

Non-fiction readers' advisory

- In an essay, Chuck Klosterman referred to “the rise of the real” – talking about reality tv, reality reading, etc.
- Traditionally, we have viewed our role as readers; advisors to include mostly fiction recommendations. If we did recommend non-fiction, it was strictly by subject headings. Our booklists were fiction only, or, if they were non-fiction, they were called bibliographies and offered nothing in the way of annotations or evaluative reviews; God forbid we should mix the two and have a booklist with both fiction and non-fiction recommendations on it! Popular professional opinion tended towards thinking that there was no fertile ground for RA in non-fiction – patrons could simply search using the catalogue's headings, and find what they wanted, and the concept of appeal factors being applied to non-fiction was unthinkable.
- Then there was a shift! Now we're talking about abolishing Dewey in some public library non-fiction collection, books have been published, and NoveList is including non-fiction in NoveList Plus! More recent developments that include non-fiction within RA include the development of reading maps, and OPLA's Readers' Advisory Core Competencies including non-fiction in its definitions of collection knowledge (defined as an “understanding of, and familiarity with, the depth and breadth of materials and resources in the branch and/or system, including material in all formats and media, both fiction and non-fiction”).
- We began to realize that subject headings weren't always adequate: they did nothing to characterize non-fiction using appeal factors or account for the power of narrative, they were often so specific as to be utterly useless in making connections to other texts, they sometimes didn't link titles in a non-fiction series, and they sometimes didn't list non-fiction award-winning books.
- We also began to realize that authors aren't as prolific in non-fiction, and they often write about completely different topics, making for bad read-alikes!
- We also began to understand that non-fiction reading, much more than fiction, lends itself to dipping in and out of texts; as librarians, it can sometimes be difficult for us to embrace the idea that not everything needs to be read cover to cover.
- There are various barriers to nonfic RA service: our own reading limitations, our collections and the way they are arranged, and even our patrons (they know to come to us for subject search and fiction recommendations, but not necessarily recreational nonfic reading suggestions).
- We began to differentiate between mediums or types (graphica, essay, humour, letters, memoir) and genres.
- Neal adds that “the additional appeal element of learning/experiencing needs to be considered” for non-fiction RA because some non-fiction is written in an uniquely accessible way for a reader who is not an expert in the subject area. She also includes the importance of tone and detail in non-fiction readers' advisory recommendations.
- Appeal: There are overlaps with fiction appeal factors but many appeal factors for nonfic are unique. Kenneth Shearer (in Burgin) makes the point that nonfic and fic exist on a continuum, a “textual terrain” – are all nonfic bks completely true + factual? Many advance a point of view, or offer a comforting perspective. Traditionally, appeal factors: Story line, Frame, Pacing and Character. Shearer adds: advice, belief, human behaviour, theory, humour, emotional appeal, invocation of curiosity. Wyatt adds detail, learning/experiencing, language, setting and tone. Here's the stumbling point: we often recommend nonfic based on subject, not appeal.
- Why read nonfic? Vickie Novak (in Burgin) lists some reasons: to indulge curiosity, excitement of real-life stories, adds meaning to events, personal/emotional connection with subject, to be inspired, to make history come to life, to learn something, to be transported, to live vicariously!
- NovelistPlus identifies 15 non-fiction genres: Adventure Writing, Arts and Entertainment, Biography and Memoir, Business Writing, Current Events and Politics, Food Writing,

- History, Humor, Nature Writing, Science Writing, Social Issues, Spirituality and Religion, Sports and Competition, Travel Writing, and True Crime.
- Sarah Statz Cords identifies, in *The Real Story: A Guide to Nonfiction Reading Interests*, four non-fiction genres (true adventure, travel, true crime and environmental issues), two non-fiction subject interests (science and math, and history), three categories of life stories (biography, memoir and autobiography, and relationships) and two stylistic genres (investigative writing and “making sense...” books – making sense of ourselves and each other, of culture and society, of our surroundings and the natural world, and of our histories).
 - Suggestions to market nonfic: nonfic stickers like fic stickers, shelf talkers, displays, website, reading guides, reading maps, whole coll RA!
 - Some book-buying stats from Nielsen BookScan:
 - Over the past five years, sales of adult nonfiction were up overall 11.1% but declined in 2008. In adult nonfiction, travel was down 4.6%, biography and autobiography rose 34.1% and business was up 19.4%.
 - In biography, over the past five years, sales of personal memoirs rose 567%, travelers were up 516%, cultural heritage rose 175% and political bios were up 56%.
 - In the business category during the last five years, personal finance rose 122%, economics and general business was up 351%, finance jumped 103% and investments and securities were up 117%.
 - In the self-help category during the last five years, spiritual was up 224%, mood disorders rose 108%, general personal growth was up 183% and motivational and inspirational titles rose 51%.
 - Sales of adult fiction were up 8.9% during the past five years. In that category, general fiction was up 23.3%, graphic novels rose 52.7%, mystery and detective titles were down 12.7%, literary fiction rose 86.1%, historical fiction was up 24.1% and political fiction was up 157.7%.
 - In the first quarter this year, adult nonfiction sales were down 8%. Within that category, cooking was up 4.8%, humor rose 8.9%, travel fell 18.7%, business and economics were down 10.1% and biography/autobiography rose 7.5%.
 - Fiction has been "pretty much flat" during the first quarter. General fiction was down 3.4%, romance has risen 1.5%, mystery/detective was down 19.8%.
 - Children's book sales were up almost 9% in the quarter. ("Stephenie Meyer is still driving children's.") Children's fiction was up 10.4%, and children's nonfiction was up 2.5%.

Further notes:

- Provide examples of reading lists from various libraries that include both fic and nonfic titles
- Be prepared to defend our choice of categories for non-fic. Sarah defends her in *The Real Story*, saying she left out religion and politics because they are easy to find via subject headings and she left out cookbooks and self help because no awards for genre so difficult to compile lists, etc.

Recommended background reading about non-fiction readers' advisory

Baker, Sharon L. and Karen L. Wallace. *The Responsive Public Library: How to Develop and Market a Winning Collection*. Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 2002 (Rev. ed.)

Burgin, Robert (ed.) *Nonfiction readers' advisory*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2004.

Sarah Statz Cords. *The Real Story: A Guide to Nonfiction Reading Interests*

Wyatt, Neal. "Working with nonfiction enriches readers' advisory and offers your readers more." LJ Series "Redefining RA": Exploring Nonfiction. *Library Journal*, 2/15/2007. <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6413459.html>

Narrative non-fiction – Genre: Travel

Background Information

The long history of travel writing dates right back to the 5th century BC with the writer Herodotus covering his travels in ancient Greece and the Mediterranean lands. Since then we have had Marco Polo, James Boswell, Charles Darwin, among others. More recent narrators of journeys include such names and classics as Jack Kerouac (*On the Road*, 1957), Paul Theroux (*The Old Patagonian Express*, 1979), Bruce Chatwin (*The Songlines*, 1987), Peter Mayle (*A Year in Provence*, 1989) or Bill Bryson (*A Walk in the Woods*, 1998).

Recent travel narratives are notably subjective, according to Jan Morris, one of the genre's acknowledged masters. The trend is toward memoir-like style and travel writers tend to use "exaggeration, drama, and hyperbole" with a "selective use and organization of facts" to add to their narrative appeal and quickness of their pacing. As Joshua Hammer of the New York Times remarked recently about travel writers - "just about everybody has an ulterior motive". These are factors to remember when recommending these works to readers of non-fiction who may be used to more stringently researched works. The key appeal features of the genre are in the setting and the skill of the author in describing unfamiliar or exotic locations. Subgenres as listed in Sarah Cords' *The Real Story: A Guide to Nonfiction Reading Interests* include: Armchair Travel, Adventures, The Expatriate Life, Journey Narratives, Literary Travel, and Travel Humor.

Five notable Canadian titles:

Never shoot a Stampede Queen: a rookie reporter in the Cariboo by Mark Leiren-Young; Surrey, B.C.: Heritage House Pub., c2008

This is the winner of the 2009 Stephen Leacock Medal. Just as the subtitle says it is about the adventures of a young man from the big city in the B.C. interior. It is thoughtful and compassionate as well as funny.

What the Psychic Told the Pilgrim: A Midlife Misadventure on Spain's Camino de Santiago de Compostela by Jane Christmas; Vancouver: Greystone Book, 2007. The author decides to celebrate her 50th birthday with a hike along the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. This 800 kilometre pilgrimage turns out to be more than she bargains for as it includes being accompanied by a group of women. This is one among many books on the popular pilgrimage route, including a recent translation done by Shelley Frisch of a German bestseller by Hape Kerkeling *I'm off then: Losing and Finding Myself on the Camino de Santiago* (Free Press, 2009) which covers the route with a humorous slant.

Fantasy in Florence: Leaving Home and Loving it by Rod McQueen; Toronto: McArthur, 2007. In September 2004, Rod McQueen, Canadian journalist and business author, and his wife Sandy moved to Florence for nine months. While Sandy was pursuing her art studies with the Ontario College of Art and Design in Italy, her *Scrittore Canadese* husband was able to explore the city and its environs. Insight into the art, artisans, food and culture is only the beginning as one gets an intimate view of the Italian way of life.

Beauty Tips from Moose Jaw: Travels in Search of Canada by Will Ferguson; Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2004.

The 2002 Winner of the Leacock Medal for Humor has written a fun and insightful tribute to the "outposts and enclaves of Canada". He has another book coming out in October - *Beyond Belfast* about his 560 mile walk across Northern Ireland

Solo: Writers on Pilgrimage, edited by Katherine Govier; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2004.
Fifteen wonderful writers went on pilgrimages to places that beckoned them. This collection of essays allows us to share in the personal journeys of Margaret Atwood, Douglas Coupland and others.

Upcoming:

Burmese Lessons by Karen Connelly; Toronto: Random House, 2009.
This is a memoir of her experiences in Burma in the late 1990's. She fell in love with the country and then with a man who died in the struggle for political change. Her first book was another travel memoir, *Touch the Dragon: A Thai Journal*.

Non-Fiction Sports

Background Information

Sports non-fiction is unique and marketable and particularly appealing to many readers because it reflects our cultural experience so well. Both old and new titles reflect current sports trends such as skateboarding and extreme sports as well as the nostalgic focus on past sports legends such as Guy Lafleur and George Chuvalo.

Today, sports and games are more popular than ever, and readers do not need to be able to play a sport themselves to feel the pull of a well-written book.

Five Core Canadian Titles

Searching for Bobby Orr by Stephen Brunt; A.A. Knopf Canada, 2006.
Stephen Brunt is a well-known Canadian sports journalist and has been the lead sport columnist for *The Globe & Mail* since 1989. He has authored several books, with this particular title being a #1 Canadian best seller. This book looks not only at the brilliant but tragically short career of Bobby Orr, but also at the historical development of Canadian hockey and the NHL, and the significant changes at the time of Orr's career.

Tropic of Hockey by Dave Bidini; McClelland & Stewart, 2001.
Dave Bidini is a Canadian musician and writer and has published several books about music and sports. Bidini wrote and hosted the Gemini Award-winning adaptation of *Tropic of Hockey*, called "Hockey Nomad", which was first broadcast on CBC Television in January 2003. This travelogue is a cultural expose, of people and how they play the game. The adventure includes stops in China, Singapore, the Philippines, a rink on the eighth floor of a mall in Hong Kong, the desert city of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, and Romania, where hockey remains a war between rival ethnic groups. The result is a delightful read that both armchair travelers and aficionados will enjoy.

100 Greatest Canadian Sports Moments by James Bisson; Wiley, 2009.
Journalist James Bisson ranks the list of the top 100, assisted by a distinguished panel of eighteen sports media personalities from the four largest newspapers in the country and three all-sports television networks. It's a thorough collection of the most celebrated events the country has ever seen with a compilation of testimonials, animated discussion and healthy debates.

Inside the Olympics by Dick Pound; Wiley, 2006.
Canadian lawyer and former Olympian, Pound really reveals the inner workings of the games, from the big news now on doping, to the judging scandals, and to the contentious process of selecting the host city. A fascinating read for anyone interested in the Olympics.

Inside Out: Straight Talk from a Gay Jock, by Mark Tewksbury; Wiley, 2006.

As a three-time Olympic medalist, Mark Tewksbury met all the challenges a high performance athlete faces — discipline, sacrifice, intense pressure, and post-Olympic transition. But while he earned medals and even the cover of Time Magazine, Tewksbury also had to overcome the difficult personal challenge of coming out as a gay man — first to his family and confidants, and ultimately under the spotlight of the public eye. Tewksbury uses his own story — public and private — to offer a fascinating insight into Olympic politics, media, fame, gay life, and sports leadership. Despite the "Gay Jock" subtitle, the book is accessible and is a thoughtful, moving narrative that inspires as much as it entertains.

Narrative non-fiction - Genre: History

Background information

History is just that, a story of what happened. The writing of history is as varied as any other genre out there in Fiction and Non Fiction; they can be as expansive as the history of the world to as narrow as the history of salt. There can be heroes, villains, romance, grand adventures, explorations of life and lifestyles. From the fall of the Roman Empire to the examination of everyday life of nuns in PEI during the 1830s every aspect of life, and culture; History is limited by information and the imagination to explore new avenues and ideas, anything is possible.

There is also the added benefit of reading a sometimes interesting series of events, with heroes, villains and locations that have a personal connection to the reader. There is also the added appeal of being able to visit the sites talked about in the narrative. There can be nothing greater and more humbling than reading the accounts of the D-Day landings then walking the beaches of Normandy. History can provide great insight into how today's world has evolved.

Five Canadian titles

More Than an Island: A history of the Toronto Island by Sally Gibson
Irwin Publishing Toronto Canada, 1984

What started off as a PhD dissertation has turned into a love affair with an aspect of local geography; a group of islands that have played a great part in the evolution of York, Toronto, and the world. This extensive survey of the land and inhabitants is entertaining as it is informative.

Tip of the Spear: An Intimate Account of 1 Canadian Parachute Battalion, 1942-1945, A Pictorial History By Lieutenant-Colonel Bernd Horn and Michel Wyczynski

The huge success of Band of Brothers has prompted a renewed interest in Canada's own airborne troops. Though not a HBO miniseries this pictorial history gives a full account of the Battalion in all stages of the War.

Holding Juno: Canada's Heroic Defence of the D-Day Beaches: June 7-12, 1944. By Mark Zuehlke.

Douglas & McIntyre 2005.

Using interviews diaries and military records Mark Zuehlke recreates the battles skirmishes, from the view of the common man on the ground. The personal narratives provide the reader with what it was really like to those 5 days in June, which changed the course of History of Europe, Canada, and yes I will say it the world.

The Battle of the St. Lawrence: The Second World War in Canada, by Nathan M. Greenfield
HarperCollins Ltd, 2004

Little is known about the battle between the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and German U-boats for control of the Canada's waterways. These waterways supplied men, machines and food stuffs to a beleaguered Britain as well as local shipping and ferry transportation.

In all 300 men women and children lost their lives during this battle. This book follows the efforts of the RCN to battle the hidden threat in Canada's greatest waterway.
Battle of the Atlantic. By Marc Milner
Tempus 2003

World War II was only hours old when the longest campaign of the Second World War and the most complex submarine war in history, began with the sinking of the unarmed passenger liner *Athenia* by the German submarine U30. This book is a great example of an examination of the War from the top down, looking at the efforts of ships, officers and Politicians in their fight to get badly needed supplies and men to Britain. This book is an armchair admiral's dream, pictures, maps and diagrams fill its pages. Along with the narratives of battles and near misses there is discussion of the technology and strategies on both sides of the war.

Narrative non-fiction – Genre: Adventure

Background Information

Perhaps you wish you had the guts to push against your normal boundaries and go on an adventure or maybe you just like being amazed at the "crazy" things some people do; on the other hand, you may be a reader who enjoys the introspection that often is a part of exploring something new or of taking on new challenges. These are just some of the reasons readers select tales of true adventures.

Adventure stories can include travel, physical activity, history (of a place or of the adventurer), and memoir. Recent titles often also incorporate environmental themes. While the action frequently centers on the adventure, these books are often character driven. Classic titles such as *Into Thin Air* (Krakauer), *Alive: the story of the Andes Survivors* (Read) and those by authors Thor Heyerdahl and Ernest Shackleton make compelling reading. Canadians are not strangers to the adventure bug. Whether they recount excursions into our own wilderness or trips in foreign lands, their adventurous spirit comes through in their books. The titles below represent a cross section of the some of the more recent titles in the Canadian non-fiction adventure genre.

Five Canadian titles:

Beyond the sky and the Earth: a journey into Bhutan by Jamie Zeppa; Toronto: Doubleday Canada, c1999.

Detouring from her plan to complete a PhD in English, 23 year old Jamie Zeppa, who had rarely been outside of Canada, travelled to Bhutan to take a position as a volunteer teacher working with the World University Service of Canada. Her frank, honest, and sometimes, naïve, tale is one of discovery as she moves from finding this Third World country unbearable to becoming totally at home in Bhutan, appreciating both the physical landscape and the people.

Fatal Passage: the untold story of John Rae, the Arctic Adventurer who discovered the fate of Franklin by Ken McGoogan. Toronto: HarperCollins, 2001.

Who makes your list of Canadian explorers? Probably not John Rae, a Scot whose surveying of uncharted territory in the Canadian Arctic led him to solve the mystery surrounding the Franklin Expedition. What he found was not acceptable to British society and prominent individuals, such as Lady Franklin and Charles Dickens worked to discredit him, contributing, in part, to our lack of knowledge about this accomplished adventurer. You will also want to read award winning author, McGoogan's other adventure titles, including *Race to the Polar Sea: the heroic adventures and romantic obsessions of Elisha Kent Kane*.

The Riverbones: stumbling after Eden in the jungles of Suriname by Andrew Westoll; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, c2008.

When Andrew Westoll returned to Suriname, a country where he had studied monkeys in the jungle five years earlier, his intention was to have more experiences in the rainforests that have made this land one of Earth's "last Eden's". Far more than an ecological tale, this adventure includes mystery, murder and the search for an elusive electric blue frog, in an environment where colonial exploitation, economic uncertainty and politics collide. An engrossing read that introduces the complexities of an ecologically rich, but economically challenged, country that is trying to chart a course for its future.

Rowboat in a hurricane: my amazing journey across a changing Atlantic by Julie Angus; Vancouver: Greystone Books, c2008.

Imagine being the first woman in the world to row across the Atlantic from mainland to mainland. What's the first thing you have to do to prepare for such a journey – learn to row! Enjoy Julie Angus' re-telling of this incredible adventure, embarked upon with her then fiancé, now husband, Colin. Follow this up by reading Colin Angus' own tale of this journey, that formed only one part of his adventure circumnavigating the globe by human power, in his book, *Beyond the horizon: the great race to finish the first human-powered circumnavigation of the planet*.

Starting out in the afternoon: a mid-life journey into wild land by Jill Frayne. Toronto: Random House Canada, 2002.

A "small book", part journal, part diary, part psychological self-discovery, this literate story of the author's adventures driving across Canada and kayaking in the Queen Charlotte's as she treks towards the Yukon, inspires readers to enjoy the beauty around us and to reflect on the many directions in which life can take us. Experiences with nature and escaping routine, common components of many books in this genre, lead to an evaluation of life and priorities. Not a thrill a minute style adventure book, but one where going to new places and doing new things, although sometimes challenging, lead quietly to increased self-knowledge.

Narrative non-fiction - Genre: Current affairs

Background information

Current affairs titles can come from a broad range of categories, including politics, the environment, social issues, religion and many other subject areas. Some current affairs titles take a definite stand on an issue; these types of books are often written in an essay style, and readers often enjoy reading them to re-enforce their own viewpoint and to be entertained by the tone. Some current affairs titles act as an overview of events or topics in the news; often, these are often written in a journalistic style, and readers generally enjoy reading them to learn about a certain topic. Current affairs titles need not always be new books; some older titles often become "current" again. Look at these awards' list for other excellent current affairs titles: the Writers' Trust Non-Fiction Prize, the Writers' Trust of Canada's Shaughnessy, the Cohen Prize for Political Writing, the Governor General's Literary Awards (non-fiction category), the Charles Taylor Prize for Literary Non-Fiction, the Lionel Gerber Prize for Best Book in International Affairs, the Shaughnessy Cohen Award for Political Writing, the Kiriya Prize (non-fiction category), the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the RUSA Notable Book Lists.

Five core Canadian titles

Blue covenant: the global water crisis and the coming battle for the right to water by Maude Barlow; McClelland & Stewart, 2007.

Canadian activist Barlow highlights the global water shortage and the dangers of

- considering water a commercial product. She calls for fresh water to be considered both a human right and as a public trust. A highly-detailed work rich in data.
- The Trouble with Islam Today: A Wake-up Call for Honesty and Change* by Irshad Manji; Vintage Canada, 2005.
- An open letter to the world calling for a return to *ijtihad*, which Manji defines as Islam's lost tradition of independent thinking. *Ijtihad* flowered in the Islamic golden age between 700 and 1200 AD; Manji explores the fundamentalist Islam of the modern world and the causes of the current East/West divide. She suggests remedies for a stronger, more honest and respectful world order.
- Future: tense: the coming world order* by Gwynne Dyer; M&S, 2004.
- Dyer's essay-style text takes a stand about the U.S. Iraq war and its implications for the 21st century political and social environment. Himself a veteran and a former instructor at the Canadian Forces College in Toronto, Dyer takes aim at U.S. President Bush for ending a period where the UN Charter meant something, and beginning an era in which countries can, and will, declare war on each other arbitrarily. A fascinating (and sobering) call to action.
- No logo: no space, no choice, no jobs: taking aim at the brand bullies* by Naomi Klein; Vintage Canada, 2000.
- An impassioned call to resistance from Toronto Star columnist Klein, who calls on us to be more aware of - and resist - corporate logos and all they stand for: sweatshop labour, censorship, unfair market practices, and bullying on a global scale.
- Race against time* by Stephen Lewis; Anansi, 2005.
- Lewis's heartbreaking work, part of the 2005 Massey Lectures, centres on the AIDS crisis in Africa. Lewis was the UN Secretary General's special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, and he has much to say about the utter tragedy of the AIDS crisis, and his own rage at the needless suffering. A quick read that introduces the major issues surrounding AIDS in African countries, and the inefficacies of the UN.

Five (+ one for the road!) non-Canadian titles of interest

- Banker to the poor: micro-lending and the battle against world poverty* by Muhammad Yunus with Alan Jolis; Public Affairs, c2003.
- Field notes from a catastrophe* by Elizabeth Kolbert; Bloomsbury, 2006.
- An inconvenient truth: the crisis of global warming* by Al Gore; Viking, c2007.
- The post-American world* by Fareed Zakaria; W.W. Norton & Company, c2008.
- Three cups of tea: one man's mission to promote peace-- one school at a time* by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin; Penguin Books, 2007, c2006.
- The world is flat: a brief history of the twenty-first century* by Thomas L. Friedman; Straus and Giroux, 2005.

Sources

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