

**Narrative Nonfiction: What's the Appeal**  
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## Creating Read-alikes Using Appeal

1. After you have chosen your author there are several steps to developing a read-alike list.
  1. Determine the author's appeal characteristics:
    1. Read at least some of the author's work to get a sense of the style and other characteristics
    2. Read reviews of the author's works, looking for descriptions that tie into the four main appeal factors (e.g. "leisurely style," "fast-paced and action-filled," "lush language," etc.)
    3. Look in reviews for other authors mentioned as similar in style
    4. Check the readers' advisory tools that you have available, both print and online (see the bibliography for a good core collection)
    5. Use the Internet for ideas
      - (1) Amazon.com's "people who bought X also bought Y" listings can be a good place to generate ideas for read-alikes
      - (2) A google.com search using the phrase "if you like" and an author's name will pull up a variety of read-alike lists that other people have created. Sometimes these are useful, sometimes not
  2. As you are reading these reviews and thinking about appeal factors, be considering other authors you know who have similar appeal factors
  3. Don't try to match all the appeal characteristics for every author, select one or two that strongly suggest that these two authors may appeal to the same reader
  4. Be willing to go outside the genre of the author you are working on, Louis L'Amour's Westerns might appeal to those readers who like the lone hero aspect of John Grisham's legal thrillers
  5. In your list, be sure to articulate what appeal factors led you to suggest author X as a read-alike for author Y, don't just give a long list of other authors, annotations or notes make the list more usable

## Marketing Readers' Advisory Services

- Don't treat readers' advisory questions as secondary (no cringing)
- Signage – does your library mention reading in its signage at the information/reference desk
- Turn reference queries (“Can I get on the list for this book?”) into readers' advisory queries
- Seek out readers in the stacks to offer assistance
- Hand sell your readers' advisory tools – reading lists, RA books and databases, services you offer, etc.
- Keep the tools accessible to readers
- Keep your reading lists available both in print and online
- Use the library newsletter to promote readers' advisory services and programs
- Put reading lists out in the stacks where they are near the appropriate books
- Use displays to circulate materials that readers otherwise might not know you have (mix fiction and nonfiction items together on displays)
- Develop quick readalike lists for materials with high hold lists so staff can give them to readers when they place them on the holds list
- Consider offering form-based readers' advisory service

## Why do nonfiction readers' advisory

- Attract new readers to use your RA services (especially male readers)
- Anywhere from one third to one half of the circulation at most public libraries is NF materials. We should not be ignoring the reading needs of this segment of the community of readers.
- Use NF readers' advisory to move parts of the collection that otherwise might not be as likely to circulate.
- NF readers are as important to the library as fiction readers.
- People read nonfiction for pleasure.
- Nonfiction has genres just like fiction does.
- Historically, readers' advisory services were primarily nonfiction-based (the ladder of reading concept).
- Everything that we know about fiction readers' advisory can be applied to nonfiction RA work
- Many readers do not make a distinction between fiction and nonfiction reading.
- Our goal should be ultimately to be readers' advisors, not fiction or nonfiction readers' advisors. The reading interests of the entire community of readers should be our focus.

## Narrative Nonfiction Appeal Factors

The following list of appeal factors for some of the various subgenres of narrative nonfiction was developed by members of the RUSA CODES Readers' Advisory Committee and the PLA Readers' Advisory Committee in conjunction with participants in the program *Taking the Guess Work Out of Nonfiction Readers' Advisory*, held at ALA Annual Conference, June 26, 2005, Chicago IL. Participants in developing this resource were: RUSA CODES RA Committee -- Barry Trott (Chair), Martha Bayley, Shelley Ekeroth, Joanna Hazelden, Jon Kadus, Megan McArdle, Joyce Saricks, Jackie Sasaki, Andrew Smith, Sharron Smith, Patrick Wall; PLA RA Committee -- Rosalind Reisner, Kaite Mediatore Stover, Cathy Jo Yarmoski.

These appeal factors are intended to give librarians beginning to work with readers of narrative nonfiction some guidance in selecting titles and understanding reader interests. By understanding what draws readers to a particular book or genre – fiction or nonfiction – the readers' advisor can make better suggestions about what other titles or authors that reader might enjoy. The same appeal elements that librarians use when working with fiction readers – frame, pacing, storyline, and character – can be applied to working with readers of narrative nonfiction. The goal of readers' advisory for readers of nonfiction is the same as that for fiction readers, to match the reader with a narrative that affirms and validates their own story.

We hope that these initial attempts to define some of the appeal of narrative nonfiction writing will be useful to our readers' advisory colleagues as they work with their reading community.

### BIOGRAPHIES

- **Characters:** The primary appeal of biography comes from its real connection to the human experience. Readers want to know about the challenges and ethical dilemmas faced by the subject of the biography, and how that person grew and changed over time.
- **Pace:** Biographies are often big, densely written works, filled with the details of a person's life. Readers usually do not rush through these books, and expect to enjoy a biography at a more leisurely pace.
- **Frame (Setting):** People who read biographies often enjoy learning as much about the times in which the subject lived, as about the details of their life. In this respect, biographies can also be viewed as historical nonfiction.

### COOKING

- Presents unique and unusual recipes, offering the opportunity to learn a new skill
- Captures the experience of a satisfying pastime – cooking
- Well presented information can inspire confidence to experiment
- Increases readers knowledge of the subject

### ESSAYS

- They're short. Readers can dip into them, reading an essay or two at bedtime or on a commuter train.
- Like short stories they can be used as an introduction to an author's style or to a topic. A reader can sample essays to discover topics or authors to pursue further. Teens might enjoy these more than books on a subject.
- Collections of essays offer variety. They include a wide range of genres and subjects.
- Collections of essays display a diversity of tone, topic, style, and mood. They might be personal or explore a subject. Some are thoughtful, others humorous, some nostalgic.

- Collections might feature the work of one author on different topics; they might offer many authors' views on a single topic; or they may feature many authors writing on a range of subjects.
- Essay collections are the best place to start exploring nonfiction writers and topics. Reading or perusing essay collections increases our familiarity with the important nonfiction writers—all of whom have written essays at some point—and thus our comfort level.

## **HUMOR**

- PACING can make or break a humor title.
- CHARACTERS can be a BIG draw (especially if they ARE Characters!)
- BACKGROUND (can appeal to our sense of self - common background issues)
- Sometimes a LOCAL APPEAL is a draw for a certain author.
- Also much humor seems centered on DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES.
- The good Humorist takes you "where your mind SHOULD NOT go"!
- It can be a STRESS RELIEVER, especially CHILDLIKE HUMOR and IRREVERANCE.

## **IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE**

- loss of home (exile)
- loss of language,
- loss of culture
- the difficult situation that led to leaving home (plot)
- arrival in another country is disorienting, disheartening, frightening, and leaves the person feeling like an outsider
- the importance of ambition, luck, hard work, help of relatives, education
- encountering prejudice
- generational conflict—the younger generation wants to assimilate; tension between keeping culture, values, mores, and assimilating
- what it means to become an American
- search for identity (often these are coming of age novels)
- importance of storytelling in the immigrant community, providing a connection back to the culture of origin

## **MEMOIR**

- Anyone with a story can write one, doesn't have to be famous.
- Unlike biography it can be a fragment of a life or experience;
- Easier to absorb like sub-genre essays.
- More about feelings than fact
- Very "Character based"

## **POLITICS**

- Tone—Look for the type of tone the author is employing. Is it insightful or incendiary? Is it reasonable or incoherent?
- Pacing—Examine the text of the book. Is it dense with drawn out explanations for arguments or analysis? Are there footnotes or endnotes? Are the supporting materials pages meant to be read in conjunction the text or is it just a list of foot/endnotes? Are the chapters short with bullet points? Is there much explanation or clarification of the author's opinions/theories?
- Plot/Story Line—Is the topic thought provoking, challenging, balanced? Is it one-sided or biased (this is not necessarily a poor quality; some readers may want their own beliefs explained and thus affirmed).

- Characters—How are people treated in a political nonfiction book? Are they portrayed fairly, with examinations of flaws and virtues? Are they cast in a poor light or a saintly glow?
- It may be challenging to determine what a reader's preferences are in relation to political nonfiction. No one wants to get into a political debate at the Readers' Advisor desk when both parties want the same thing—a good book to read.
- Diplomacy is needed when querying the reader about preferences. Consider asking "Do you want to explore your current political opinions or explore opposing beliefs?" or "Do you want to explore a particular political issue? From which viewpoint would you like to explore it?"
- Political nonfiction requests are a prime opportunity to give a reader more than one book and encouragement to form or reform opinions.
- Political books seem to be cyclical with one point of view more prevalent than others at times.

## SCIENCE

- Different from the theory writing done by people like Brian Greene – explain the concepts along with the formulation of the idea, its trials by various means, the personalities (and personality clashes) behind the concept, and how it has influenced science in the meantime. Theory writing can be good, but focusing too much on the theory can keep the focus of the book narrow.
- Can help make the huge and hugely complex world of science more human, more in scale with readers' daily lives.
- Frame: the historical and scientific circumstances surrounding the concept, person, event; how was it influenced, what was it's reception, how has it influenced subsequent science and policy.
- Characterization: fully developed characters, usually from personal writings, official records, newspaper accounts. Views, perhaps, of domestic life, friendships, rivalries, teachers and students.
- Story: relates the formulation and testing of the idea – often active, with periods that recount times of contemplation or setbacks.
- Tone: can vary widely, from humorous to serious. Regardless, a sense of factuality, not opinion, is at its base.
- Style/Language: most often going to be somewhat elevated, informative.
- Pacing: again, varies with topic, but successful narrative nonfiction will always draw its readers back in.
- Detailed examination of unusual subject that contributes to 'mainstream' discussion.
- Conveys a sense of wonder.

## SPIRITUALITY

- Change or transformation – readers look for a story that reflects some enlightenment
- The struggle to believe
- Elements of memoir, especially in the transformative nature of the story
- How-to manual for personal growth or personal enlightenment
- Outsider versus insider appeal – does the reader want a book about Looking at or Looking from
- Often poetic language is an appeal in spiritual writing

## SPORTS

- Nostalgia (such as readers can remember parents or grandparents taking them to a sports event or watching together on television)
- Living vicariously through sports biographies (someone commented how you still see children and adults wearing Michael Jordan t-shirts and jerseys all over the world)
- Sports biographies reflect the historical, social, and cultural record of the time period. Someone cited Joe Morgan's biography (*Joe Morgan: a Life in Baseball* by Joe Morgan and David Falkner) as containing vivid pictures of racism and segregation in the 1960's. Someone else noted that

the many Pete Rose biographies would presumably cover both baseball and gambling and reflect changing trends in ethics or morality.

- Readers like gaining insider knowledge of a world (professional or amateur sports) that many people know very little about.
- Sports books contain characters that readers can both love and hate. They often feature characters with generally strong personalities – many are entertaining, engaging, and likeable, but the opposite can also be true, such as demanding or self-centered subjects.
- There can be geographical appeal, as readers may be more interested in sports teams or individuals close to where they live.
- Recognition of the concept of “sports as life” – that is, the books are often about more than just “sport” and can reflect life’s lessons
- Are often written by prizewinning authors and/or sports journalists, therefore the quality of writing is equal to that of good fiction
- Tie-ins to fiction and historical fiction, such as W. P. Kinsella’s *Shoeless Joe* or Troy Soos’s baseball mysteries like *Murder at Ebbets Field*, etc.
- Can also include titles examining the economy or business aspect of sport (someone suggested *Lords of the Realm: the Real History of Baseball* by John Helyar) or even “how to” titles or something as specialized and beautifully illustrated as *Glove Affairs: the Romance, History, and Tradition of the Baseball Glove* by Noah Liberman

## TRUE CRIME

- Many at the table thought that True Crime appeals to mystery readers, as often these books will follow a very similar pattern as a thriller or police procedural.
- There is a crime, and the efforts to solve the crime and bring the perpetrator to justice, which offers readers a sense of closure. This seemed important, especially as the crimes described are often disturbing.
- Ending the True Crime book with a criminal being brought to justice seems to be a necessary reassurance to readers.
- We discussed that the wide variety of True Crime books can have different appeals. *Devil in the White City* was our example book, and the historical detail could appeal to readers of history and historical fiction.
- Many stated that one of the biggest appeals was the kind of vicarious thrill you get from reading something scary from the safety of your own world.
- Many people who read True Crime, especially of the Ann Rule serial killer variety, often like a similar scary edge to their fiction. Serial killer fiction such as James Patterson or even horror seemed a likely appeal.
- Some True Crime books were described as fast-paced and quick reads (Ann Rule), but we also discussed more leisurely, atmospheric examples like *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.

## TRAVEL

- Humor
- Literary quality - language, writing style
- Cultural study - the insider's knowledge and details
- Extreme adventure/quest - vicarious experiences for the armchair traveler
- Character driver - internal meditation/journey that parallel the external one

- Genre bending - easily combined with subjects such as farming, horticulture, adventure, cooking, memoirs/biography, history, geography, exploration, and sports
- Unexpected discoveries - new insights and information

## **TRUE ADVENTURE**

- Many of the stories address the theme of man battling against nature, and succeeding against all odds in surviving
- Some involve a search for treasure, whether it's actual treasure or not
- They allow vicarious participation in adventures one could never undertake personally
- The success of the protagonist in reaching his goals acts as an inspiration to readers to follow their own dreams – and validates one's personal ambitions
- Readers often get involved with the characters and come to care about what happens to them in the end
- The working class experience is often addressed – another point of identification for readers
- Learn about new topics – the background details of the story are very important, and can lead a reader to further pursuit of a new subject
- There's a lot of crossover into other genres, such as sports, disasters
- These stories appeal to a reader looking for something that reads like a novel but is actually a true story

## **Sure Bet Narrative Nonfiction Suggestions**

Compiled by the members of the RUSA/CODES Readers' Advisory Committee and members of the PLA Readers' Advisory Committee for *Taking the Guess Work Out of Nonfiction Readers' Advisory* ALA Annual Conference, June 26, 2005, Chicago IL

### **BIOGRAPHIES**

*Benjamin Franklin: A Life*, Walter Isaacson (074325807X)

A colorful, witty biography, this book covers the full range of Franklin's life – from his days as a runaway printer to his triumphs as a statesman. Readers interested in American history will appreciate this account of a Founding Father, whose brilliance as a scientist, inventor, diplomat, and writer still resonates in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*John James Audubon: The Making of an American*, Richard Rhodes (0375414126)

A comprehensive picture of the famed ornithologist/artist as well as a portrait of the United States in its formative years. Using passages from Audubon's own journals and letters, the author chronicles every aspect of the artist's life, from the commonplace to the daring. Readers looking for books about natural history as well as tales of adventure will enjoy this biography.

*Kate Remembered*, A.O. Scott (0425199096)

An intimate portrait of a treasured icon, this biography provides an inside glimpse into the world of Katharine Hepburn – beloved movie star and role model for the modern American woman. The author, who was a close friend of the actress, captures her passions, personality and wit. Fans of cinema and theater history will find this book enlightening.

*The Mapmaker's Wife: A True Tale of Love, Murder and Survival in the Amazon*, Robert Whitaker (0385337205)

A sweeping tale of adventure that will make readers appreciate modern-day comforts. The author recreates the life of Isabel Grameson, an 18<sup>th</sup> century Peruvian woman who journeyed 3000 miles down the Amazon River to join her French husband, whom she had not seen for 20 years. Readers who enjoy stories of exploration will be amazed by this tale of perseverance

*Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*, Stephen Greenblatt (0393050572)

A provocative, controversial reconstruction of the life of William Shakespeare, this biography demonstrates the concept of "new historicism", an approach to literary criticism that looks at art in its historical context. Readers looking for additional information about Shakespeare will find the author's interpretation of events illuminating.

### **COOKING**

*In Julia's Kitchen with Master Chefs*, Julia Child (0679760059)

As part of a PBS series, renowned chefs gathered to cook in Child's kitchen. The author then takes their sometimes complicated recipes and menus and translates them for the everyday cook. The beloved chef's voice springs off the page as she shares her joy and love of cooking and techniques for cooking success. This title received the James Beard Foundation KitchenAid Book Awards in 1996.

*The Pat Conroy Cookbook: Recipes of My Life*, Pat Conroy (0385514131)

In this cookbook by one of America's great storytellers, the author uses stories and recipes to convey his love and passion for food, cooking, people, and places in a way that draws the reader from author's home dinner table to wonderful restaurants around the world. Readers of Conroy's novels will enjoy this glimpse into the author's life and kitchen.

*Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World*, Mark Kurlansky (0140275010)

This engaging history presents a highly readable 1,000 year historical perspective on one of the North Atlantic's dwindling resources. Through history, illustrations, and recipes the reader comes to understand the importance and impact of the cod fishing industry. Kurlansky received a number of awards including Library Journal Best Books of the Year (1997).

*Larousse Gastronomique: The World's Greatest Culinary Encyclopedia*, with the assistance of the Gastronomic Committee President Jöel Robuchon (0609609718)

Originally published in 1938 and continually updated ever since, this work is considered to be the definitive food and cooking guide, appealing to laymen and professionals, as well as those who just love to read about food. At more than 1350 pages, the volume looks at the ever changing world of food, history of cuisine, trends and customs; with over 3,000 recipes from past and present it is comprehensive yet highly readable guide to the world of food.

*The Tummy Trilogy*, Calvin Trillin (0374524173)

In this collection of essays, which originally appeared in the *New Yorker*, Trillin humorously examines the food and restaurants of everyday life, taking the reader on a journey to discover the secret delights of Buffalo chicken wing, New York bagels, or Boston pizza. In 1994, Trillin was inducted into the James Beard House Cookbook Hall of Fame.

## ESSAYS

*The Best American Essays, 2004*, edited by Louis Menard (0618357092)

Prominent guest editors select and introduce the best essays published, but not necessarily written, during the previous year. This mix of old and new writing, familiar and emerging authors covers a range of subjects and styles and offers a concise introduction to the field of nonfiction writing.

*In Fact: The Best of Creative Nonfiction*, edited by Lee Gutkind with introduction by Annie Dillard (0393326659)

The best from 10 years of Gutkind's groundbreaking journal *Creative Nonfiction*, established to encourage nonfiction writers to embrace the dramatic freedoms offered by fiction and apply them to their nonfiction writing. This collection includes essays from well-known novelists and nonfiction writers alike, from Francine Prose to John McPhee, on a variety of fascinating topics.

*The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings*, Amy Tan (0399150749)

Tan's fans and readers new to her writing will find much to appreciate in these essays which run the gamut from her amusing description of one of the consequences of literary fame – confronting one's life and work in *Cliff's Notes* – to details of her relationship with her mother and her ongoing battle with Lyme disease. Tan writes with wit and sensitivity, offering insights into her personal and professional lives and interests.

*Ex Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader*, Anne Fadiman (0374148600)

Fadiman's entertaining collection of essays about language and literature is sure to please bibliophiles everywhere. From the joys of book collecting to the perils of joining book collections after marriage, Fadiman shares her passion and favorites in these witty essays.

*Outside 25: Classic Tales and New Voices from the Frontiers of America*, edited by Hal Espen (0393325032)

From the editors of *Outside* magazine comes this collection of adventure essays from a host of familiar writers including Sebastian Junger, Jon Krakauer, and Susan Orlean. In accounts that take place around the world and present the endangered as well as the dangers of extreme adventure, these essays from the foremost adventure magazine take readers there. For the armchair traveler as well as the true adventurer.

## HISTORY

*Beyond the River: The Untold Story of the Heroes of the Underground Railroad*, Ann Hagedorn (0684870665)

An exciting story of one Ohio town's fight to help fleeing slaves on their way to freedom. From the Kentucky side of the river there are midnight raids, assassinations and an almost unbelievable trial, with the defendant kidnapped and dragged across from Ohio to Kentucky to answer charges made by slaveholders.

*The Last Duel: A True Story of Crime, Scandal and Trial by Combat in Medieval France*, Eric Jager (0767914163)

Fans of true crime will be drawn to this story of a 14<sup>th</sup> century French crusader, his wife, and the neighboring noble. A story that begins with envy, court intrigue, love, and betrayal ends with a rape accusation and the last trial by combat sanctioned by the King of France.

*Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*, Ross King (0142003697)

Sixteenth century Italy comes alive in this tale that brings together a warrior pope and one of history's most famous artists. There are cameo appearances by Machiavelli, Donatello, and Leonardo in this detailed history of one of the world's treasures. Fans of art history, church history, and the Renaissance will love this one.

*Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves*, Adam Hochschild (0618104690)

Twelve men meeting in a printer's shop in London started a movement that brought about an end to one of the most profitable businesses of its time. It's a story that is both horrifying in its detail and inspirational in showing how a small group of people can make a big difference.

*Lusitania: An Epic Tragedy*, Diana Preston (0425189988)

One of the events that brought America into World War One held within it many stories. Preston does a wonderful job of telling the tale of the torpedoing of the liner, the deaths of over 1,200 passengers, and some of the secrets that were suppressed during and after the war.

## **HUMOR**

*Dave Barry's Greatest Hits*, Dave Barry (0345419995)

A Greatest Hits package to die for, in which the inimitable, Pulitzer-winning humorist applies himself to taxes, toilets, airbags, baseball, beer commercials, and numerous other American artifacts.

*I'm A Stranger Here Myself*, Bill Bryson (076790382X)

Classic Bryson musings about returning to America with British wife and children after an absence of nearly 20 years only to discover the land he left is not the land he recognizes upon his prodigal return.

*Molly Ivins Can't Say That, Can She?* Molly Ivins (0679741836)

Outspoken Texas journalist Ivins is never afraid to tackle whatever and whoever piques her ire. Known for her irreverent, sometimes brash commentary, she tends to "tell it like it is", like it or not!

*The CEO of the Sofa*, P.J. O'Rourke (080213940X)

This bestselling author and humorist takes a look at life from his living room sofa, facing a three-year old who wants a cell phone, neighbors who "smell" like Democrats, and other topics from the home front.

*Barrel Fever*, David Sedaris (0316779423)

This collection of short stories best illustrates Sedaris' quirky yet subtle observations on everyday life. A seemingly normal situation can turn bizarre in split second or with a twist of a word. Particularly humorous are his adventures as a Christmas Elf at Macy's!

## IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

*Border Passage: From Cairo to America—A Woman's Journey*, Leila Ahmed (0140291830)

Religion, politics, and the forces of history in the Middle East all affected Ahmed's search for identity and intellectual vocation. Ahmed came of age in a wealthy Cairo family who lost their elegant, traditional lifestyle as the political winds changed in 1950s Egypt. A perceptive and distinctly feminist coming of age story that lyrically evokes the multicultural experience.

*The Rice Room: Growing Up Chinese-American: From Number Two Son to Rock'n'Roll*, Ben Fong-Torres (0452274125)

Fong-Torres fondly remembers the "rice room" in his father's restaurant and the process of his assimilation into American popular culture of the 1950s and 1960s. This is a bittersweet tale of the distance traveled by the children of immigrants in their efforts to follow their parents' exhortations to work hard and succeed. Readers who remember—or would like a window into—growing up San Francisco in the turbulent and heady years of the late 1960s and early 1970s will enjoy this memoir from one of the original editors of *Rolling Stone*.

*Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language*, Eva Hoffman (0140127739)

Hoffman left her beloved Warsaw at the sensitive age of 13 and moved with her parents to Canada, where the transition to another language and culture seemed like insurmountable obstacles to a budding writer. Insight and thoughtfulness pervade this account of a young woman caught between two cultures.

*The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, Maxine Hong Kingston (0072435194)

This classic account of the Chinese immigrant experience from the woman's point of view is told in an unconventional style, weaving dreamlike recollections of Chinese myths and legends with realistic accounts of first generation immigrants in the U.S. Readers who enjoy magical realism and shifting points of view will find that Kingston's technique enhances their understanding of the dislocating experience of the Chinese immigrants.

*When I Was Puerto Rican*, Esmeralda Santiago (0679756760)

Santiago, the oldest of 7 siblings, grew up in a tin shack in a rural Puerto Rican barrio and moved to Brooklyn as a young teenager. The struggles and contrasts of life in the two places fill this affecting coming of age memoir. Santiago's evocative writing will please readers who enjoy character-driven, descriptive fiction, and stories about the triumph of the human spirit against dispiriting odds.

## MEMOIR

*Dry: a Memoir*, Augusten Burroughs (0312423799)

This picks up where his first memoir, *Running With Scissors*, left off, with the same self-deprecating humor. It describes his life in New York, with a successful job in advertising that obscures how chaotic his personal life has become. Laced with darkly comic episodes of trying to mask his downward spiral and his eventual forced rehab stint, the sharp humor and unflinching look at the seamier side of life will appeal to fans of David Sedaris.

*Finding Fish: A Memoir*, Antwone Quenton Fisher (0060527927)

After his birth to an incarcerated mother, the author survived a brutal upbringing in foster care, only to become homeless. After joining the Navy, Fisher began a journey back to a stable and caring family, eventually becoming a successful screenwriter. This book appeals to those who enjoy "overcoming the odds" stories with happy endings; it was also made into a film with Denzel Washington and Derek Luke.

*A Girl Named Zippy : Growing Up Small in Mooreland, Indiana*, Haven Kimmel (0767915054)

Kimmel's book is actually a series of warm short stories about childhood memories of small town life, and funny vignettes covering the landscape of childhood. It will appeal to readers who long for times when things seemed safer and simpler, or to those who just enjoy a gentle read. This was chosen by the Today Show Book Club, so there is also a reading guide.

*The Glass Castle*, Jeanette Walls (0743247531)

The writer narrates her family's life with her nomadic, unconventional parents—getting used to surviving in marginal neighborhoods, scrounging for food, being homeless, and yet having the strength of family ties despite all the ups and downs. This book will appeal to people who like stories about difficult and unusual childhoods, and coming of age stories.

*Journey From the Land of No: A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran*, Roya Hakakian (1400046114)

The author catches the moment in Iran's history when there was still hope after the fall of a corrupt government. As a Jewish minority she enjoyed some freedoms Islamic girls didn't, but it became dangerous for her family as the ruling powers turned despotic and repressive, eventually forcing their emigration. The book will appeal to those who want to understand Islamic societies, especially Middle Eastern ones.

## **POLITICS**

*Profiles in Courage*, John F. Kennedy (0060530626)

A classic among political readings, this collection demonstrates the courage and power of conviction nine American statesmen have had in the House of Representatives and Senate by choosing to stand for the greater good despite popular opinion and pressure from colleagues. Readers will appreciate the timeless quality of the writing and the message.

*All the President's Men*, Carl Bernstein & Bob Woodward (0671894412)

The book that changed the way America looks at politics and politicians, this fast paced expose will appeal to readers who enjoy a good detective story or intriguing thriller. Characters are complex, mysterious, and persistent. The plot twists and turns, and readers will be surprised even if they do know how the story ends.

*Madam President: Women Blazing the Leadership Trail*, Eleanor Clift & Tom Brazaitis (041593432X)

A fascinating premise that will come to fruition sooner than many people believe. The authors trace the development of women in American politics from the first female presidential candidate to the women who could be contenders in just a few short years. Readers looking for new ways to think about politics with engaging and savvy characters will enjoy this analysis.

*Reason: Why Liberals Will Win the Battle for America*, Robert B. Reich (1400076609)

Employing a quieter, more civil tone than some of the more vituperative political commentaries, Reich explores the current liability of liberalism and how its principles can be defended and revived. For readers looking for a serious and accessible political assessment coupled with knowledgeable ideas.

*What's the Matter With Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*, Thomas Frank (0805073396)

With wit and insight, Frank shows how the Republican party was able to take hold of the Heartland. He dissects this unusual relationship between Wall Streeter and farmer and poses other disturbing questions as well. Readers who appreciate a well-reasoned challenge to their currently held beliefs will enjoy this humorous political examination from a native Kansan.

## **POP CULTURE**

*Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet Out of Idaho*, Jon Katz (0767906993)

After writing a column entitled "The Rise of the Geeks" for the HotWired website, Katz was inundated with email. One message stood out for him – an email from a nineteen year-old boy named Jesse Dailey in Caldwell, Idaho. Jesse and his roommate Eric are computer geniuses working dead-end jobs, living for the time they spend on the Internet. Katz encourages them to move to Chicago where there are more opportunities for them to use their skills. The story is both compelling and inspirational and will appeal to anyone who has ever felt like an outsider.

*Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs: A Low Culture Manifesto*, Chuck Klosterman (0743236017)

An amusing series of essays from a self-proclaimed Gen X slacker, Klosterman covers everything from MTV's *Real World* to Jeffrey Dahmer to breakfast cereal to porn and religion. He blames John Cusack and *When Harry Met Sally* for the fact that our love lives will never quite measure up to all the images we're shown on TV and in the movies. Each chapter is a separate essay on some aspect of popular culture. Unless you slept through the eighties and nineties, you will find something to relate to, but this book will probably hold the most appeal for Generation X.

*Positively Fifth Street: Murderers, Cheetahs, and Binion's World Series of Poker*, James McManus (0312422520)

Sent to Vegas by *Harper's* to cover the 2000 World Series of Poker, McManus also relates, in alternate chapters, the trial for the murder of Ted Binion. In a daring move, McManus puts his entire advance on the line, gets a spot in the tournament, and against all odds places fifth. A riveting, terrifying, and entertaining first person account of the ultimate game of no-limit Texas hold 'em combined with the sensational trial of a stripper and her boyfriend. Poker players and true crime aficionados will be fascinated by this page turner. Poker terminology guide is included.

*Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, Eric Schlosser (0060938455)

A passionate, well-written look at the McDondaldization of American Culture, *Fast Food Nation* presents both the history and practices of the fast food industry. Schlosser shows that not much has changed in meatpacking since Upton Sinclair wrote *The Jungle* almost 100 years ago, and that fast food's legacy is low-paying jobs held by unskilled workers with no opportunity for a career path. Readers will find this alternately fascinating and horrifying.

## SCIENCE

*The Seashell on the Mountaintop*, Alan Cutler (0525947086)

The earliest geological laws were written by Nicolau Steno, a seventeenth-century anatomist who recognized fossilized shark teeth and seashells for what they were – evidence of ancient and repeated inundations of the earth by the sea. Cutler recaptures the biography of a little-known but immensely important scientist who excelled in both anatomy and geology, and whose service as a Catholic bishop led to his beatification.

*The Man Who Found Time*, James Repcheck (073820692X)

A member of the Scottish Enlightenment group that included Adam Smith and James Watt, James Hutton was a chemist and gentleman farmer whose personal observations of erosion on his land led him to assert the immense tracks of time required for geological change. Repcheck lays out a clear narrative and ties in threads about Biblical chronology (the limiting factor in establishing the age of the earth), Scottish independence, and the impact of good writing on the dissemination of ideas.

*Waiting for Aphrodite*, Sue Hubbell (0395837030)

In a series of graceful chapters that lead the reader through the increasingly complex world of invertebrates, Hubbell makes observations on the unknowable history and diversity of the "other" kingdom. Easily readable, yet filled with profound insights and interesting facts about the lives of organisms easily bypassed or dismissed, Hubbell conveys an insatiable curiosity backed up by enviable research skills and wonderful storytelling ability.

*The Botany of Desire*, Michael Pollan (0375501290)

The fortuitously-named Pollan translates his love of gardening into a love of exploring the ramifications of human cultivation of plants. The anecdotes he selects to convey his story give a great sense of readability, while building the intellectual case for his central thesis. From the intoxicating cider 'Johnny Appleseed' brought to the American frontier to the monoculture of perfect French fry potatoes, Pollan explores the coevolution of man and plant, and questions which one is in control.

*Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*, Mary Roach (0393050939)

Mary Roach traces in detail a highly unusual subject, and one that may not suit all readers - the 'afterlife' of the human cadaver. She turns what could have been a grisly or coldly scientific retelling into something deeply human, blending dark humor, fact, and a respectful treatment of the dead. She also shares the education that cadavers provide to doctors, scientists, and engineers, and along the way teaches the reader about the glory and efficiency of the human machine.

## **SPIRITUALITY**

*The Cloister Walk*, Kathleen Norris (1573225843)

Story is at the center of Norris's appeal. There are multiple stories being told in *Cloister Walk* – Norris's year in a Benedictine monastery, her life before entering the monastery, the story of the Benedictines, and the story of the church year. Norris explores these layers of story in episodes that move from history to reporting to memoir. She explores the role of religion in her life and writing, but also looks at how monastic life fits into the modern world. A simple but elegant style carries the reader through the book.

*The Spontaneous Fulfillment of Desire*, Deepak Chopra (1400054311)

Chopra's books are intended as guides on the spiritual journey. Like much of his other work, *The Spontaneous Fulfillment of Desire* outlines steps to spiritual fulfillment in a practical, easy to read fashion. In particular, this work explores the relationship between scientific theory and mysticism. Chopra's work also appeals to those readers looking for concrete steps to take in the process of spiritual development. He includes numerous sets of exercises to expand the readers' spiritual horizons.

*The History of God*, Karen Armstrong (0345384563)

Some readers come to religion and spirituality looking for the historical perspective, and Armstrong's book is an excellent choice for these readers. Armstrong takes a scholarly, but readable approach to the development of the three major monotheistic religions – Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. This book will appeal to those readers who enjoy interesting stories, as Armstrong travels down some of the back roads of the early religions and looks at how these experiments influenced later thinking.

*Expecting Adam*, Martha Beck (0425174484)

Many readers come to spiritual writing to read about transformative experiences, both good and bad. Beck's book will appeal to readers looking for an exploration of how events force people to reexamine their lives, and of the spiritual development that can arise out of this reexamination. While a graduate student, Beck discovered that her second pregnancy would result in a child with Down's Syndrome. Her acceptance of this news, and the changes it makes in her life and her family's life are told in a clear easily read style. Beck deftly blends humor, spirituality, and sadness.

*Tuesdays With Morrie*, Mitch Albom (076790592X)

Albom's book is a sure bet for a variety of readers. The book tells the story of the final months in the life of a former professor of Albom's with whom he has reconnected. Along the way, Albom brings in the story of his earlier relationship with Morrie Schwartz and of Albom's own life in the intervening years. These visits with Morrie revolve around discussions of how to live, and how to die. Never saccharin, Albom captures the wisdom of his mentor in compelling prose, and offers that wisdom to the reader.

## SPORTS

*The Boys of Winter: The Untold Story of a Coach, a Dream, and the 1980 U.S. Olympic Hockey Team*, Wayne Coffey (0786274484)

Winning the Olympic gold medal in hockey was a Cinderella story in 1980, and it remains one today in this detailed and ultimately thrilling account of the men who made it happen. Highly improbable yet true, the story follows the game period by period, focusing on both American and Russian participants and including social and Cold War history of the time. It will appeal to readers who enjoy getting to know a diverse group of both winners and losers, and sports fans wishing to re-live or learn more about the event often described as the twentieth century's greatest sports moment.

*Eight Men Out: The Black Sox and the 1919 World Series*, Eliot Asinof (0805065377)

Eight underpaid Chicago White Sox players took bribes to fix the 1919 World Series, resulting in a scandal that captivated America and a story that will appeal to sports, history, and even suspense readers. The characters – baseball players and owners, underworld gamblers, journalists, attorneys, and fans – take center stage in this narrative reconstructing the story as it unfolded. First published in 1963, this baseball classic stands the test of time by painting a vivid picture not only of a sport but also American history and popular culture.

*Paper Lion*, George Plimpton (1592280153)

An example of the "participatory journalism" pioneered by Plimpton, this memorable tale follows the 36-year old "first-string" writer/editor as he becomes a "last-string" quarterback - he joined the Detroit Lions in the early 1960's for a month of preseason training camp. Considered by many one of the best sports books of all time, *Paper Lion* tackles professional football and athletes with much humor and insight and will appeal to anyone who has ever dreamed of being a sports star (or of hanging out with them!).

*A Season on the Brink: A Year with Bob Knight and the Indiana Hoosiers*, John Feinstein (0671688774)

Many words have been used to describe Coach Knight, among them brilliant, difficult, passionate, and complex, and this book will appeal to readers looking for a sports story encompassing all of those emotions and more. The extremely thorough insider's look at college basketball (and one of the best-selling sports books in history) follows the Indiana University basketball team's 1985-86 season.

*Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*, Geoffrey C. Ward (0375415327)

A very detailed, dramatic, and well-researched story of the first African American heavyweight boxing champion, this book explores the controversial life of a man of uncompromising individuality; it will appeal to serious biography and history readers, as well as boxing fans. Use of newspaper accounts takes readers back to the social context of the times, as Johnson's world in and out of boxing comes alive within the framework of early twentieth-century racism.

## TRAVEL

*The Heart of the World: A Journey to the Last Secret Place*, Ian Baker (1594200270)

Buddhist scholar and mountain climber Ian Baker, and his National Geographic-sponsored team, trekked into the heart of the previously-unexplored Tsangpo Gorge in search of a mythical waterfall. Writing about an extreme adventure into one of the world's most inaccessible and wild regions to find the legendary grail of both western explorers and Tibetan seekers, Baker blends suspenseful, entertaining accounts of overcoming danger with introspective, sophisticated writing.

*Hold the Enlightenment*, Tim Cahill (0375713298)

One of America's funniest adventure writers, and a contributor to *National Geographic Adventure*, Cahill returns with his most entertaining collection of essays, taking readers to sites as far-flung as Saharan salt mines, the Congolese jungle, and Hanford, Washington, home of the largest toxic-waste dump in the Western hemisphere. Masterly storytelling and outrageously sly humor make this a sure bet read.

*Wrong About Japan: A Father's Journey with His Son*, Peter Carey (1400043115)

The Booker Prize novelist takes an intriguing and uplifting odyssey to Tokyo with a shy young companion who has an obsessive fascination with manga and anime. Carey arrives in Japan with a head full of clichés about what constitutes the real Japan and discovers during the course of his stay that he is wrong about most things. With a novelist's sensibility and literary dexterity, Carey describes this extraordinary journey and the relationship between father and son. An engaging hybrid of memoir and travel book, this title will appeal to fans of Sophia Coppola's film *Lost in Translation*.

*The World: Travels, 1950-2000*, Jan Morris (0393326489)

*The World* collects a veteran travel writer's eyewitness accounts of historical moments in the latter half of the twentieth century – events such as the first successful ascent of Mount Everest, the Eichmann trial, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the relinquishment of Hong Kong. Morris' keen observations made this one of Booklist's Top 10 Literary Travel Books in 2004.

*Angry Wind: Through Muslim Black Africa by Truck, Bus, Boat and Camel*, Jeffrey Taylor (061833467X)

The *Atlantic Monthly's* Gen X correspondent made a difficult 4000-mile trek through the anti-western Sahel, from Chad to Senegal, and from Ethiopia to the Atlantic Ocean. Though writing about an area beset by ethnic rebellion, sectarian violence, and banditry, he still manages to tell an amusing tale filled with entertaining anecdotes. Taylor set out to experience the geography of a region united by religion and savaged by the Harmattan, a dusty wind, but in the end gained a better understanding of the conflict between the West and the Islamic world.

*Seasons in Basilicata: A Year in a Southern Italian Hill Village*, David Yeadon (006053110X)

Influenced by Carlo Levi's account of his time under house arrest by Mussolini (*Christ Stopped at Eboli*), Yeadon decided to spend a year in the land Levi described. *Seasons* traces the author's cultural and culinary exploration of mountainous Basilicata, the incredible beauty of rural Italy and the pagan practices of his neighbors. From the hill village of Aliano, Yeadon makes in-depth observations, infusing the pages with warmth and personality and enlivening his text with drawings and sketches.

## **TRUE ADVENTURE**

*The Perfect Storm: A True Story of Men Against the Sea*, Sebastian Junger (0060977477)

The story of the doomed fishing boat *Andrea Gail* and its crew as they are caught up in what was considered "the storm of the century".

*Dove*, Robin Lee Graham (0060920475)

A classic tale of a twenty-year-old's solo journey around the world in a sailboat.

*Shadow Divers: The True Adventure of Two Americans Who Risked Everything to Solve One of the Last Mysteries of World War II*, Robert Kurson (0375508589)

After discovering a WW II German U-boat off the coast of New Jersey, two scuba divers work to uncover its secrets.

*Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mount Everest Disaster*, Jon Krakauer (0887532454)

Krakauer's account of his 1996 climb of Mount Everest, and the blizzard which left a number of climbers dead.

*Alive: The Story of the Andes Survivors*, Piers Paul Read (038000321X)

When their plane crashed in the Andes, a team of young Uruguayan rugby players endured a harrowing ten-week battle to survive.

*No Horizon Is So Far: Two Women and Their Extraordinary Journey Across Antarctica*, Ann Bancroft & Liv Arneson (0143034243)

Two former schoolteachers set off to cross Antarctica on foot, surviving blizzards and perilous conditions while electronically documenting their adventure for millions of students.

## **TRUE CRIME**

*In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote (0375507906)

In this landmark of creative nonfiction and forerunner of the “new journalism” movement, Capote tells of the murder of a Western Kansas farm family, following the crime from its conception to its aftermath. Capote called this work a nonfiction novel, and its lasting power results from the author’s ability to combine the appeal of true crime with that of serious literature.

*Devil in the White City*, Erik Larson (0375725601)

Larson’s book is set against the backdrop of the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago, and tells parallel stories of the fair’s architect, Daniel Burnham, and H.H. Holmes, a serial killer who poses as a doctor during the fair to quietly commit mass murder. The rich historical detail of the preparation for the fair alternates with grisly descriptions of Holmes’ crimes in a way that will keep both fans of history and a good mystery enthralled.

*Black Mass: The True Story of an Unholy Alliance Between the FBI and the Irish Mob*, Dick Lehr & Gerald O’Neill (0060959258)

Two Boston Globe reporters describe the complex relationship between criminal informants and the law enforcement agencies they assist, and how that relationship can be subverted. When an Irish mobster from “Southie” turned informant and helped the FBI prosecute the Italian mafia, the FBI agent who grew up with him turned a blind eye to his criminal activities. As an example of investigative journalism, this book will appeal to fans of police procedurals and tales of organized crime.

*Under the Banner of Heaven*, Jon Krakauer (1400032806)

When two brothers killed the wife and child of their younger brother, the crime made news because the killers claimed that they were acting on orders from God. Krakauer uses this case as a way to explore not only the particulars of the crime, but also the brand of fundamental Mormonism that the killers espoused. The author’s in-depth look into the world of Mormonism adds greatly to the book’s appeal.

*Green River, Running Red*, Ann Rule (078627266X)

The acknowledged queen of true crime rules for a reason, and this is the book she has been researching for years: the story of the notorious Green River killer in Seattle, WA. By delving into the lives of the victims, their grieving relatives, the investigators and the killer, Rule explores one of the most horrific serial killers in American history. Fans of crime fiction will appreciate Rule’s pacing and attention to detail.

## A Bibliography of Readers' Advisory Sources

### Training and background:

Saricks, Joyce G. *Readers' Advisory Service in the Public Library*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Chicago: American Library Association, 2005.

Shearer, Kenneth D. and Robert Burgin, eds. *The Readers' Advisors' Companion*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 2001.

### Nonfiction:

Burgin, Robert, ed. *Nonfiction Readers' Advisory*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2004.

Cords, Sarah Statz. *The Real Story: A Guide to Nonfiction Reading Interests*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2006.

### Web resources for Nonfiction Readers' Advisory

- BiblioTravel ([www.bibliotravel.com](http://www.bibliotravel.com))
- BookBrowse ([www.bookbrowse.com](http://www.bookbrowse.com)) reviews of current titles including nonfiction
- Lukas Prize Project Winners ([www.jrn.columbia.edu/events/lukas/winners](http://www.jrn.columbia.edu/events/lukas/winners)) prizes for best American nonfiction writing
- Readers Club nonfiction reviews ([www.readersclub.org/category.asp?cat=2](http://www.readersclub.org/category.asp?cat=2)) reviews of nonfiction titles by subject
- Reading Group Guides ([www.readinggroupguides.com/findaguide/index.asp](http://www.readinggroupguides.com/findaguide/index.asp)) excellent collection of nonfiction discussion guides
- Waterboro PL nonfiction lists ([www.waterborolibrary.org/bklistnonf.htm](http://www.waterborolibrary.org/bklistnonf.htm)) links to lists of narrative nonfiction titles

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