Driscoll and other talented women worked for the famous Tiffany Glass Company designing and creating works of masterful art. Their lamps and other glass designs were world renown, but the women who created them were often overshadowed by their male counterparts and didn't receive proper recognition until now.

***The Five Sides of Marjorie Rice: How to Discover a Shape*** by Amy Alznauer, illustrated by Anna Bron (Candlewick Press, 2025)



Creativity and support of it abound in THE FIVE SIDES OF MARJORIE RICE. Phenomenally intricate illustrations by Anna Byron, including her own tessellating patterns, bring life to Amy Alznauer's text about mathematics and the puzzles surrounding tessellating tiles. Marjorie Rice was a true amateur mathematician who decided that she would create a new "versatile" even though it had been decades since any were discovered. Readers learn about the Golden Ratio, M.C. Escher, that math can be fun, and more while exploring nature with Marjorie.

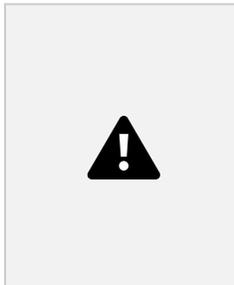
***The Friendship Train: A True Story of Helping and Healing After World War II*** by Debbie Levy, illustrated by Boris Kulikov (Bloomsbury Children's Books, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., 2025)



The Friendship Train came about as a way to help fill hungry bellies Italy and

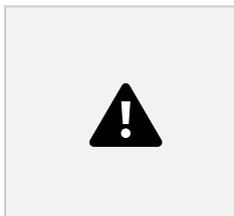
France after World War II. From the newspaper article written by Drew Pearson in not one paper , but newspapers all over the U.S. the idea of a way for children and adults too, to collect food to send to these far away places. A train moved across the country adding boxcars full of dried food, and canned milk that people could not get in the war torn countries and winter was coming. At the end of the line 500 Boxcars of food were collected and it took 4 very large ships to transport it all to foreign ports.

***Gold Rush: The Untold Story of the First Nations Woman Who Started the Klondike Gold Rush*** by Flora Delargy (Wide Eyed Editions, an imprint of The Quarto Group, 2024)



The beautifully illustrated book combines the fascinating history of the Klondike Gold Rush with the personal stories of First Nation' women who persevered during a time in history that was primarily dominated by men.

***The House on the Canal: The Story of the House that Hid Anne Frank*** by Thomas Harding, illustrated by Britta Teckentrup (Candlewick Studio, an imprint of Candlewick Press, 2023)



Ann Frank's house is THE HOUSE ON THE CANAL. Thomas Harding provides the background information on the house's construction and occupants before the Frank family. Small corner insets give dates for each new family, transition, or business. An ideal text-set addition for World War II or Anne Frank study.

***Hurricane*** by Jason Chin (Neal Porter Books, an imprint of Holiday House Publishing, Inc., 2025)



The Hurricane can have an effect on many different people on Hatteras Island North Carolina. The timeline is effective as it explains how the storm is moving their way and what they must do in order to evacuate if needed. The little stray cat as well as the scientific information help to make this a real but not a scary book about a hurricane.

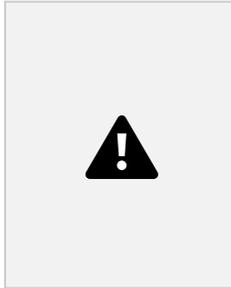
***Lighthouse Ladies: Shining a Spotlight on Hardy Heroines*** by Kris Coronado, illustrated by Islenia Mil (Clarion Books, an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2025)



Meet four women whose courage, guts, and hard work saved lives and proved

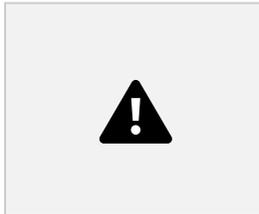
women could be lighthouse keepers. Learn about their daily lives, struggles and heroic acts.

***Making Light Bloom: Clara Driscoll and the Tiffany Lamps*** by Sandra Nickel, illustrated by Julie Paschkis (Peachtree Publishing Company Inc., 2025)



This tells the story of the iconic Tiffany Lamp creator, Clara Bloom highlighting her love for nature and her eye for engineering and craftsmanship.

***Mariam's Dream: The Story of Mariam Al-Shaar and Her Food Truck of Hope*** by Leila Boukarim, illustrated by Sona Avedikian (Chronicle Books, 2025)



This is the story of how Mariam, a woman born in a refugee camp in Lebanon, overcame obstacles to create a woman - run kitchen and food truck that has inspired not only the people around her but the world.

***Mighty: The Story of an Oak Tree Ecosystem*** by Henry Cole, (Peachtree Publishing Company Inc., 2025)



Finely detailed pen and ink illustrations accompany simple text that takes readers through the life of a mighty Oak Tree. The lives of numerous animals and insects are supported by the tree, while humans find shade and enjoyment under its branches.

***\*The Secret World of Spiderwebs*** by Jan Beccaloni, illustrated by Namasri Niumim (Thames & Hudson, 2025)



Twenty spiders and thirteen unique styles of webs are expertly illustrated with fascinating descriptions. Readers will learn the anatomy of a spider and how they spin their webs, as well as the many ways webs are used to catch prey. An engaging read for arachnophiles and those curious about nature.

***Tomatoes on Trial: The Fruit v. Vegetable Showdown*** by Lindsay H. Metcalf, illustrated by Edwin Fotheringham (Calkins Creek, an imprint of Astra Books for Young Readers, 2025)



Tomatoes. Team fruit or Team vegetable? Follow the arguments as presented to the Supreme Court in 1893. Then you decide.

***Woody's Words: Woodrow Wilson Rawls and Where the Red Fern Grows*** by Lisa Rogers, illustrated by Susan Reagan (Calkins Creek, an imprint of Astra Books for Young Readers, 2025)



This reads just like *Where the Red Fern Grows*, in that it too is a story of a boy who hungers for dogs, and for a chance to read. Once he hears the Call of the Wild, he is hooked, but knows that he must write down his own interesting stories that he had just been telling his dogs for years. He teaches himself to write, and later in adulthood finds a woman who believes in him and encourages him to continue writing. Through the telling of his story comes his words which indeed tell how he thinks and why there is a need for him to write.

***\*The World Entire: A True Story of an Extraordinary World War II Rescue*** by Elizabeth Brown, illustrated by Melissa Castrillón (Chronicle Books, 2025)



When faced with the horrors of World War II, Portuguese diplomat Aristides de Sousa Mendes defied his superiors and saved thousands of refugees fleeing the Nazi regime in France.

***World of Mushrooms: Discover the Freaky, Fantastic Fungi that Lurk in the Woods, Pop up in Lawns, and Sneak Around Underground*** by Pauline Payen, illustrated by Zelda Pressigout (Storey Publishing, an imprint of Workman Publishing, a division of Hachette Book Group, 2025)



Welcome to the weird and marvelous world of mushrooms. Charming illustrations and engaging text provide young mycologists with fungal fun facts, an identification guide, and a sense of wonder about spore-tastic

mushrooms.

## GRADES 6-8

***\*The Bard and the Book: How the First Folio Saved the Plays of William Shakespeare from Oblivion*** by Ann Bausum, illustrated by Marta Sevilla (Peachtree Publishing Company Inc., 2024)



The author begins this entertaining read with a short introduction to Shakespeare's plays, followed by the fascinating process that was used to compile a catalog of his works into a printed folio. Without these folios, much of Shakespeare's works may have been lost forever. The folio's that still exist today also reveal insights about early printing methods and the importance of original source material.

***Ellis Island: Immigration and the American Dream*** by Felipe Galindo Feggo, illustrated by Tait Howard (First Second, an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Group, 2025)



Learn the full history of Ellis Island as it evolved from a small piece of land to the historically iconic site that is critical to our nation's immigrants, regardless of their point of entry. The engaging graphic novel format relates facts from each stage of the island's history through to our present day. Even those who have visited this site may learn more information and develop a new perspective.

***Fantastic Flora: The World's Biggest, Baddest, and Smelliest Plants*** by Ann McCallum Staats, illustrated by Zoe Ingram (MIT Kids Press, an imprint of Candlewick Press, 2025)



Fantastic Flora allows you to learn about the amazing adaptations that some plants have so they can thrive in their environment. Plants that smell like rotting animals, have seeds that explode, mimic other things in nature, all this and more can be found in Fantastic Flora.

***\*Fighter in the Woods: The True Story of a Jewish Girl Who Joined the Partisans in World War II*** by Joshua M. Greene (Scholastic Focus, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 2025)



When Celia's boarding school is bombed in 1941 Poland, her world changes forever. Friends turn against her, and her family is soon separated or forced into a ghetto where they face starvation and extermination. Full of courage and resilience, Celia risks her life and escapes into the woods to join the partisans in their fight to stop the Nazis' reign of terror.

**\*Manga Biographies: Charles M. Schulz, The Creator Snoopy and Peanuts** by Yuzuri Kuki, translated by Muri Morimoto (Udon, 2024)



This biography shows the creator of one of America's cartoon icons from the beginning. See where it all began for the creator of Snoopy, Charlie Brown, and their friends.

**SCAT: The Incredible Science of Wildlife Poop** by Anita Sanchez (Holiday House, 2025)



Can you believe that there is a science for Poop, with the technical term it is Scat? This book goes into how animal dung, scat helps fertilize the seeds that make our earth green. There is a problem in that sometimes there is so much poop that the rivers and streams become polluted, check out the Hippos. The type of poop an animal in the zoo will tell the zookeepers how the animals feel, just by examining their scat. It may be gross but every living thing from human

to animals to even a plant either sends out the digested food as poop or eats the poop of another.

**Seeds of Discovery: How Barbara McClintock Used Corn and Curiosity to Solve a Science Mystery and Win a Nobel Prize** by Lori Alexander, illustrated by Rebecca Santo (Clarion Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2025)



A personal inside look at Barbara McClintock, a Nobel Prize winning scientist, who broke stereotypes and used her intelligence, problem solving skills, and curiosity to study botany. Her tireless and important work led to discoveries that laid the foundations for many breakthroughs in genetics.

**\*Spying on Spies: How Elizabeth Smith Friedman Broke the Nazis' Secret Codes** by Marissa Moss (Abrams Books for Young Readers, an imprint of ABRAMS, 2024)



History and codes collide in this story of the United States' first female code breaker and her contributions to the war efforts. Spying on Spies tells the

detailed story of pioneering female cryptographer Elizabeth Smith Friedman, who operated and excelled in a male-dominated field. By offering insights into her professional accomplishments and personal challenges readers will learn Friedman's achievements in national security during a time when the world was on edge.

***The True Story of Vanilla: How Edmund Albuiz Made History*** by Anne Richards, illustrated by Arden Taylor (Orca Book Publishers, 2025)



How will an enslaved orphan boy develop the skill to pollinate vanilla so that it becomes instead of a very expensive flavoring to one that the masses can enjoy? The book delves into the life of a young slave, Edmund, who was sent to live on the plantation of Ferreol Bellier-Beaumont, a skilled botanist who teaches him everything about plants. Edmond figures out on his own how to hand-pollinate the locally grown vanilla plant. Much work is done on Ferreol's part to give Edmond the credit he deserves.

***The Vanishing of Lake Peigneur: A Graphic Novel Based on a True Story*** by Allan Wolf, Illustrated by Jose Pimienta (Candlewick Press, 2025)



Vanishing of Lake Peigneur 's title drew me in as if it really was true that a lake disappeared. Telling the story of just a regular lazy day in far south Louisiana where the fish are biting and folks are working in the oil and salt mining industry made for an interesting start, but the information that came from the telling of the story by the lake itself made the lake seem like a real person. It was a living creature that shared the history and events that lead to the POP! and the creation of the hole that grew so large that it was swallowing everything that ended up being pulled towards its whirlpool.

***Waist Deep in Dung: A Stomach Churning Look at the Grossest Jobs Throughout History*** by Christine Virnig, illustrated by Korwin Briggs (Godwin Books, an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Group, 2024)



Dirty jobs for the younger set. Sadly, not every job is glamorous. Disgusting jobs have existed throughout the history of mankind. Sprinkling gross-out humor into thoughtful design, watch your step as you take a look at icky jobs throughout history.

***\*Wish I Was a Baller*** By Amar Shah, illustrated by Rashad Doucet (Graphix, an imprint of Scholastic, 2025)



As kids, we tend to focus on what we see as the worst aspect of ourselves. Amar Shah is not an exception to this. He had his frustrations with height and fickle friends, yet his love for sports journalism was his driving focus. That love enabled him to meet some of the 1990s NBA all-stars such as Shaquille O’Neal, Kobe Bryant, and more! This graphic novel is a perfectly poised memoir to remind teens to stay focused on their goals and the positives in order to survive and thrive!

**GRADES 9-12**

***At Last She Stood: How Joey Guerrero Spied, Survived, and Fought for Freedom*** by Erin Entrada Kelly (Greenwillow Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2025)



From a young orphaned girl who relates to Joan of Arc to surviving WWII in the Philippines even with Hansen's Disease she believes she can do anything such as spy, be a Guerrilla fighter, and deliver all important minefield maps (without being caught by the enemy). She comes to the United States after WWII and is healed when she comes to Louisiana then continues her life as a survivor of a dread disease, a teacher, and a peacemaker. The many sidebars help set the stage of time and place along with what is happening in her world, the Philippines, and why. This makes the story of Joey Guerrero even more compelling to read.

***Death in the Jungle: Murder, Betrayal and the Lost Dream of Jonestown*** by Candace Fleming (Anne Schwartz Books, an imprint of Random House Children’s Books, 2025)



What started as a more progressive congregation for its time gradually turned into a cult’s gruesome mass suicide. Follow the complex origins of Jim Jones and the People’s Temple as author Candace Flemming tells the story of how Jim Jones was able to utilize his charisma and control to turn a church into a cult. An accessible and fascinating account of the tragedy of Jonestown.

***Earthrise: The Story of the Photograph that Changed the Way We See Our Planet*** by Leonard S. Marcus (Farrar Straus Giroux Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Group, 2025)



So many of us are familiar with the image titled "Earthrise". Leonard S. Marcus delves into the space program and how the Earthrise photograph came to exist. Readers will familiarize themselves with NASA's history and the reasons we sustained our space program. Earthrise has become iconic in helping our understanding of the Earth and Moon in our solar system.

***One in a Million*** by Claire Lordon (Candlewick Press, 2023)



In this powerful graphic memoir, Lordon shares her journey through a range of symptoms from intense physical pain to emotional struggles as doctors search for answers. When she is diagnosed with a rare illness that affects just one in a million, she faces endless tests and excruciating treatments. It's an eye-opening story about resilience and living with a chronic condition.

***Putin vs. Zelensky: The Russo-Ukrainian War: Why It's Happening and How it All Got Started*** by Ben Thompson (Roaring Brook Press, an imprint of Macmillan Publishing Group, 2025)



This book explores the long and complicated history between Russia and Ukraine, the leaders who shaped it over time, and how it set the stage for the current war. It looks at how Vladimir Putin rose to power determined to restore Russia's influence, and how Volodymyr Zelensky went from being a comedian to becoming president, stepping up to protect his country and lead his people when Russia launched its invasion.

***Shackled: A Tale of Wronged Kids, Rogue Judges, and a Town that Looked Away*** by Candy J. Cooper (Calkins Creek, an imprint of Astra Books for Young Readers, 2024)



As much as we're taught to believe "The System" is fair, sometimes the system is wrong. Judges getting money to sentence kids sounds like the plot of a Law and Order episode. Unfortunately, in this instance, no one was looking out for teenagers in Pennsylvania.

***\*White House Secrets: Medical Lies and Cover-Ups*** by Gail Jarrow (Calkins Creek, an imprint of Astra Books for Young Readers, 2025)



Some U.S. presidents were seriously ill or even dying while still in office, and the public had no idea. Discover astonishing true stories about presidential medical cover ups, who covered it up, why the truth was hidden, and what it means for the country when presidents are too sick to lead.