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

Those Amazing Ants

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

Animal Fact/Animal Fable

Hummingbirds: Jewels in the Sky

Art

Linnea in Monet’s Garden

Talking with Artists
Cummings, Pat, ed. Illus. and photos. Bradbury, 1992. (Gr. 3–7)
Family Pictures / Cuadros de Familia

Pyramid

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

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

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

Snowflake Bentley

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

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

The Way Things Work

How to Dig a Hole to the Other Side of the World

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

Volcanoes

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

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

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

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

Splish Splash
This Land Is Your Land
(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

The Random House Book of Mother Goose

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

How Now, Brown Cow?

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

Where the Sidewalk Ends
(Gr. 1–6)

The Fireside Book of Fun and Game Songs
(Gr. K–6)

Rocket in My Pocket: The Rhymes and Chants of Young Americans