

Popular Science Readers' Advisory

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Speed Dating Through the Genres

RA in a Half Day

Hosted by the BCLA Readers Advisory Interest Group
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Science topics presented in a style, format, and degree of complexity that is accessible to the general population. "The goal of the genre is often to capture the methods and accuracy of science, while making the language more accessible." –Wikipediā, "Popular Science"

Appeal

- The experience of wonder!
- Experiencing the "Did you know?" moment
- Practical, pragmatic, real
- Make sense of the world (& your place in it)
- Challenge
- The usual appeal suspects.....
- CHARACTERS (Great minds, complex personalities)
- NARRATIVE/STORY (Drama, adventure, controversy)
- SETTING (Unique places – outer space, underwater, volcanos, exotic lands, historic moments)
- SUBJECT (See below: Think of this like Genre)
- BEAUTIFUL WRITING (Yes really!)

Subject Matter Tips

- Watch out for "Self-Help prejudice" from some popular science readers ("That's not real science")
- Some readers really care about the scientific subject & some just want to be amazed
- If they care: Hard Science = natural sciences, quantitative methods vs. Soft Science = social sciences, qualitative (some people think soft science is not "real science")
- Natural Sciences = Understanding natural phenomena...Or "science, pure and simple"; Chemistry, Physics, Earth Sciences, Biology, Astronomy
- Social Sciences = Understanding human relationships & society; Economics, Psychology, Anthropology, Archeology, Sociology
- Additional subjects - Medicine, Engineering, Mathematics, Technology.....(oh so many more)

Important authors

- Carl Sagan
- Stephen Hawking
- Brian Greene
- Richard Dawkins
- Michio Kaku
- James Gleick
- Richard Feynman
- Stephen Jay Gould
- Steven Pinker
- Oliver Sacks
- Daniel Levitin
- V.S. Ramachandran
- Philip Plait
- James Burke
- Ben Goldacre
- Bill Bryson
- Simon Singh
- Mary Roach
- Malcom Gladwell
- Matt Ridley

Deep Science

- Not for new popular science readers
- Might need some background in the subject area
- Classics of science literature
- WARNING! These titles often appear on Goodreads and "Best of Popular Science" booklists – So watch out!

James Gleick. *Chaos: Making a New Science*. (1987)
Stephen Hawking. *A Brief History of Time*. (1988)
Michio Kaku. *Hyperspace*. (1994)
Douglas Hofstadter. *Godel, Escher & Bach*. (1979)

Intro "Getting Into Popular Science"

- Easy reads, often employ humor
 - Lots of "Did you know?" moments
 - Often fall into multiple nonfiction genres – history, biography, self-help, etc.
 - But...in some cases the science isn't the most rigorous and some readers will object
- Chris Hadfield. *An Astronauts Guide to Life on Earth*. (2013)
Steven D. Levitt & Stephen J. Dubner. *Freakonomics*. (2005)
Superfreakonomics. (2009) *Think Like a Freak*. (2014)
Mary Roach. *Gulp*. (2013) *Packing for Mars*. (2010)
Oliver Sacks. *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. (1985) *An Anthropologist on Mars*. (1995)

Great Stories/Amazing Characters

- Mystery, intrigue, adventure, discovery
 - Thrills, chills, & challenging ideas
 - Kooks, cranks, geniuses, curmudgeons, beautiful minds
 - Lots of crossover appeal with other genres
- James Burke. Most of his books would work here.
Steven Johnson. *The Ghost Map*. (2006)
Sam Kean. *The Disappearing Spoon*. (2013)
Siddhartha Mukherjee. *The Emperor of All Maladies*. (2010)
Simon Singh. Most of his books would work here.

<p>Challenging But Worth It</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex ideas, slower reading, but still accessible • Appeal to the sense of wonder & desire to be challenged • The “meat” of the popular science universe • Appeals to the reader who wants “real science” <p>Richard P. Feynman. <i>Six Easy Pieces</i>. (1994) Brian Greene. <i>The Elegant Universe</i>. (1999) Stephen Hawking. <i>A Briefer History of Time</i>. (2005) Chris Impey. <i>How It Began</i>. (2012) Matt Ridley. <i>Genome</i>. (1999) Carl Sagan. <i>Billions & Billions</i>. (1997)</p>	<p>Not Just Books</p> <p><u>Magazines</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Popular Science • Psychology Today • Scientific American • Wired <p><u>Podcasts</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 99% Invisible • Radiolab • Stuff You Should Know • Professor Blastoff (comedy, accuracy relative) <p><u>Websites</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How Stuff Works - http://www.howstuffworks.com/ • IFLScience - http://www.iflscience.com/ • io9 - http://io9.com/ • NASA - http://www.nasa.gov/ 	<p>Graphic Novels</p> <p>Darryl Cunningham. <i>Psychiatric Tales</i>. (2011) <i>Science Tales</i>. (2013) Jay Hosler. <i>Clan Apis</i>. (2000) Jim Ottaviani. Too many great books to pick from!</p>
<p>Investigative Science</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No special background knowledge required • Controversial topics or moral conundrums in science • Often relate to current events, modern “problems” • Appeal to “pragmatic” readers <p>Richard Dawkins. <i>The God Delusion</i>. (2006) Ben Goldacre. <i>Bad Pharma</i>. (2012) Lawrence M. Krauss. <i>A Universe from Nothing</i>. (2012) Sherwin B. Nuland. <i>How We Die</i>. (2nd Ed. 1995)</p> <p><u>Current Bestsellers</u></p> <p>Atul Gawande. <i>Being Mortal</i>. (2014) Naomi Klein. <i>This Changes Everything</i>. (2014)</p>	<p>Fun Reads</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seriously, it’s not all serious ▪ Get icked out, roll your eyes, laugh out loud...you can take science reading to the beach ▪ Appeals to curiosity, wonder, new popular science readers <p>Rachel P. Maines. <i>The Technology of Orgasm</i>. (2001) Philip Plait. <i>Bad Astronomy</i> (2002) <i>Death from the Skies!</i> (2008) Richard Schweid. <i>The Cockroach Papers</i>. (1999) Timothy Verstynen & Bradley Voytek. <i>Do Zombies Dream of Undead Sheep?</i> (2014)</p>	
<p>Crossover Appeal</p> <p><u>Mystery readers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Thunderstruck</i> by Erik Larson (2006) • <i>The Ghost Map</i> by Steven Johnson (2006) <p><u>History readers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Connections</i> by James Burke (Revised ed., 2007) • <i>A Short History of Nearly Everything</i> by Bill Bryson (2003) <p><u>Literary readers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature/Environmental writing • <i>An Alchemy of the mind</i> (2004) or <i>A Natural History of the Senses</i> (1990) by Diane Ackerman <p><u>Science Fiction readers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •everything 	<p><u>Adventure readers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Surviving Galeras</i> by Stanley Williams (2001) • <i>The Code Book</i> by Simon Singh (1999) <p><u>Biography readers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Surely Your Joking, Mr. Feynman!</i> by Richard P. Feynman (1985) • <i>Naturalist</i> by Edward O. Wilson (1994) 	

Helpful resources (print & online):

Moyer, Jessica E. Ed. *Integrated Advisory Service: Breaking Through the Book Boundary to Better Serve Library Users*. Santa Barbara, Calif: Libraries Unlimited, 2010.

Adamson, Lynda G. *Thematic Guide to Popular Nonfiction*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2006.

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

“Introduction to Popular Science Resources.” Wellcome Library. <http://is.gd/lpPXUI> (This site has a list of relevant awards.)

“50 Best Science Writers of All Time.” OnlineCollege.org. <http://is.gd/zK7COB>

“100 All-Time Greatest Popular Science Books (and 17 more).” Open Education Database. <http://is.gd/oOoApE>

“Top 15 Most Popular Science Websites | October 2014.” eBizMBA Guide. <http://is.gd/YI7BZx>