

Booktalk by Judy Freeman

Nonfiction: 71 top books of the century

Nonfiction is a crucial genre to emphasize in the classroom, but teachers don't always have time to research the best. Here, I've selected a number of nonfiction books from the past century that have had an impact on my teaching, broken new ground, taught me something extraordinary, wowed readers, and are unforgettable books to introduce to children. Share them, read them aloud, and leave them around the classroom for your students to pore over.

Animals

Urban Roosts:

Where Birds Nest in the City

Bash, Barbara. Little, Brown, 1992. (Gr. 3–6)

To the Top of the World: Adventures with Arctic Wolves

Brandenburg, Jim. Walker, 1995. (Gr. 4–8)

Red-Eyed Tree Frog

Cowley, Joy. Photos by Nic Bishop.

Scholastic, 1999. (Gr. PreK–2)

Those Amazing Ants

Brennan Demuth, Patricia. Illus. by S. D. Schindler. Simon & Schuster, 1994. (Gr. K–2)

It's an Armadillo!

Lavies, Bianca. Dutton, 1989. (Gr. K–4)

Owls in the Family

Mowat, Farley. Illus. by Robert Frankenberg. Little, Brown, 1961. (Gr. 3–6)

Koko's Kitten

Patterson, Francine. Photos by Ronald H. Cohn. Scholastic, 1987. (Gr. 2–6)

Giants of the Land, Sea and Air, Past and Present

Peters, David. Illus. by the author. Knopf, 1986. (Gr. K–6)

Animal Fact/Animal Fable

Simon, Seymour. Illus. by Diane de Groat. Crown, 1979. (Gr. K–3)

Hummingbirds: Jewels in the Sky

Tyrrell, Esther Quesada. Photos by Robert A. Tyrrell. Crown, 1992. (Gr. 3–6)

Art

Linnea in Monet's Garden

Bjork, Christina. Illus. by Lena Anderson. R&S Books, 1987. (Gr. 3–6)

Talking with Artists

Cummings, Pat, ed. Illus. and photos. Bradbury, 1992. (Gr. 3–7)

Family Pictures / Cuadros de Familia

Lomas Garza, Carmen. Illus. by the author. Children's Book Press, 1990. (Gr. 1–4)

Pyramid

Macaulay, David. Illus. by the author. Houghton Mifflin, 1975. (Gr. 4–8)

Biographies

Lou Gehrig: The Luckiest Man

Adler, David A. Illus. by Terry Widener. Harcourt, 1997. (Gr. 2–5)

William Shakespeare and the Globe

Aliki. HarperCollins, 1999. (Gr. 2–8)

Flight: The Journey of

Charles Lindbergh

Burleigh, Robert. Illus. by Mike Wimmer. Philomel, 1991. (Gr. 2–6)

Eleanor

Cooney, Barbara. Illus. by the author. Viking, 1996. (Gr. 1–4)

Boy: Tales of Childhood

Dahl, Roald. Farrar, 1984. (Gr. 4–8)

Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl

Frank, Anne. Doubleday, 1967. (Gr. 7+)

Lincoln: A Photobiography

Freedman, Russell. Clarion, 1989. (Gr. 5–8)

The Wright Brothers: How They Invented the Airplane

Freedman, Russell. Holiday House, 1991. (Gr. 5–8)

And Then What Happened, Paul Revere?

Fritz, Jean. Illus. by Margot Tomes. Penguin, 1996. (Gr. 2–6)

Teammates

Golenbock, Peter. Illus. by Paul Bacon. Harcourt, 1990. (Gr. 2–6)

Chuck Close Up Close

Greenberg, Jan & Jordan, Sandra. DK Ink, 1998. (Gr. 4–8)

My Great Aunt Arizona

Houston, Gloria. HarperCollins, 1992.

(Gr. K–6)

Lives of Extraordinary Women: Rulers, Rebels (and What the Neighbors Thought)

Krull, Kathleen. Illus. by Kathryn Hewitt. Harcourt, 2000. (Gr. 4–8)

Lives of the Presidents: Fame, Shame and What the Neighbors Thought

Krull, Kathleen. Illus. by Kathryn Hewitt. Harcourt, 1998. (Gr. 4–6)

Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the World's Fastest Woman
Krull, Kathleen. Illus. by David Diaz. Harcourt, 1996. (Gr. 2–5)

Lost Star: The Story of Amelia Earhart
Lauber, Patricia. Scholastic, 1988. (Gr. 4–7)

Author: A True Story
Lester, Helen. Illus. by the author. Houghton, 1997. (Gr. K–4)

Snowflake Bentley
Martin, Jacqueline Briggs. Illus. by Mary Azarian. Houghton Mifflin, 1998. (Gr. 1–6)

Leonardo Da Vinci
Stanley, Diane. Morrow, 1996. (Gr. 4–8)

Math and Science

Bet You Can't: Science Impossibilities to Fool You
Cobb, Vicki. Illus. by Stella Ormai. Lothrop, 1980. (Gr. 3–6)

It's Perfectly Normal: A Book About Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health
Harris, Robie H. Illus. by Michael Emberley. Candlewick, 1994. (Gr. 5–8)

Hottest Coldest Highest Deepest
Jenkins, Steve. Illus. by the author. Houghton Mifflin, 1998. (Gr. K–3)

Measuring Penny
Leedy, Loreen. Illus. by the author. Henry Holt, 1998. (Gr. 1–4)

The Way Things Work
Macaulay, David. Illus. by the author. Houghton Mifflin, 1988. (Gr. 6+)

How to Dig a Hole to the Other Side of the World
McNulty, Faith. Illus. by Marc Simont. HarperCollins, 1990. (Gr. 1–4)

How Much Is a Million?
Schwartz, David M. Illus. by Steven Kellogg. Lothrop, 1985. (Gr. K–4)

Volcanoes
Simon, Seymour. Illus. with photos. Morrow, 1988. (Gr. 2–6)

Bridges Are to Cross
Sturges, Philemon. Illus. by Giles Laroche. Putnam, 1998. (Gr. 1–4)

A Drop of Water
Wick, Walter. Photos by the author. Scholastic, 1997. (Gr. 3–6)

Social Studies

The Children We Remember

Abels, Chana Byers. Illus. with photos. Greenwillow, 1986. (Gr. 3–8)

Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World: The Extraordinary True Story of Shackleton and the Endurance

Armstrong, Jennifer. Illus. with photos. Crown, 1998. (Gr. 6–12)

The Incredible Journey of Lewis and Clark

Blumberg, Rhoda. Lothrop, 1987. (Gr. 4–8)

Through My Eyes

Bridges, Ruby. Illus. with photos. Scholastic, 1999. (Gr. 4–8)

Children of the Wild West

Freedman, Russell. Clarion, 1983. (Gr. 3–8)

Buffalo Hunt

Freedman, Russell. Holiday House, 1988 (Gr. 5–8)

Turn of the Century

Jackson, Ellen. Illus. by Jan Davey Ellis. Charlesbridge, 1998. (Gr. 2–5)

Inca & Spaniard: Pizarro and the Quest of Peru

Marrin, Albert. Atheneum, 1989. (Gr. 7–12)

Smoke and Ashes: The Story of the Holocaust

Rogasky, Barbara. Holiday House, 1988.
(Gr. 6–12)

People

Spier, Peter. Illus. by the author. Doubleday, 1980. (Gr. K–8)

So You Want to Be President?

St. George, Judith. Illus. by David Small. Philomel, 2000. (Gr. 3–6)

Language, Songs and Poetry

Eats

Adoff, Arnold. Illus. by Susan Russo. Lothrop, 1979. (Gr. 1–6)

Say Hola to Spanish

Elya, Susan Middleton. Illus. by Loretta Lopez. Lee & Low, 1996. (Gr. 1–6)

Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices

Fleischman, Paul. Illus. by Eric Bellows. Harper, 1988. (Gr. 3–8)

Insectlopedia

Florian, Douglas. Harcourt, 1998. (Gr. 2–6)

Splish Splash

Graham, Joan Bransfield. Illus. by Steve Scott. Ticknor & Fields, 1994. (Gr. K–4)

This Land Is Your Land
Guthrie, Woody. Little, Brown, 1998.
(Gr. K–6)

Knock at a Star: A Child's Introduction to Poetry
Kennedy, X. J. and Kennedy, Dorothy.
Illus. by Karen Ann Weinhaus. Little, Brown, 1982. (Gr. 4–7)

Gonna Sing My Head Off!: American Folk Songs for Children
Krull, Kathleen. Illus. by Allen Gars. Knopf, 1992. (Gr. K–5)

The Random House Book of Mother Goose
Lobel, Arnold. Illus. by the author. Random House, 1986. (Gr. PreK–1)

Now We Are Six
Milne, A. A. Illus. by the author. Dutton, 1927. (Gr. PreK–3)

When We Were Very Young
Milne, A. A. Illus. by the author. Dutton, 1924. (Gr. PreK–3)

And the Green Grass Grew All Around: Folk Poetry from Everyone
Schwartz, Alvin. Illus. by Sue Truesdale. HarperCollins, 1992. (Gr. 2–6)

How Now, Brown Cow?
Schertle, Alice. Illus. by Amanda Schaffer. Brown Deer/Harcourt, 1994. (Gr. 1–6)

Tomfoolery: Trickery and Foolery with Words
Schwartz, Alvin. Illus. by Glen Rounds. Lippincott, 1973. (Gr. 2–6)

Where the Sidewalk Ends
Silverstein, Shel. HarperCollins, 1974.
(Gr. 1–6)

The Fireside Book of Fun and Game Songs
Winn, Marie, comp. Illus. by Whitney Darrow, Jr. Simon & Schuster, 1974.
(Gr. K–6)

Rocket in My Pocket: The Rhymes and Chants of Young Americans
Withers, Carl. Illus. by Susanne Suba. Henry Holt, 1948. (Gr. K–6)

Judy Freeman is a children's literature consultant and the author of More Books Kids Will Sit Still For (Bowker/Greenwood, 1995: 1-800-225-5800; www.greenwood.com); and Hi Ho Librario: Songs, Chants, and Stories to Keep Kids Humming, a package that includes a book and tape cassette (Rock Hill Press, 1997: 1-888-ROCKHILL).