Recommended reading 400s

Talking with Your Hands, Listening with Your Eyes: A Complete Photographic Guide to American Sign Language by Gabriel Grayson (419 GRAYSON)

After English and Spanish, it is the third most common language in North America. Over 22 million people use it to communicate. It has its own beauty, its own unmistakable form, and its own inherent culture. It is American Sign Language (ASL), the language of the deaf.

Mother Tongue: English and How It Got That Way by Bill Bryson (420 BRYSON)

Highly entertaining tour through the history of the English language and its current (at least as of the 1990s) status. Fun tidbits, little-used words that should be better-known, historical watersheds, and how English words have migrated into other languages all combine for a truly fun read.

Loose Cannons & Red Herrings: A Book of Lost Metaphors by Robert Claiborne (422 CLAIBORNE)

Explains the origins and original meanings of common metaphors and expressions from ace in the hole to zero-sum.

The Word Museum: The Most Remarkable English Ever Forgotten by Jeffrey Kacirk (423.1 KACIRK)

As the largest and most dynamic collection of words ever assembled, the English language continues to expand. But as hundreds of new words are added annually, older ones are sacrificed. This book is a collection of fascinating archaic words and phrases, providing an enticing glimpse into the past. With beguiling period illustrations, The Word Museum offers up the marvelous oddities and peculiar enchantments of old and unusual words.
An Exaltation of Larks by James Lipton (428.1 LIPTON)

An “exaltation of larks”? Yes! And a “leap of leopards”, a “parliament of owls”, an “ostentation of peacocks”, a “smack of jellyfish”, and a “murder of crows”! For those who have ever wondered if the familiar “pride of lions” and “gaggle of geese” were only the tip of a linguistic iceberg, James Lipton has provided the definitive answer: here are hundreds of equally pithy, and often poetic, terms unearthed by Mr. Lipton in the Books of Venery that were the constant study of anyone who aspired to the title of gentleman in the fifteenth century. When Mr. Lipton’s painstaking research revealed that five hundred years ago the terms of venery had already been turned into the Game of Venery, he embarked on an odyssey that has given us a “slouch of models”, a “shrivel of critics”, an “unction of undertakers”, a “blur of Impressionists”, a “score of bachelors”, and a “pocket of quarterbacks”.

Sister Bernadette’s Barking Dog: The Quirky History and Lost Art of Diagramming Sentences by Kitty Burns Florey (428.2 FLOREY)

In its heyday, sentence diagramming was wildly popular in grammar schools across the country. Kitty Burns Florey learned the method in sixth grade from Sister Bernadette: “It was a bit like art, a bit like mathematics. It was a picture of language. I was hooked.” Now, in this offbeat history, Florey explores the sentence-diagramming phenomenon, including its humble roots at the Brooklyn Polytechnic, its “balloon diagram” predecessor, and what diagrams of famous writers’ sentences reveal about them.

Between You & Me: Confessions of a Comma Queen by Mary Norris (428.2 NORRIS)

Between You & Me features laugh-out-loud descriptions of some of the most common and vexing problems in spelling, punctuation, and usage—comma faults, danglers, “who” vs. “whom,” “that” vs. “which,” compound words, gender-neutral language—and clear explanations of how to handle them.

Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation by Lynne Truss (428.2 TRUSS)

We all know the basics of punctuation. Or do we? A look at most neighborhood signage tells a different story. Through sloppy usage and low standards on the internet, in email, and now text messages, we have made proper punctuation an endangered species. This is a book for people who love punctuation and get upset when it is mishandled.
Bless Me, Ultima by Rudolfo A. Anaya (428.6 ANAYA)

This set of seven books offered by Literacy Volunteers of New York City (LVNYC) provides YA and adult new readers with a variety of quality contemporary literature. Each book in the “Writers’ Voices” series contains an unedited selection from the original work as well as a summary of the book, a short biography of the author, and a list of thought-provoking questions about the material. These books should help motivate students to delve deeper into the reading world. While geared for more advanced new readers, the discussion questions and activities enable these books to be used as valuable tools in a tutorial setting as well as on an individual basis.

The Joys of Yiddish by Leo Rosten (492.49 ROSTEN)

A relaxed Lexicon of Yiddish, Hebrew and Yinglish words often encountered in English, Plus dozens that ought to be, with Seredipitous Excursions into Jewish Humor, Habits, Holiday, History, Religion Ceremonies, Folklore, and Cuisine, the whole generously garnished with Stories, Anecdotes, Epigrams, Talmudic Quotations, Folk Sayings and Jokes, from the days of the Bible to those of the Beatnik.

Recommended reading 500s

Hidden Figures by Margot Lee Shetterly (501.92 SHETTERLY)

The phenomenal true story of the black female mathematicians at NASA at the leading edge of the feminist and civil rights movement, whose calculations helped fuel some of America’s greatest achievements in space—a powerful, revelatory contribution that is essential to our understanding of race, discrimination, and achievement in modern America. Before John Glenn orbited the earth, or Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, a group of dedicated female mathematicians known as “human computers” used pencils, slide rules and adding machines to calculate the numbers that would launch rockets, and astronauts, into space.

Bully for Brontosaurus by Stephen Jay Gould (508 GOULD)

A collection of thirty-five essays—representing the best of the column “This View of Life” from “Natural History” magazine—focuses on the themes of evolution and of the innumerable oddities of nature.
American Women in Science by Martha J. Bailey (509.2 BAILEY)
Against the odds, women have made contributions in every field of scientific endeavor. American Women in Science is a biographical treatment of more than 400 women in the social, physical, and medical sciences and technology who began their careers before 1950. Coverage ranges from early female scientists with no formal training, such as Elizabeth Agassiz, founder of Radcliffe College, to Nobel Prize winners Rosalyn Yalow and Barbara McClintock. Many women had to study in Europe, such as Gerty Theresa Cori at the University of Prague. Some were the first women to graduate from their institutions, such as Nora Barney, a civil engineer from Cornell University, or Florence Bascom, the first female doctorate from Johns Hopkins University. Contributors to home economics, such as Fannie Farmer, are treated as are popular nature writers. Minority women are included: Sophie Aberle, a Native American, and Katherine Dunham and Zora Neale Hurston, African Americans, all of whom were anthropologists.

Zero: The Biography of a Dangerous Idea by Charles Seife (511.211 SEIFE)
A "biography" of the most vexing and troublesome number in human history reveals how the Babylonians invented it, why the Greeks were afraid of it and the Hindus worshipped, the role it played in hunting down heretics in the Middle Ages, and its current place in the Y2K issue.

How to Bake Pi: An Edible Exploration of the Mathematics of Mathematics by Eugenia Cheng (512.62 CHENG)
What is math? How exactly does it work? And what do three siblings trying to share a cake have to do with it? In How to Bake Pi, math professor Eugenia Cheng provides an accessible introduction to the logic and beauty of mathematics, powered, unexpectedly, by insights from the kitchen: we learn, for example, how the béchamel in a lasagna can be a lot like the number 5, and why making a good custard proves that math is easy but life is hard. Of course, it's not all about cooking; we'll also run the New York and Chicago marathons, take a closer look at St. Paul's Cathedral, pay visits to Cinderella and Lewis Carroll, and even get to the bottom of why we think of a tomato as a vegetable.
A Short History of Nearly Everything by Bill Bryson (523.1 BRYSON)
One of the world's most beloved and bestselling writers takes his ultimate journey -- into the most intriguing and intractable questions that science seeks to answer. Now, in his biggest book, he confronts his greatest challenge: to understand -- and, if possible, answer -- the oldest, biggest questions we have posed about the universe and ourselves. Taking as territory everything from the Big Bang to the rise of civilization, Bryson seeks to understand how we got from there being nothing at all to there being us.

A Brief History of Time by Stephen Hawking (523.1 HAWKING)
A landmark volume in science writing by one of the great minds of our time, Stephen Hawking’s book explores such profound questions as: How did the universe begin—and what made its start possible? Does time always flow forward? Is the universe unending—or are there boundaries? Are there other dimensions in space? What will happen when it all ends?

Mars 3-D: A Rover’s-Eye-View of the Red Planet by Jim Bell (523.43 BELL)
What would it be like to visit Mars—to explore the distinctive, untouched terrain that inspired astronomers and stirred so many sci-fi writers’ imaginations? Two highly capable robotic geologists—Spirit and Opportunity—made that amazing voyage, and spent the last four years roaming the Red Planet’s unique landscape. Thanks to 120 stunning 3-D and color images shot by these rovers, we can come along—and right now, it’s the closest we can get to actually setting foot on Mars.

Darwin: The Life of a Tormented Evolutionist by Adrian Desmond & James Moore (575.0092 DESMOND)
Hailed as the definitive biography, this monumental work explains the character and paradoxes of Charles Darwin and opens up the full panorama of Victorian science, theology, and mores. The authors bring to life Darwin's reckless student days in Cambridge, his epic five-year voyage on the Beagle, and his grueling struggle to develop his theory of evolution.
I Contain Multitudes by Ed Yong (579.17 YONG)
A groundbreaking, marvelously informative “microbe’s-eye view” of the world that reveals a radically reconceived picture of life on earth. With humor and erudition, Ed Yong prompts us to look at ourselves and our fellow animals in a new light: less as individuals and more as the interconnected, interdependent multitudes we assuredly are. When we look at the animal kingdom through a microbial lens, even the most familiar parts of our lives take on a striking new air. We learn the secret, invisible, and wondrous biology behind the corals that construct mighty reefs, the glowing squid that can help us understand the bacteria in our own guts, the beetles that bring down forests, the disease-fighting mosquitoes engineered in Australia, and the ingredients in breast milk that evolved to nourish a baby’s first microbes. We see how humans are disrupting these partnerships and how scientists are now manipulating them to our advantage. We see, as William Blake wrote, the world in a grain of sand.