



2021 Texas Topaz Youth Nonfiction Reading List

The purpose of the Texas Topaz Reading List is to provide children 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 vote by the committee.

K – 2nd

****A Garden in Your Belly: Meet the Microbes in Your Gut*** by Masha D'Yans (Millbrook Press, 2020) A fascinating look at an essential part of our physiology, the human microbiome. Written in an accessible style for younger readers and illustrated with charming watercolors, this title also includes a glossary and a slew of gut-related facts.

J 612.3

****All the Way to the Top*** by Annette Bay Pimentel, illustrated by Nabi Ali (Sourcebooks Explore, 2020) Social justice is also a fight for kids, as demonstrated in this book by its fearless protagonist, Jennifer Keelen, who knew her voice would represent the thousands of handicapped kids like herself. Sure, it was an obstacle, but her wheelchair didn't define her enthusiasm to accomplish the many goals on her list. This story of determination introduces kids to the history of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

J 323.37

Brave Ballerina: The Story of Janet Collins by Annette Bay Pimentel, illustrated by Nabi Ali (Sourcebooks Explore, 2019) his picture book biography introduces Janet Collins, a Black dancer in the 1930s and 40s who ultimately, through hard work, determination, and encouragement from others, became the first Black prima ballerina to perform at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1951. Her story of overcoming discrimination, finding acceptance, and perseverance is beautifully told here.

J 92 Collins

****Dancing hands: how Teresa Carreno Played the Piano for President Lincoln*** by Margarita Engle, illustrated by Rafael Lopez (Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2019) The story of the "Piano Girl", 10-year-old Theresa Carreno of Venezuela, who traveled the world playing concerts, plays a special concert for Abraham Lincoln during the time of the Civil War.

J 92 Carreno

****Fauja Singh Keeps Going: The True Story of the Oldest Person Ever to Run a Marathon*** by Simran Jeet Singh, illustrated by Baljinder Kaur (Penguin Random House, 2020) This beautifully illustrated first picture book featuring a Sikh from a major publishing house is an uplifting story of resilience. Simran Singh chronicles the life of Fauja Singh, who didn't walk until he was five years old and suffered weakness for many years thereafter, as he became the world's oldest marathon runner. This lovely picture book inspires through perseverance over physical limitations and over prejudice.

J 796.420

How to Solve a Problem: The Rise (and Falls) of a Rock-Climbing Champion by Ashima Shiraishi, illustrated by Yao Xiao (Make Me a World, 2020) Sometimes when you see someone with a rare talent or gift, it can appear easy, effortless. In this colorful, dynamically illustrated book written by the teen rock-climbing phenom Ashima Shiraishi, readers are reminded that that is almost never the case and that the best way to get better at something is to fail, learn from mistakes, and try, try again.

E Shiraishi

It Began with a Page: How Gyo Fujikawa Drew the Way by Kyo Maclear, illustrated by Julie Morstad (HarperCollins Children's Books, 2019) It Began with a Page is a biography of Gyo Fujikawa an artist and Japanese American hero who fought for racial diversity in picture books.

J 92 Fujikawa

Just Like Beverly by Vicki Conrad, illustrated by David Hohn (Sasquatch Books, 2019) This charmingly illustrated book brings fans into the world of author Beverly Cleary, including the struggles she had as a young student. A warm and loving tribute to a beloved author.

J 92 Cleary

Making Their Voices Heard: The Inspiring Friendship of Ella Fitzgerald and Marilyn Monroe by Vivian Kirkfield, illustrated by Alleanna Harris (Little Bee Books, 2020) Ella Fitzgerald and Marilyn Monroe are known as "greats" in their industries. However, their struggle to become successful and their friendship is highlighted in this wonderful story about overcoming odds, fighting for success, and shows how they both helped each other as friends.

J 782.421 Kirkfiel

****Moth: An Evolution Story*** by Isabel Thomas, illustrated by Daniel Egnéus (Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2018) Simply told and beautifully illustrated, this title effectively uses the story of the peppered moth to introduce the principles of adaptation and natural selection, as well as the impact of environmental change.

E Thomas

Mother Jones and Her Army of Mill Children by Jonah Winter, illustrated by Nancy Carpenter (Schwartz and Wade Books, 2020) A revolutionary figure in the fight for labor unions, worker's rights, and child labor, Mary Harris Jones, aka Mother Jones, is given her due in this book for young readers. Her fervent activist spirit shines through in her words and quotes throughout this wonderfully illustrated book.

J 92 Jones

****My Bed: Enchanting Ways to Fall Asleep Around the World*** by Rebecca Bond, illustrated by Sally Mavor (HMH Books for Young Readers, 2020) This beautiful book illustrates how children around the world sleep. The double-page spreads are amazingly illustrated with textiles using yarn, beads and fabric to create scenes with animals, plants and backgrounds that show the diversity of our world.

J 392.36 Bond

****Not a Bean*** by Claudia Guadalupe Martinez, illustrated by Laura Gonzalez (Charlesbridge, 2019) Not a Bean is an informational counting book that introduces the reader to the life cycle of the Mexican jumping bean using poetic language and Spanish words.

J 595.78 Martinez

****The Oldest Student: How Mary Walker Learned to Read*** by Rita Lorraine Hubbard, illustrated by Oge Mora (Schwartz & Wade Books, 2020) This picture book biography depicts the life of Mary Walker, born in 1848. She waited her entire life to read and with perseverance and determination proved that you're never too old to learn to read!

J 306.362 Walker

Packs: Strength in Numbers by Hannah Salyer (HMH Books for Young Readers, 2020) Through minimal words and beautiful illustrations, Salyer portrays how groups of animals live, work, play, and survive together.

J 591.5 Salyer

Play Like an Animal!: Why Critters Splash, Race, Twirl, and Chase by Maria Gianferrari, illustrated by Mia Powell (Millbrook Press, 2020) In this lively exploration of why animals play, kids learn that animals benefit from play in many of the same ways animals do: by learning cooperation, increasing physical skill and strength, and just having fun! Charming, dynamic illustrations accompany text that liberally uses great action verbs and includes fact boxes on each page.

J 591.56 Gianferrari

****R-E-S-P-E-C-T: Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul*** by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Frank Morrison (Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2020) A concise biography in picture form of the life of the great Aretha Franklin.

J 92 Franklin

3rd–5th

****A Last Goodbye*** by Elin Kelsey, illustrated by Soyeon Kim (Owlkids Books, 2020) An exquisite look at how animals grieve the loss of their loved ones.

J 155.93 Kelsey

Even More Lesser Spotted Animals by Martin Brown (David Fickling Books, 2019) Delightfully illustrated, charmingly and wittily written, readers will learn about gerenuks and dibatags, lorises, beaked whales and more. Each entry contains information about the animal's size, diet, location and status of endangerment, but the real joy is to be found in the depiction of the animals' faces. Glossary.

J 599 Brown

Fearless Felines: 30 True Tales of Courageous Cats by Kimberlie Hamilton (Scholastic Press, 2019) In this collection, you'll meet a multitude of memorable felines including Snowball, the Canadian cat who solved a murder, Félicette, the first cat in space, and the Guinness World Champion mouser, Towser, to name a few. In between profiles of notable cats, you'll learn about feline anatomy, famous literary cats, ways you can help cats in need, and more.

J 636.8 Hamilton

****How Women Won the Vote: Alice Paul, Lucy Burns, and Their Big Idea*** by Susan Campbell Bartoletti, illustrated by Ziyue Chen (Harper, 2020) Americans Alice Paul and Lucy Burn were involved in the British suffragette movement in 1909. Using that experience, they returned to the United States to lobby for an amendment to give voting rights to women. They also organized the first suffragist parade in Washington, D.C. in March of 1913. This well documented book offers a glimpse into the complex and difficult issues of political change.

J 324.6

Itch! Everything You Didn't Want to Know about What Makes You Scratch by Anita Sanchez, illustrated by Gilbert Ford (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018) This fun and fascinating book will grab your eye...and make you want to scratch it! With loads of information on the flora and fauna that make us itch, Sanchez offers little known facts about the worst offenders: lice, prickly pear, and more, along with tips on how to soothe the itch.

J 612.79 Sanchez

Let's Save Our Planet: Forests. Uncover the Facts. Be Inspired. Make a Difference. by Jess French, illustrated by Alexander Mostov (Ivy Kids, 2020) Forests explores different forest types and what makes them unique and precious to wildlife and humanity. Includes a glossary and chapters emphasizing conservation efforts and practical solutions.

J 577.3 French

****Love Your Body*** by Jessica Sanders, illustrated by Carol Rossetti (Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2020) In a world that likes to tell girls they need to fit in a particular box, *Love Your Body* reminds them that their bodies need to be celebrated for what they are and not what society tells them they should be.

J 179

****The Next President: The Unexpected Beginnings and Unwritten Future of America's Presidents*** by Kate Messner, illustrated by Adam Rex (Chronicle Kids, 2020) This inspiring book explores short facts and information about each of the 45 presidents and considers their varied life experiences before they were presidents. The book concludes with a consideration of who may be president in the future and shows kids that it really could be anyone.

J 973.09 Messner

****Nonsense! The Curious Story of Edward Gorey*** by Lori Mortensen, illustrated by Chloe Bristol (Versify, 2020) A wonderful introduction to the author and illustrator of the grim and fantastic, the "sweet and sinister", Edward Gorey. The influence of his singular, gothic style can be seen in the work of many contemporary writers, artists, and filmmakers today, including Lemony Snicket, Neil Gaiman, and Tim Burton.

J 92 Gorey

Ocean Speaks: How Marie Tharp Revealed the Ocean's Biggest Secret by Jess Keating, illustrated by Katie Hickey (Tundra Books, 2020) This picture biography covers the story of Marie Tharp, who was the cartographer who mapped the first map of the mid-Atlantic Ridge. Her story points out the impact of scientific curiosity, exploration, and persistence in the face of sexism in the science industry.

J 92 Tharp

Paper Son: The Inspiring Story of Tyrus Wong, Immigrant and Artist by Julie Leung, illustrated by Chris Saaki (Schwartz & Wade Books, 2019) Beautiful book about Wong Geng Yeo, a young Chinese immigrant who grew up to become an artist who lent his beautiful stylized backgrounds to the Disney motion picture, Bambi.

J 92 Wong

Queen of Physics: How Wu Chien Shiung Helped Unlock the Secrets of the Atom by Teresa Robeson, illustrated by Rebecca Huang (Sterling Children's Books, 2019) Queen of Physics is an inspirational biography that tells the story of Chinese Physicist Wu Chien Shiung who battled sexism and racism to follow her dream of becoming a scientist.

J 92 Wu

****Rise! From Caged Bird to Poet of the People, Maya Angelou*** by Bethany Hegedus, illustrated by Tonya Engel (Lee & Low, 2019) This lyrical text follows the life of poet Maya Angelou from her childhood in Arkansas to her life in San Francisco and beyond. The colorful illustrations beautifully depict her various careers such as a trolley car conductor, a mother, an activist, and poet.

J 92 Angelou

****Selena: Queen of Tejano Music*** by Sylvia López, illustrated by Paola Escobar (Little Bee Books, 2020) A beautifully illustrated biography for young readers of an iconic figure in both Tejano and American popular music. Whether you are new to her music or already a fan, you'll find much to appreciate and learn about this Texas legend.

J 782.421

She Leads: The Elephant Matriarch by June Smalls, illustrated by Yumi Shimokawara (Workman Publishing, 2020) Quietly powerful, this book resonates with love for elephants and with respect and admiration for the strong bonds of families and female power. Exquisite illustrations combined with two levels of text bring the touching deep bonds within pachydermal societies to life.

J 599

Unseen Worlds: Real-Life Microscopic Creatures Hiding All Around Us by Hélène Rajak and Damien Laverdunt (What on Earth Books, 2019) This beautifully illustrated title takes you deep into ten different microscopic worlds that are sometimes totally disgusting but always utterly fascinating. From the ocean and forest floors to the jungle of your own bed, meet the microorganisms that populate our world.

J 579 Rajcak

Wait, Rest, Pause: Dormancy in Nature by Marcie Flinchum Atkins (Millbrook, 2019) Exploring how various animals lie dormant - and the vast differences within dormancy - the dazzling photos and fun, lively text will captivate young readers and listeners. Older science-minded children will appreciate the clear definitions that delineate the various types of dormancy, as well as the recommended further reading and websites.

J 571.78 Atkins

What Do Scientists Do All Day? by Jane Wilsher, illustrated by Maggie Li (Wide Eyed Editions, 2020) There are all kinds of scientists in the world, but what do they do all day? This book will take you to 14 different spots to learn about the variety of scientists working to help us make sense of the wonderful world we live in.

J 650

****Winged Wonders: Solving the Monarch Migration Mystery*** by Meeg Pincus, illustrated by Yasmin Imamura (Sleeping Bear Press, 2020) Monarch butterflies make a long migration each year, but no one had proof until 1976. Presented in a questioning style, the book focuses on how a combination of professional and citizen scientists, teachers, and students, were able together to prove where the monarch butterflies go on their migrations.

J 595

5th–8th

****Atomic Women: The Untold Stories of the Scientists Who Helped Create the Nuclear Bomb*** by Roseanne Mintillo (Little, Brown, and Company, 2020) Historically, women have been left out of the narrative when discussing the advancements in nuclear science. Atomic Women sheds light on the group of pioneering female scientists who played a pivotal role in developing the science behind the nuclear bomb.

YA 355.825 Montillo

El Baile de Octavo y Otros Recuerdos / The Eighth-grade Dance and Other Memories by Ada de Jesus, translated by Nicolas Kanellos (Pinata Books, 2019) The Eight-Grade Dance is a bilingual coming-of-age memoir candidly through a series of short recollections. Ada De Jesus offers cultural insight into what it was like moving to the United States from Puerto Rico as a young teenager.

The Big Book of Soccer by Mundial, illustrated by Damien Weighill (Wide Eyed Solutions, 2020) If you love soccer (or football as the rest of the world calls it) this book is for you! It's got info on all your favorite players, teams, even the best kits! And if you don't like soccer, here's your chance to catch up on why it's known as "The Beautiful Game."

J 796

Caught! Nabbing History's Most Wanted by Georgia Bragg, illustrated by Kevin O'Malley (Crown Books for Young Readers, 2020) This lively collective biography of fourteen criminals has lots of visual appeal and humor and will entertain both as a read-all-at-once offering or a choose-your-favorite-scallywag quick read.

J 364.1 Bragg

How We Got to the Moon by John Rocco (Crown BYF, 2020) Everything you ever wanted to know about the first trip to the moon! Beautifully illustrated and full of diagrams and charts, this book tells the story of how it all started and came together by telling the stories of the people who worked to make this an amazing mission.

J 629.45

****Monstrous: The Lore, the Gore, and Science Behind Your Favorite Monsters*** by Carlyn Beccia (Carolrhoda Books, 2019) Eight different monsters are given their due in the pages of this colorfully illustrated title. Readers will pick it up for the creep factor but will stay for the science. Each monster is introduced with background into the folklore and culture of origin and then digs into the science behind them.

J 001.944

My Survival: A Girl on Schindler's List Rena Finder with Joshua M. Greene (Scholastic Press, 2019) Rena's memoir, written when she was 90 shares her experiences as one of the youngest of Oskar Schindler's workers. Her story of surviving the Holocaust, including Auschwitz, is very open and shares her courage, perseverance, and hope. She also shares the important impact Oskar and Emilie Schindler had on their workers all while risking their own lives.

J 92 Finder

****Nazi Saboteurs: Hitler's Secret Attack on America*** by Samantha Seiple (Scholastic Focus, 2019) In the summer of 1942, Hitler's plan to infiltrate the United States is set in motion when eight men land on the shores of New York. Their mission: bomb key American targets, bringing the US to its knees, and allowing the Germans to invade.

J 940.54 Seiple

****Plasticus Maritimus: An Invasive Species*** by Ana Pêgo and Isabel Minhós Martins, illustrated by Bernardo P. Carvalho (Greystone Kids, 2020) In this book marine biologist, Ana Pego, talks about the problems that plastic has caused in oceans and suggests ways to recycle, reuse and rethink the ways that we use plastics.

J 363.738 Pego

Playlist: *The Rebels and Revolutionaries of Sound by James Rhodes, illustrated by Martin O'Neill (Candlewick Studio, 2019) A visual feast spotlighting seven classical composers and some of their major works, this culturally current work will bring new focus, enthusiasm and humanity to musical powerhouses whose names readers have long heard of, but whose music may remain a mystery.

YA 780.922 Rhodes

Rainbow Revolutionaries: 50 LGBTQ+ People Who Made History by Sarah Prager, illustrated by Sarah Papworth (HarperCollins, 2020) This artful collective biography features brief entries of queer history-makers from around the world, including rulers, scientists, athletes, artists and more, written in very positive and accessible language. Includes timeline, glossary, and information about queer flags and symbols.

J 306.760

A Sporting Chance: How Paralympics Founder Ludwig Guttmann Saved Lives with Sports by Lori Alexander, illustrated by Allan Drummond (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020) The story of neurologist Ludwig Guttmann, who revolutionized the treatment of spinal injuries during WWII. He created athletic competitions for these men which eventually led to the modern Paralympics Games.

J 796.456

The Talk: Conversations About Race, Love & Truth Edited by Wade Hudson, Cheryl Willis Hudson (Crown Books for Young Readers, 2020) In this diverse collection of poetry, letters, comics and prose, well-respected authors talk about their own experiences with race and social injustice with honesty, grace and hope.

J 305.8 Talk

Torpedoed: The True Story of the World War II Sinking of "The Children's Ship" by Deborah Heiligman, illustrated by Lawrence Lee (Henry Holt and Company, 2019) This is the incredible story of the SS City of Benares ship that carried children out of England during the blitzkrieg. After being torpedoed by a German U Boat, the book follows the tragic and troubling story of the disaster that faced the passengers as they faced stormy seas, freezing temperatures, and, for a small few, eventual rescue.

J 940.54 Heiligman

Trending: How and Why Stuff Gets Popular by Kira Vermond, illustrated by Clayton Hanmer (Owlkids Books, 2020) *Trending* examines how and why fads spread and what makes them so contagious. It also covers manipulation and propaganda, as well as how to use fads to do some good.

J 306 Vermond