

2017 Texas Topaz Nonfiction Reading List - Annotated



Anderson, M. T. *Symphony for the City of the Dead: Dmitri Shostakovich and the Siege of Leningrad*. Candlewick Press, 2015.

Composer Shostakovich, caught between the ruthless domestic oppression of Stalin and the armies of Hitler besieging his home of Leningrad manages to create his most famous work. The narrative reveals the power of art to transcend and the horrific hardships endured by his fellow Russians.

Andraka, Jack. *Breakthrough: How One Teen Innovator Is Changing the World*. New York, HarperCollins, 2015.

Literally hundreds of doctors rejected fourteen-year-old Andraka's hypothesis for a pancreatic cancer early detection test, no doubt thinking: he's just a teenager - what does he know? Andraka recounts his battle to bring his successful test to fruition while living the life of a normal teen dealing with issues such as bullies and depression. Andraka's underdog story will leave you cheering, and maybe tearing-up.

Bartoletti, Susan Campbell. *Terrible Typhoid Mary: A True Story of the Deadliest Cook in America*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015.

This book brings to life a famous episode taking place when germ theory was not widely accepted by the public and yellow journalism personalized and sensationalized the truth. The multifaceted account of Mary Mallon and her pursuers has much to teach us about the present day and how the public ignores science.

Barton, Bethany. *I'm Trying to Love Spiders: (It Isn't Easy)*. Penguin Group, 2015.

A sardonic, yet informative look at the unpopular arachnid with many 'superpowers.' Book is fun for both reader and young audience because of its humor and interactive watercolor illustrations.

Beck, W. H. *Glow: Animals with Their Own Night-Lights*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.

Who knew so many animals glowed in the dark? Young readers are introduced to the science behind bioluminescence via striking photos and engaging text.

Brown, Don. *Drowned City: Hurricane Katrina & New Orleans*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015.

Brown's graphic depiction of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath proves the adage "a picture is worth 1000 words". His drawings coupled with the unique narrative choice to solely use statistics and quotes from survivors and news reports, represents the best in graphic nonfiction and recounts the disaster for a new generation.

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Bryant, Jennifer. *Six Dots: A Story of Young Louis Braille*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2016.

An inspiring picture book biography of Louis Braille who was just five years old when he lost his sight. What he wanted more than anything was to be able to read, so he invented his own alphabet system for writing that could be read by touch. A system so ingenious that it is still used by the blind community today.

Burgess, Matthew. *Enormous Smallness: A Story of E.E. Cummings*. New York, Enchanted Lion Books, 2015.

A delightful introduction to ee cummings that incorporates his poetry and employs his whimsical style. As the title intimates, cummings' story proves that small pleasures and events in life and art can have an enormous impact.

Cain, Susan. *Quiet Power: The Secret Strengths of Introverts*. Dial Books for Young Readers, 2016.

Introverts are often overlooked, misunderstood and unappreciated. This powerful self-help guide for introverts and their family and friends has the potential to change lives and the world via the ideas in the minds of the quiet set.

Churnin, Nancy. *The William Hoy Story: How a Deaf Baseball Player Changed the Game*. Albert Whitman & Company, 2016.

The largely unknown story of William 'Dummy' Hoy, who was on the local deaf team, and forever changed the way baseball was played by asking the umpire to use hand signals.

Collier, Peter. *Choosing Courage: Inspiring Stories of What It Means to Be a Hero*. Artisan, 2015.

Published in collaboration with the Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation, Peter Collier shares the inspiring stories of Medal of Honor recipients while offering sidebars and essays to illuminate the qualities of true-life civilian and military heroes.

Cooper, Alex. *Saving Alex: When I Was Fifteen I Told My Mormon Parents I Was Gay, and That's When My Nightmare Began*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2016.

Alex's deeply religious parents send her to live with an unqualified, uncertified couple claiming to have the ability to "cure" her homosexuality. Alex suffers emotional and physical abuse in their home until she finds the strength and support to take legal action on her own, enabling her to live openly as a gay teenager. Tragic on several layers, but ultimately hopeful.

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Corey, Shana. *The Secret Subway*. Schwartz & Wade Books, 2016.

This is the astounding true story of nineteenth-century inventor Alfred Ely Beach's solution to New York City's crowded streets: in 1870, he unveiled the first underground train, which went back and forth in a 294-foot tunnel.

DiPiazza, Francesca. *Remaking the John: The Invention and Reinvention of the Toilet*. Twenty-First Century Books, 2015.

This title may open with the "ew" factor, but the issue of a sanitation global health crisis is no joke. Dipiazza focuses not just on the history of the john (with many photos for inquisitive minds), but also on how indoor plumbing revolutionized mankind's health and that in many third world countries infectious diseases could be almost eradicated with, yes, the john. Fascinating and relevant for today's globally conscientious youth.

Feinstein, John. *The Legends Club: Dean Smith, Mike Krzyzewski, Jim Valvano, and the Story of an Epic College Basketball Rivalry*. New York, Doubleday, 2016.

John Feinstein tells the fascinating story of coaches Dean Smith, Mike Krzyzewski, and Jim Valvano as they dominated and transformed college basketball. Feinstein was there from the beginning, as a rookie student reporter, and his front-stage view and clear friendships with the coaches leads to a nuanced and engaging true sports tale.

Freedman, Russell. *We Will Not Be Silent: The White Rose Student Resistance Movement That Defied Adolf Hitler*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.

A tragic and emotional story of the defiant and courageous college students known as the White Rose who defied the Nazi regime.

Goldblatt, David. *The Games: A Global History of the Olympics*. W. W. Norton, 2016.

How did the Olympic Games develop into the global phenomenon that it is today? This engaging history explores seminal moments, traditions, popular events and captures the drama and excitement of the Games.

Guerrero, Diane. *In the Country We Love: My Family Divided*. Henry Holt and Company, 2016.

One day the author comes home from school to find her parents gone without warning. Guerrero's story puts a human face on the impact which both the threat and the reality of deportation has on the American born children of undocumented immigrants.

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Hall, Shyima. *Hidden Girl: The True Story of a Modern-Day Child Slave*. Simon & Schuster, 2014.

When Shyima was just eight years old her parents sold her to a wealthy family to pay off their debt - a not totally unheard of practice in Egypt. After the family moved to the US with Shyima, she was rescued by a suspicious neighbor who reported to the authorities. Shyima's memoir raises awareness on child trafficking, illiteracy, the foster system and other social issues from a very personal perspective.

Heos, Bridget. *Blood, Bullets and Bones: The Story of Forensic Science from Sherlock Holmes to DNA*. HarperCollins, 2016.

Blood, bullets and bones - oh my! Heos takes us on a forensic science journey revealing scientific discoveries chronologically and highlights their uses in famous cases such as the Sam Sheppard and OJ Simpson cases. Whether you want to be an FBI agent, work on the body farm or are just looking for interesting anecdotes, there's something here for almost everyone.

---. *I, Fly: The Buzz about Flies and How Awesome They Are*. Henry Holt and Company, 2015.

Why do butterflies and frogs get all the attention when learning about metamorphosis? Fly makes his case for why his species should be the classroom's newest study.

Hollandsworth, Skip. *The Midnight Assassin: Panic, Scandal, and the Hunt for America's First Serial Killer*. New York, Henry Holt and Company, 2016.

In December 1884, Austin Texas was terrorized by someone equally as vicious and, in some ways, far more diabolical than London's infamous Jack the Ripper. For almost exactly one year, the Midnight Assassin crisscrossed the entire city, striking on moonlit nights, using axes, knives, and long steel rods to rip apart women from every race and class. Before it was all over, at least a dozen men would be arrested in connection with the murders, and the crimes would expose what a newspaper described as "the most extensive and profound scandal ever known in Austin." And yes, when Jack the Ripper began his attacks in 1888, London police investigators did wonder if the killer from Austin had crossed the ocean to terrorize their own city.

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Inman, Mason. *The Oracle of Oil: A Maverick Geologist's Quest for a Sustainable Future*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2016.

Marion King Hubbert grew up on a Texas farm and in the 1950s, long before the climate change debate began, he presented research that made the oil industry queasy. Society needed to quickly wean itself off its dependence on oil, he concluded, or face dire consequences. His argument wasn't motivated by the global climate impacts of fossil fuel burning, but rather by a bold prediction that U.S. oil production would soon peak and quickly taper off. In its portrait of a man whose prescient ideas still resonate today, *The Oracle of Oil* looks to the past to find a guiding philosophy for our future.

Jenkins, Steve. *Animals by the Numbers: A Book of Infographics*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.

Jenkins utilizes easy-to-understand and delightful infographics to relay intriguing facts and statistics from the animal kingdom. Young readers do not have to know how to read to understand information depicted- thoroughly engaging and enjoyable.

---. *Eye to Eye: How Animals See the World*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014.

Take a closer look at how eyes have evolved to meet the needs of the simplest to most complex animals.

Johnson, Steven. *How We Got to Now: Six Innovations That Made the Modern World*. Penguin Group, 2014.

In this illustrated history, Steven Johnson explores the history of innovation over centuries, tracing facets of modern life from their creation to their unintended historical consequences. *How We Got to Now* investigates the secret history behind the everyday objects of contemporary life.

Keating, Jess. *Pink Is for Blobfish: Discovering the World's Perfectly Pink Animals*. Illustrated by David DeGrand, Alfred A. Knopf, 2016.

Think Pink! This picture book introduces the weirdest, wildest, wackiest, and most perfectly pink critters in the animal kingdom!

Konnikova, Maria. *The Confidence Game: Why We Fall for It...Every Time*. Viking, 2016.

Part intriguing history and part self-help, Konnikova weaves tales from famous cons of the past while revealing the underlying psychology at each stage of the confidence game.

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Larson, Erik. *Dead Wake: The Last Crossing of the Lusitania*. Crown, 2015.

Erik Larson once again takes the bones of an historical event (the sinking of the Lusitania) that we all believe we know about, and fleshes them out with such skill that readers are breathlessly enthralled despite knowing the ultimate outcome of the events. His books have the historical detail and the narrative novelization to bring a distant maritime disaster to brilliant life.

Levy, Debbie. *I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Makes Her Mark*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2016.

This is a colorfully illustrated biographical account of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She was a woman who rose to serve in the U.S. Supreme court during a time when men were of power and women were meant to become wives and mothers. Ginsburg often disagreed with others, never compromising her beliefs.

Lewis, John. *March. Book Three*. Top Shelf Productions, 2016.

The final installment of Lewis' graphic novel trilogy sees the culmination of years of discrimination, protesting and marching resulting in Lewis standing strong on the Edmund Pettus Bridge and President Johnson's signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Empowering and memorable.

London, Jonathan. *Hippos Are Huge!* Candlewick Press, 2015.

Chomp, glide, splat, and roar your way through this colorful and informative book about one of the world's largest and deadliest land animals.

Macy, Beth. *Truevine*. Little, Brown and Company, 2016.

George and Willie Muse were albino African Americans who travelled the circus freak show circuit from the time they were children. They were presented to the public as martians, savages bushmen and various other incarnations before being reclaimed by their mother in a dramatic reunion.

McBride, James. *Kill 'Em and Leave: Searching for the Real James Brown*. Spiegel & Grau, 2016.

While this is, indeed, an in depth biography of a musical legend named James Brown, it is also the story of poverty, talent, prejudice, hubris and discrimination that lays bare the uneasy truth of life in the American South. McBride delivers new insight into the 'Godfather of Soul' unequalled in any previous book about Brown.

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- McCullough, David. *The Wright Brothers*. Simon & Schuster, 2015.
Pulitzer and National Book Award winner McCullough, a historian without peer, does it again, breathing new life into the already dramatic story of two Ohio brothers who believed they could fly. New family correspondence and other records add dimensions to the story previously unavailable, particularly weaving in the contributions of their sister Katherine.
- Moalem, Sharon. *Inheritance: How Our Genes Change Our Lives -- and Our Lives Change Our Genes*. Grand Central Publishing, 2014.
Award-winning physician and New York Times bestselling author Sharon Moalem, MD, PhD, reveals how genetic breakthroughs are completely transforming our understanding of both the world and our lives.
- Mone, Gregory. *The Boys in the Boat: The True Story of an American Team's Epic Journey to Win Gold at the 1936 Olympics*. New York, Viking Childrens Books, 2015.
An uplifting story of triumph in sport and life during the great depression and the 1936 Nazi Olympics.
- Murphy, Jim. *Breakthrough!: How Three People Saved "Blue Babies" and Changed Medicine Forever*. Boston, Clarion Books, 2015.
Alfred Blalock is the known surgeon who paved the way for open heart surgery with a breakthrough for "blue baby syndrome". This memorable narrative tells the real story of the lab assistant Vivien Thomas who gave the step-by-step instructions during the procedure to Blalock.
- Noah, Trevor. *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhoos*. Spiegel & Grau, 2016.
Noah's crazy antics, cringe-worthy teen years and brave choices make for compelling reading as he recounts growing up "colored" under the Apartheid system in South Africa. Fascinating, enlightening and fun reading.
- Philbrick, Nathaniel. *Valiant Ambition: George Washington, Benedict Arnold, and the Fate of the American Revolution*. Viking, 2016.
How did one of the American Revolution's leading heroes turn into the country's most infamous traitors? This page turner goes beyond what is taught in school to shed light on both Benedict Arnold's and George Washington's characters and actions.

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Seiple, Samantha. *Lincoln's Spymaster: Allan Pinkerton, America's First Private Eye*. New York, Scholastic Press, 2015.

The book is an extensively detailed account of the adventures of Allan Pinkerton, America's first private eye. It contains an array of cases solved by our first private detective agency, including the prevention of an assassination plot against Abraham Lincoln.

Sheinkin, Steve. *Most Dangerous: Daniel Ellsberg and the Secret History of the Vietnam War*. Roaring Brook Press, 2015.

Daniel Ellsberg was privy to unsettling government secrets about America's decisions and involvement in several wars that, in his view, showed the systemic misleading of the American public. After much deliberation, he leaked what we now call the Pentagon Papers. This enthralling examination provides readers with firsthand details and raises questions relevant today: is a whistleblower a hero or a traitor? How much government secrecy is too much?

Silvey, Anita. *Untamed: The Wild Life of Jane Goodall*. National Geographic, 2015.

From a child who kept earthworms under her pillow and hid in the henhouse, to a grown woman who lived most of her adult life with chimpanzees, Jane Goodall's life is intriguing. This richly illustrated story of her life gives you a glimpse into a scientist's field journal and her dedication to her cause.

Stelson, Caren Barzelay. *Sachiko: A Nagasaki Bomb Survivor's Story*. Carolrhoda Books, 2016.

Sachiko was a mere six years old when her tranquil life was rocked with the bombing of her hometown Nagasaki. Interspersed with historical notes highlighting the events surrounding the war and bombing, this personal look at the end of WWII covers what many history classes may neglect.

Step toe, Javaka. *Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat*. Little, Brown and Company, 2016.

An excellent introduction not only to Basquiat's art and life for young readers, but also the concept of making art with what you have and finding the beauty in many, sometimes painful, situations.

Swartz, Clay. *Who Wins?: 100 Historical Figures Go Head-to-Head and You Decide the Winner!* Illustrated by Tom Booth, Workman Publishing, 2016.

Mixing and matching 100 historical figures in 50 competitive categories, from Ping-Pong to climbing Mount Everest, this book turns history into a compelling game. Each of the famous people is given a short bio and ranked in six categories—bravery, leadership, artistry, wealth, wisdom, and fitness.

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Traister, Rebecca. *All the Single Ladies: Unmarried Women and the Rise of an Independent Nation*. Simon & Schuster, 2016.

Today, only twenty percent of Americans are wed by age twenty-nine, compared to nearly sixty percent in 1960. The Population Reference Bureau calls it a “dramatic reversal.” *All the Single Ladies* is a remarkable portrait of contemporary American life and how we got here, through the lens of the single American woman. Covering class, race, sexual orientation, and filled with vivid anecdotes from fascinating contemporary and historical figures, *All the Single Ladies* is destined to be a classic work of social history and journalism. It is exhaustively researched, brilliantly balanced, and told with wit and insight.

Turner, Pamela S. *Samurai Rising: The Epic Life of Minamoto Yoshitsune*. Charlesbridge, 2016.

This tale of the twelfth-century Japanese samurai Minamoto Yoshitsune reads like a movie. The action-packed battles, deception and compelling narrative do more than describe Yoshitsune’s life and that of other samurai, it brings that era to life.

Van Wagenen, Maya. *Popular: A Memoir : Vintage Wisdom for a Modern Geek*. Penguin Group, 2014.

Take a 1950’s teen model’s guide to popularity; apply it to your current high school life; write honestly, with great humor and charm; and you have this 15-year-old author’s bestseller. You might even be surprised at what you learn.

Walker, Sally M. *Winnie: The True Story of the Bear Who Inspired Winnie-the-Pooh*. Henry Holt and Company, 2015.

When Harry Colebourn saw a baby bear for sale at the train station, he knew he could care for it. Harry was a veterinarian. But he was also a soldier in training for World War I. This is the heartwarming story of the real bear who inspired Winnie-the-Pooh.

Webb, Brandon. *The Making of a Navy SEAL: My Story of Surviving the Toughest Challenge and Training the Best*. New York, St. Martin’s Press, 2015.

Webb’s memoir recounts key difficult moments in his youth that formed him into the type of man with the grit, determination and perseverance that led to his success as a Navy SEAL. Webb’s story gives readers more than just a glimpse into the SEAL life and a lot to think about.

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Woodson, Jacqueline. *Brown Girl Dreaming*. Penguin, 2014.

In Woodson's lyrical memoir she remembers her childhood spent in the midwest, deep south and New York with vivid sensory recall. Growing up African American roughly mid- century provides readers a window into racism and later developments such as Black Power - all explored through a child's eyes. This haunting memoir stays with readers.

Zuckerman, Gregory. *Rising Above: How 11 Athletes Overcame Challenges in Their Youth to Become Stars*. Philomel Books, 2016.

Well-curated collection of vignettes about successful athletes that overcame a variety of disabilities and childhood obstacles to reach the big leagues.