

Reaching Reluctant Readers with Nonfiction

Jamie Watson and Jennifer Stencel

During our years as members of YALSA's Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers Committee, we've shared books with hundreds of teens, most of whom would describe themselves as not liking to read, or at best, sometimes liking to read. They've been from the inner city and the suburbs, in school and public libraries, in schools for students with behavioral problems, in after-school programs, and teens we've talked to at family picnics. Time and again, it is the nonfiction books that teens select first from our boxes of books; it is nonfiction that gets passed around and returned much worse for the wear; and it is nonfiction that engages a group enough to talk about issues inside the book.

Most of the teens we work with simply choose not to read, and look at us doubtfully at first, certain that we could not possibly have anything that interests them. Many of these teens are not committed library users; they are simply in the library because they have nowhere else to go, or they are using the computer, or they have to read for an assignment. Our challenge on the Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers Committee is to find the "right book for the right teen at the right time," and again, nonfiction fills the bill.

What makes nonfiction popular? Often, reluctant teen readers think reading = school, and that also equals fiction (*assigned* fiction). Nonfiction about rappers, or cars, or your zodiac sign is not likely to be assigned reading, or even encouraged. To the reluctant reader, these interest areas are likely to be their true escape, the same kind of escapism that entices an avid fiction reader.

Nonfiction also comes in easily digestible pieces—the titles that work with reluctant readers have plenty of pictures as well as demarcated sections or chapters that make it easy to browse the book without having to read it from cover to cover or even in chronological order. The subjects are obvious as well; there is no need to sell a teen on the plot of a sports biography or drawing book.

There has been great focus on getting males to read, most notably Jon Scieszka's *Guys Read*

campaign (www.guysread.com) about the need for books with a clear "guy sensibility." Guys might quickly grab fiction featuring Alex Rider (in the series by Anthony Horowitz) or Darren Shan (*Cirque du Freak* series). But girls might choose those titles as well. Much of teen fiction is still what our Quick Picks Committee members have come to call "pink books" (think *Gossip Girl*, *Princess Diaries*, *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, and the Georgia Nicolson series), and they do not cross genders. There are pink nonfiction books, too, such as those about makeup, crafts, or style. But books with strong female appeal do not dominate the nonfiction market as they do in fiction. This might make good business sense (girls read more fiction so more is published for them), but it makes finding fiction for boys more of a challenge, even with the amount of young adult titles being published today.

Nonfiction continues to be popular with a male audience. But finding the right nonfiction titles for your library collection can be a challenge of its own. Even the most popular titles are rarely reviewed by traditional library journals. Besides asking your teens for recommendations, one of the best ways to find popular nonfiction titles is by browsing, but you need to go beyond bookstores. Stores with teen clientele, such as Urban Outfitters and Hot Topic, stock books with high browsing appeal on the (excuse the pun) hottest topics. Try reading and browsing magazines such as *Teen People*, *Spin*, *Maxim*, and *Blender* to discover new nonfiction titles as well as high interest topics.

The biggest drawback to nonfiction is that it does tend to be ephemeral. Pro wrestling titles, which were all the rage five years ago, have waned in popularity considerably. Popular singers come and go as well; in our three years on the

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committee we've seen Eminem come in, go out, and come back in again!

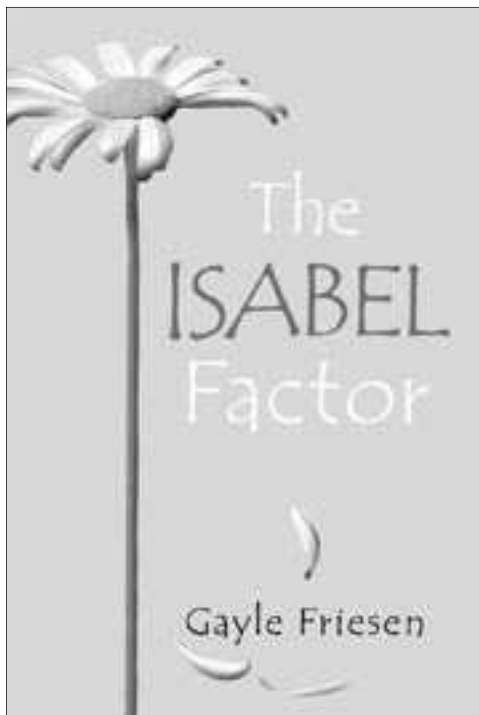
Nonfiction has to be more strenuously weeded—titles featuring 'N Sync and Lil' Bow

Wow when he was still "Lil" served their purpose admirably, but can date your entire collection quickly. If you're on a limited budget but want to incorporate some nonfiction, magazines are a great

way to acknowledge popular interests with more variety at a lower cost. Browse your local grocery stores and bookstores, or ask your teens for recommendations for the newest, hottest titles. **YALS**

Nonfiction Recommendations with Call Numbers

- 006.5 Colby, Cliff. *iPod Playlist Book*. Peachpit Press, 2004. ISBN 0-321-30469-1. \$14.99. Not sure what to fill your iPod with? Stuck for songs for your graduation party, a new romance, or the death of one? List upon lists (two hundred in fact) of musical themes can provide a starting point for users to start filling up all those megabytes of memory.
- 006.5 Robertson, Tim. *iPod and iTunes Starter Kit*. Que Publishing, 2004. ISBN 0-7897-3387-0. \$20.99. You have that pricey piece of modern technology. Now what? Covers both Mac and Windows users with simple instructions to use from the most basic purposes to all-out customization. CD with free software downloads.
- 133.0 Shaw, Maria. *Maria Shaw's Book of Love: Horoscopes, Palmistry, Numbers, Candles, Gemstones, and Colors*. Llewellyn Publ., 2005. ISBN 0-7387-0545-4. \$14.95. Practically every new-age concept is covered under one roof, or book. Although the book is text heavy, it is not daunting, and teens are enthralled with the idea of reading love lines in a palm or determining their most compatible horoscope sign.
- 133.8 Cheung, Theresa. *Psychic Power for Teens: Get What You Want*. Adams Media Corp., 2004. ISBN 1-59337-111-X. \$8.95. Even teen skeptics pick this up! Not only is the notion of reading the thoughts of a teacher enticing, but the quizzes and exercises will entertain even those without the "gift."
- 248 Vicki, Courtney. *Teen Virtue: Real Issues, Real Life*. Broadman and Holman Publishing, 2005. ISBN 0-8054-3056-3. \$14.99. Christian nonfiction gets a hip makeover in this magazine format paperback book.
- 305.235 *CosmoGirl Quiz Book: All About You*, edited by *CosmoGirl*. Hearst Books, 2004. ISBN 1-58816-381-4. \$5.95.
- 306.7 *CosmoGirl Quiz Book: Discover Your Personality*, edited by *CosmoGirl*. Hearst Publishing, 2005. ISBN 1-58816-489-6. \$5.95.
- 306.783 *CosmoGirl Quiz Book: All about Guys* edited by *CosmoGirl*. Hearst Books, 2004. ISBN 1-58816-381-4. \$5.95. All those fun magazine quizzes compiled into a series of books.
- 305.235 Larson, Dene. *2gether 4ever: Notes from a Junior High Heartthrob*. Chronicle Books, 2004. ISBN 0-8118-4303-3. \$9.95. Dene was the real heart maker and heartbreaker of this junior high. The selling feature: the author himself reproduced those torn-out binder pages filled with scribbled ink of his professed love of the day for all of us to read. By taking a peek into Dene's journal, relive the magic and pain of junior high romance.
- 306.7 Benton, Jim. *It's Happy Bunny: Love Bites*. Scholastic, 2005. ISBN 0-439-69345-4. \$7.99.
- 306.7 Benton, Jim. *It's Happy Bunny #2: Life. Get One*. Scholastic, 2005. ISBN 0-439-69346-2. \$7.99. Contrary to popular belief, not all bunnies are cute and cuddly. *Happy Bunny* is all about dishing out advice and words of wisdom, however skewed in thought. The format is similar to a picture book, thin and slim with bright, bold colors and simple—but always sarcastic—text. This little bunny even has his own product line of T-shirts.
- 306.7 Naik, Anita. *Flirtology: Over 100 Ways to Release Your Inner Flirt*. Razorbill/Penguin, 2004. ISBN 1-59514-005-0. \$5.99.
- A self-help book for the population who does not deem themselves as "natural flirts." Simple and to the point, the author really dishes out words of encouragement instead of tacky one liners.
- 391.2 Hrabi, Dale. *US Secrets of Celebrity Style: A Crash Course in Dressing like the Stars*. Wenner, 2005. ISBN 1-932958-51-7. \$19.99. Teens cannot get enough of those glossy photos of hot celebrities in hot clothes. Fantastic colored photos of who's wearing what (as well as why and how) are plastered throughout. Beyonce, Jessica Simpson, and Paris Hilton share their fashion sense.
- 629.2275 Flaherty, Mike. *American Chopper at Full Throttle*. Meredith, 2004. ISBN 0-696-22165-9. \$19.95. "Shut up and get back to work!" The Teutuls have made black leather and motor oil part of the mainstream. One of Discovery Channels most popular shows, the book features fantastic colored shots of the bikes built by the Orange County Choppers.
- 629.2275 Seate, Mike. *Choppers Heavy Metal Art*. MBI/Motorbooks, 2004. ISBN 0-7603-2053-5. \$40. Spurred by the popularity of such biker shows as *American Chopper* and *Biker Build-Off*, teens have become quite familiar with names like Indian Larry and Billy Lane. This huge coffee table book with beautiful colored photos showcases a selection of bikes built by the industry's top builders. And, yes, teens will lug this one home!
- 629.287 Paul, Edie. *How to Build the Cars of the Fast and the Furious*. Motorbooks, 2004. ISBN 0-7603-2077-2. \$19.99. The popularity of such a book is aided by *Pimp My Ride*, *Over Haulin'*, and



Gayle Friesen's latest novel is a funny and compelling look at friendships new and old, set against the sunny backdrop of summer camp.

A Junior Library Guild Selection

HCJ 1-55337-737-0 \$16.95

PB 1-55337-738-9 \$6.95

Praise for Gayle Friesen's *Losing Forever*:

"Particularly well-crafted." — *Booklist*

"Spirited dialogue." — *School Library Journal*

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other popular television shows that take needy cars and turn them into tricked out transports of style. Step-by-step

instructions with photos show how to take an ordinary car and customize it into a unique art form on wheels.

646.48 Haab, Sherri. *Hip Handbag Book: 20 Easy to Make Totes, Purses, and Bags*. Watson-Guptill, 2004. ISBN 0-8230-2263-3. \$9.95.

Jeans, fleece, socks, and even newspaper and duct tape serve a couture purpose when it comes to creating a one-of-a-kind bag. A girl can have a bag for every day of the week with a few simple craft supplies.

668.55 Wallace, Mary. *Girls Spa Book: 20 Ways to Relax and Feel Great*. Maple Tree, 2004. ISBN 1-897066-01-5. \$9.95.

A perfect craft book for young teen girls to create wonderful spa-like products at home. All the recipes require easy-to-get ingredients with simple steps to create scrumptious projects like body art paint, luscious lip gloss, and foaming face wash.

741 Nagatomo, Haruno. *Draw Your Own Manga: All the Basics*. Kodansha International, 2003. ISBN 4-7700-2951-9. \$19.95.

If there were a textbook on how to draw manga, this would be it. It goes above and beyond the typical drawing aspect, covering details like what pens (from ink to nibs) and paper to purchase, as well as offering tips on how to get published.

746.432 Wenger, Jennifer. *Teen Knitting Club: Chill Out and Knit*. Artisan, 2004. ISBN 1-57965-244-1. \$17.95.

These aren't your granny's pot-holder projects. Instead, these are hip and trendy, easy-to-learn wardrobe-building ideas. Scarves, hats, sweaters, tanks, a choker, and a carrier bag hit the mark with teen knitters. Easy instructions (most projects call for large knitting needles and practical yarns) with colored photos of teens wearing the finished project visually assist knitters. Bonus: a spiral spine helps the book stay flat on your lap while you knit and follow the instructions.

Other knitting or crochet books:

Singer, Amy. *Knit Wit: 30 Easy and Hip Projects*. HarperResource, 2004. ISBN 0-06-074070-1. \$19.95.

Kaban, Sasha. *Ready, Set, Knit*. Creative, 2004. ISBN 1-58923-185-6. \$19.95.

- Johns, Susie. *Ready, Set, Crochet*. Creative, 2004. ISBN 1-58923-186-4. \$19.95.
- 751 Ganz, Nicholas. *Graffiti World: Street Art from Five Continents*. Harry N. Abrams, 2005. ISBN 0-8109-4979-2. \$35.
- Graffiti has gone from a streetscape nuisance to a recognized art form that is practiced worldwide. This survey features thousands of pictures as well as profiles of the leaders of the movement.
- 747.77 Montano, Mark. *Super Suite: Ultimate Bedroom Makeover Guide for Girls*. Universe, 2002. ISBN 0-7893-0811-8. \$17.95.
- These rooms are classy and vogue, yet cheap to mimic. No other remodeling book comes close to the popularity of *Super Suite*. Not only do the before and after shots help, but there are directions to make simple projects to accessorize the space, as well as a resource guide to help one get the same look. The author is a powerhouse in the fashion design industry and has a monthly column in *CosmoGirl* titled "Cool Room."
- 781 Lavigne, Avril. *Avril Lavigne: Under My Skin* (Songbook). Hal Leonard, 2004. ISBN 0-634-08539-5. \$16.95.
- We added songbooks of popular teen artists on a whim, but teens certainly took the bait. No longer do piano students or guitar players have to play Disney tunes for practice or recitals!
- Other hot artists to try:
- Blink 182. *Blink 182* (Songbook). Warner Brothers, 2004. ISBN 0-757-91944-8. \$19.95.
- Evanescence. *Evanescence: Fallen* (Songbook). Warner Brothers, 2003. ISBN 0-757-91468-3. \$19.95.
- Good Charlotte. *Good Charlotte: The Young and the Hopeless* (Songbook). Hal Leonard, 2003; ISBN 0-634-05661-1; \$19.95.
- 782.4216 Keys, Alicia. *Tears for Water: Songbook of Poems and Lyrics by Alicia Keys*. Putnam, 2004. ISBN 0-399-15257-1. \$19.95.
- Teens who find poetry boring are suddenly enthralled with the form when it is called "lyrics." In addition to the complete lyrics from Keys' first two albums, the book features poetry she has written through the years.
- 791.43 Rinzler, J. W. *Star Wars: The Making of Episode III; Revenge of the Sith*. Del Ray, 2005. ISBN 0-345-43139-1. \$21.95.
- George Lucas is in a separate category when it comes to special effects and creating magic on surround-sound screens. Packed with photos, interviews, and behind-the-scenes looks at exactly how they did it, this may quench the thirst of an avid Star Wars fan (well, maybe).
- 791.4375 Sarvady, Andrea. *Ultimate Girls Movie Survival Guide: What to Rent, Who to Watch, How to Deal*. Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 2004. ISBN 0-689-87373-5. \$14.95.
- Where else can you find a movie guide that ranks movies using a one to five popcorn kernel system; where you can find the perfect movie to match your mood by using the mood control; and where you can find out which movies are boyfriend worthy and which ones should be saved for chick flick nights?
- 791.4572 Lewman, David. *SpongeBob Square-Pants Oracle*. Pocket Books, 2003. ISBN 0-7434-8316-2. \$10.
- Although it is not read front to back, this book still provides hours of entertainment. Treat this as more of a "game" book that can handle multiple players. Simply ask SpongeBob a question, flip to a page anywhere in the book, and find the insightful answer!
- 791.8168 Trautmann, Eric S. *Art of Halo: Creating a Virtual World*. Random House/Del Rey, 2004. ISBN 0-345-47586-0. \$21.95.
- A science fiction/military adventure game, Halo is one of the hottest games for the Xbox. Never before has a computer gaming book approached its subject as an object of art, but that is exactly what this book does! You won't find any cheat codes or how to obtain extra lives; instead discover the beautiful visual story of Halo characters, ships, and environments that ended up raising the bar for computer games.
- 794.8 Kent, Steve L.. *Making of Doom III*. McGraw Hill Osborne Media, 2004. ISBN 0-07-223052-5. \$19.99.
- Everything there is to know about the new version of *Doom* and more!
- 796.7209 Miller, Timothy and Steve Milton. *Nascar Now*. Firefly, 2004. ISBN 1-55297-829-X. \$19.95.
- Tracks, teams, drivers, and, most importantly, those stunning crashes give this book some meat.
- 796.323 Palmer, Chris. *Street Ball: All the Ballers, Moves, Slams, and Shine*. Harper Resource, 2004. ISBN 0-06-072444-7. \$16.95.
- Street ball is featured on ESPN2, and in their world, the players are just as big as Shaq or Kobe. Also contains some information on how they do some of their patented moves.
- 793.38 Stein, Elissa. *Prom Night: The Best Night of Your Life*. Chronicle Books, 2005. ISBN 0-8118-4544-3. \$12.95.
- Do disco balls, wilted corsages, yards of tulle, and powder blue polyester bring back fond memories of prom? Take a trip down Prom Memory Lane in a photo-album-like format highlighting couples who have experienced this event from the '50s through the '80s.
- 808.23 Brothers Heimberg. *Official Movie Plot Generator: 27,000 Hilarious Movie Plot Combinations*. Brothers Heimberg, 2004. ISBN 0-9740439-1-5. \$15.95.
- A spiral bound book in the spirit of *MadLibs*. Pick a subject, an action, and an object and watch the hilarity ensue. (This one you really need to see to understand.)
- Bio Faught, Ken. *Jeremy McGrath: Images of a Supercross Champion*. Motorbooks, 2004. ISBN 0-7603-2032-2. \$19.95.
- Extreme-sports autobiographies are plentiful, but this one rises to the top because Jeremy McGrath allows his own personality—warts and all—to shine through.
- Bio Hodari Coker, Cheo. *Unbelievable: The Life, Death, and Afterlife of the Notorious B.I.G.* Three Rivers, 2004. ISBN 0-609-80835-4. \$19.95.
- There are scores of books about Tupac, but this is the first comprehensive treatment of his nemesis, Biggie. The book, at 368 pages, proves that when it comes to reluctant readers, size doesn't matter if the subject matter is of interest.

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