

## AP Language and Composition Nonfiction Reading Choices

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**Ambrose, Stephen. *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West*.**

In this sweeping adventure story, Stephen E. Ambrose, the bestselling author of *D-Day*, presents the definitive account of one of the most momentous journeys in American history. Ambrose follows the Lewis and Clark Expedition from Thomas Jefferson's hope of finding a waterway to the Pacific, through the heart-stopping moments of the actual trip, to Lewis's lonely demise on the Natchez Trace. Along the way, Ambrose shows us the American West as Lewis saw it—wild, awesome, and pristinely beautiful. *Undaunted Courage* is a stunningly told action tale that will delight readers for generations. (Borders)

**Arsenault, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*.**

Here is the definitive account of a dramatic and indeed pivotal moment in American history, a critical episode that transformed the civil rights movement in the early 1960s. Raymond Arsenault offers a meticulously researched and grippingly written account of the Freedom Rides, one of the most compelling chapters in the history of civil rights. Arsenault recounts how in 1961, emboldened by federal rulings that declared segregated transit unconstitutional, a group of volunteers--blacks and whites--traveled together from Washington DC through the Deep South, defying Jim Crow laws in buses and terminals, putting their bodies and their lives on the line for racial justice. The book paints a harrowing account of the outpouring of hatred and violence that greeted the Freedom Riders in Alabama and Mississippi. One bus was disabled by Ku Klux Klansmen, then firebombed. In Birmingham and Montgomery, mobs of white supremacists swarmed the bus stations and battered the riders with fists and clubs while local police refused to intervene. The mayhem in Montgomery was captured by news photographers, shocking the nation, and sparking a crisis in the Kennedy administration, which after some hesitation and much public outcry, came to the aid of the Freedom Riders. Arsenault brings the key actors in this historical drama vividly to life, with colorful portraits of the Kennedys, Jim Farmer, John Lewis, Diane Nash, Fred Shuttlesworth, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Their courage, their fears, and the agonizing choices made by all these individuals run through the story like an electric current. The saga of the Freedom Rides is an improbable, almost unbelievable story. In the course of six months, some four hundred and fifty Riders expanded the realm of the possible in American politics, redefining the limits of dissent and setting the stage in the years to come for the 1963 Birmingham demonstrations, Freedom Summer and the Selma-to-Montgomery March. With characters and plot lines rivaling those of the most imaginative fiction, this is a tale of heroic sacrifice and unexpected triumph.

**Barry, John M. *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History*.**

In 1918, a plague swept across the world virtually without warning, killing healthy young adults as well as vulnerable infants and the elderly. Hospitals and morgues were quickly overwhelmed; in Philadelphia, 4,597 people died in one week alone and bodies piled up on the streets to be carted off to mass graves. But this was not the dreaded Black Death—it was "only influenza." In this sweeping history, Barry (*Rising Tide*) explores how the deadly confluence of biology (a swiftly mutating flu virus that can pass between animals and humans) and politics (President Wilson's all-out war effort in WWI) created conditions in which the virus thrived, killing more than 50 million worldwide and perhaps as many as 100 million in just a year. Overcrowded military camps and wide-ranging troop deployments allowed the highly contagious flu to spread quickly; transport ships became "floating caskets." Yet the U.S. government refused to shift priorities away from the war and, in effect, ignored the crisis. Shortages of doctors and nurses hurt military and civilian populations alike, and the ineptitude of public health officials exacerbated the death toll. In Philadelphia, the hardest-hit municipality in the U.S., "the entire city government had done nothing" to either contain the disease or assist afflicted families. Instead, official lies and misinformation, Barry argues, created a climate of "fear... [that] threatened to break the society apart." Barry captures the sense of panic and despair that overwhelmed stricken communities and hits

hard at those who failed to use their power to protect the public good. He also describes the work of the dedicated researchers who rushed to find the cause of the disease and create vaccines. Flu shots are widely available today because of their heroic efforts, yet we remain vulnerable to a virus that can mutate to a deadly strain without warning. Society's ability to survive another devastating flu pandemic, Barry argues, is as much a political question as a medical one. (*Publisher's Weekly*)

**Beavan, Colin. *No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to Save the Planet and the Discoveries He Makes about Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process.***

Beavan chronicles his yearlong effort to leave as little impact on the environment as possible. Realizing that he had erred in thinking that condemning other people's misdeeds somehow made [him] virtuous, he makes a stab at genuine (and radical) virtue: forgoing toilet paper and electricity, relinquishing motorized transportation, becoming a locavore and volunteering with environmental organizations. Beavan captures his own shortcomings with candor and wit and offers surprising revelations: lower resource use won't fill the empty spaces in my life, but it is just possible that a world in which we already suffer so much loss could be made a little bit better if husbands were kinder to their wives. While few readers will be tempted to go to Beavan's extremes, most will mull over his thought-provoking reflections and hopefully reconsider their own lifestyles. (*Publishers Weekly*)

**Bradley, James. *Flags of Our Fathers.***

In this unforgettable chronicle of perhaps the most famous moment in American military history, James Bradley has captured the glory, the triumph, the heartbreak, and the legacy of the six men who raised the flag at Iwo Jima. Here is the true story behind the immortal photograph that has come to symbolize the courage and indomitable will of America. In February 1945, American Marines plunged into the surf at Iwo Jima--and into history. Through a hail of machine-gun and mortar fire that left the beaches strewn with comrades, they battled to the island's highest peak. And after climbing through a landscape of hell itself, they raised a flag. Now the son of one of the flag raisers has written a powerful account of six very different men who came together in a moment that will live forever. (Bookrags)

**Bradley, James. *Flyboys.***

In this book Bradley writes of the Pacific and World War II. Over the island of Chichi Jima, nine American flyboys—Navy and Marine airmen sent to bomb the Japanese—were shot down. One would be miraculously rescued, but the others would be imprisoned and subjected to a fate so terrible that it has been kept top secret until now. *Flyboys* reveals for the first time what happened to these men. Bradley details the war in the Pacific, from the attack on Pearl Harbor through the bitter end, including some of the most savage fighting the world has ever seen. And he explores the Japanese warrior culture and how America's own ideas about war in peace conflicted with Japan's. This is not just the story of those who died, but also of those who lived—including the young Navy pilot who would one day become the president of the United States. (Amazon)

**Bryson, Bill. *A Walk in the Woods.***

In the grand tradition of the travel memoir, writer Bill Bryson tells the story of his trek through the wilderness along the Appalachian Trail. With no real outdoors experience or knowledge of the trail's difficulty, he walks into a sporting goods store in his hometown of Hanover, New Hampshire, and spends a small fortune on the necessary gear, most of which is a mystery to him. His plan is to hike the entire 2,200-mile trail in one season, starting at Springer Mountain in Georgia and ending at Mt. Katahdin in Maine. He has a companion who is as comically unprepared for the trek as he is. Stephen Katz is an old school friend, who climbs off the plane with a large stomach and a duffel bag of Snickers. This hilarious book intertwines a history of the Appalachian Trail, its hikers, and the American wilderness with Bryson's personal challenge to not give up his trek, even though he has every reason to do so (Amazon).

**Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring.***

First published by Houghton Mifflin in 1962, *Silent Spring* alerted a large audience to the environmental and human dangers of indiscriminate use of pesticides, spurring revolutionary changes in the laws

affecting our air, land, and water. "*Silent Spring* became a runaway bestseller, with international reverberations . . . [It is] well crafted, fearless and succinct . . . Even if she had not inspired a generation of activists, Carson would prevail as one of the greatest nature writers in American letters" (Peter Matthiessen, for *Time's 100 Most Influential People of the Century*). (Borders)

**Dawidoff, Nicholas. *The Catcher was a Spy: The Mysterious Life of Moe Berg*.**

The story of Moe Berg, sometime major-league catcher, sometime spy, sometime lawyer, and full-time enigma. Berg, a Princeton graduate and Wall Street lawyer who played sporadically (and not very well) with the major leagues between 1923 and 1939, was recruited by Wild Bill Donovan for the OSS during World War II, and he eventually was awarded the Medal of Freedom for his work in Germany collecting information for the H-bomb project. A Jew, Berg was the odd man out in nearly every world he inhabited--the Ivy League, baseball, Wall Street, the OSS--and Dawidoff neatly emphasizes how his sense of himself as an outsider worked marvelously to his advantage in espionage, just as it had inhibited and held him back everywhere else. (Biblio.com)

**Egan, Timothy. *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dustbowl*.**

The dust storms that terrorized the High Plains in the darkest years of the Depression were like nothing ever seen before or since. Timothy Egan's critically acclaimed account rescues this iconic chapter of American history from the shadows in a tour de force of historical reportage. Following a dozen families and their communities through the rise and fall of the region, Egan tells of their desperate attempts to carry on through blinding black dust blizzards, crop failure, and the death of loved ones. Brilliantly capturing the terrifying drama of catastrophe, Egan does equal justice to the human characters who become his heroes, "the stoic, long-suffering men and women whose lives he opens up with urgency and respect" (New York Times). (Borders)

**Ellis, Joseph J. *American Creation*.**

This subtle, brilliant examination of the period between the War of Independence and the Louisiana Purchase puts Pulitzer-winner Ellis (*Founding Brothers*) among the finest of America's narrative historians. Six stories, each centering on a significant creative achievement or failure, combine to portray often flawed men and their efforts to lay the republic's foundation. Set against the extraordinary establishment of the most liberal nation-state in the history of Western Civilization... in the most extensive and richly endowed plot of ground on the planet are the terrible costs of victory, including the perpetuation of slavery and the cruel oppression of Native Americans. Ellis blames the founders' failures on their decision to opt for an evolutionary revolution, not a risky severance with tradition (as would happen, murderously, in France, which necessitated compromises, like retaining slavery). Despite the injustices and brutalities that resulted, Ellis argues, this deferral strategy was a profound insight rooted in a realistic appraisal of how enduring social change best happens. (*Publishers Weekly*)

**Ellis, Joseph J. *Founding Brothers*.**

In retrospect, it seems as if the American Revolution was inevitable. But was it? In *Founding Brothers*, Ellis reveals that many of those truths we hold to be self-evident were actually fiercely contested in the early days of the republic. Ellis focuses on six crucial moments in the life of the new nation, including a secret dinner at which the seat of the nation's capital was determined--in exchange for support of Hamilton's financial plan; Washington's precedent-setting Farewell Address; and the Hamilton and Burr duel. Most interesting, perhaps, is the debate (still dividing scholars today) over the *meaning* of the Revolution. In a fascinating chapter on the renewed friendship between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson at the end of their lives, Ellis points out the fundamental differences between the Republicans, who saw the Revolution as a liberating act and hold the Declaration of Independence most sacred, and the Federalists, who saw the revolution as a step in the building of American nationhood and hold the Constitution most dear. Throughout the text, Ellis explains the personal, face-to-face nature of early American politics--and notes that the members of the revolutionary generation were conscious of the fact that they were establishing precedents on which future generations would rely. (*Publishers Weekly*)

**Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America.***

Ehrenreich turns her gimlet eye on the view from the workforce's bottom rung. Determined to find out how anyone could make ends meet on \$7 an hour, she left behind her middle class life as a journalist except for \$1000 in start-up funds, a car and her laptop computer to try to sustain herself as a low-skilled worker for a month at a time. In 1999 and 2000, Ehrenreich worked as a waitress in Key West, Fla., as a cleaning woman and a nursing home aide in Portland, Maine, and in a Wal-Mart in Minneapolis, Minn. During the application process, she faced routine drug tests and spurious "personality tests"; once on the job, she endured constant surveillance and numbing harangues over infractions like serving a second roll and butter. Beset by transportation costs and high rents, she learned the tricks of the trade from her co-workers, some of whom sleep in their cars, and many of whom work when they're vexed by arthritis, back pain or worse, yet still manage small gestures of kindness. Despite the advantages of her race, education, good health and lack of children, Ehrenreich's income barely covered her month's expenses in only one instance, when she worked seven days a week at two jobs (one of which provided free meals) during the off-season in a vacation town. Delivering a fast read that's both sobering and sassy, she gives readers pause about those caught in the economy's undertow, even in good times. (Publisher's Weekly)

**Gawande, Atul. *Complications: A Surgeon's Notes on an Imperfect Science.***

Medicine reveals itself as a fascinatingly complex and "fundamentally human endeavor" in this distinguished debut essay collection by a surgical resident and staff writer for the New Yorker. Gawande, a former Rhodes scholar and Harvard Medical School graduate, illuminates "the moments in which medicine actually happens," and describes his profession as an "enterprise of constantly changing knowledge, uncertain information, fallible individuals, and at the same time lives on the line." Gawande's background in philosophy and ethics is evident throughout these pieces, which range from edgy accounts of medical traumas to sobering analyses of doctors' anxieties and burnout. With humor, sensitivity and critical intelligence, he explores the pros and cons of new technologies, including a controversial factory model for routine surgeries that delivers superior success rates while dramatically cutting costs. He also describes treatment of such challenging conditions as morbid obesity, chronic pain and necrotizing fasciitis the often-fatal condition caused by dreaded "flesh-eating bacteria" and probes the agonizing process by which physicians balance knowledge and intuition to make seemingly impossible decisions. What draws practitioners to this challenging profession, he concludes, is the promise of "the alterable moment the fragile but crystalline opportunity for one's know-how, ability or just gut instinct to change the course of another's life for the better." These exquisitely crafted essays, in which medical subjects segue into explorations of much larger themes, place Gawande among the best in the field. (Publishers Weekly)

**Gladwell, Malcolm. *Outliers***

The New Yorker writer Malcolm Gladwell looks how successful people achieve success. The key concepts of the book are that yes, it takes a lot of hard work to be successful, but that there's some luck involved in getting to be in a place where that work counts for something, or is even possible. Outliers is not so much The Story of Success so much as it is A New Way of Thinking About Success. This spin of title points to the true value of Malcolm's body of works. For just as each of Malcolm's case studies is really only a conjured aberration to serve as prototypal concept in the formulation of a conceptual illustration of success, so too is the subject of each of his books merely an embodiment of a common yearning. These frames of reference, these new ways of thinking about success are made of lovingly crafted analogies and honest speculation. Scientific? No. Profitable? Very. (Amazon)

**Goodwin, Doris Kearns. *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln.***

The life and times of Abraham Lincoln have been analyzed and dissected in countless books. Do we need another Lincoln biography? In *Team of Rivals*, esteemed historian Doris Kearns Goodwin proves that we do. Though she can't help but cover some familiar territory, her perspective is focused enough to offer fresh insights into Lincoln's leadership style and his deep understanding of human behavior and

motivation. Goodwin makes the case for Lincoln's political genius by examining his relationships with three men he selected for his cabinet, all of whom were opponents for the Republican nomination in 1860: William H. Seward, Salmon P. Chase, and Edward Bates. These men, all accomplished, nationally known, and presidential, originally disdained Lincoln for his backwoods upbringing and lack of experience, and were shocked and humiliated at losing to this relatively obscure Illinois lawyer. Yet Lincoln not only convinced them to join his administration--Seward as secretary of state, Chase as secretary of the treasury, and Bates as attorney general--he ultimately gained their admiration and respect as well. How he soothed egos, turned rivals into allies, and dealt with many challenges to his leadership, all for the sake of the greater good, is largely what Goodwin's fine book is about. Had he not possessed the wisdom and confidence to select and work with the best people, she argues, he could not have led the nation through one of its darkest periods.

Ten years in the making, this engaging work reveals why "Lincoln's road to success was longer, more tortuous, and far less likely" than the other men, and why, when opportunity beckoned, Lincoln was "the best prepared to answer the call." This multiple biography further provides valuable background and insights into the contributions and talents of Seward, Chase, and Bates. Lincoln may have been "the indispensable ingredient of the Civil War," but these three men were invaluable to Lincoln and they played key roles in keeping the nation intact. --*Shawn Carkonen* (Amazon)

**Heath, Chip and Dan Heath. *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die.***

Why do some ideas thrive while others die? And how do we improve the chances of worthy ideas? In this book, accomplished educators and idea collectors Chip and Dan Heath tackle head-on these vexing questions. Inside, the brothers Heath reveal the anatomy of ideas that stick and explain ways to make ideas stickier, such as applying the "human scale principle," using the "Velcro Theory of Memory," and creating "curiosity gaps." In this indispensable guide, we discover that sticky messages of all kinds--from the infamous "kidney theft ring" hoax to a coach's lessons on sportsmanship to a vision for a new product at Sony--draw their power from the same six traits. *Made to Stick* is a book that will transform the way you communicate ideas. It's a fast-paced tour of success stories (and failures)--the Nobel Prize-winning scientist who drank a glass of bacteria to prove a point about stomach ulcers; the charities who make use of "the Mother Teresa Effect"; the elementary-school teacher whose simulation actually prevented racial prejudice. Provocative, eye-opening, and often surprisingly funny, *Made to Stick* shows us the vital principles of winning ideas--and tells us how we can apply these rules to making our own messages stick. (Bookrags)

**Hickman, Homer Jr. *Rocket Boys* (also published as *October Sky*).**

In 1957, when 14-year-old Homer Hickam, a.k.a. Sonny, watches Sputnik fly over his hometown of Coalwood, West Virginia, his life is changed forever. Knowing he wants to be part of the space race, Sonny and his friends, set out to learn as much as they can about launching rockets. Soon, these Rocket Boys wind up enlisting the help of everyone in town. Set against a backdrop of miners' strikes, the beginning of the Cold War, and America's loss of innocence, this book reads like a novel. (Borders)

**Hillenbrand, Laura. *Seabiscuit: An American Legend.*** The book takes place between 1929 and 1940, a period during which the world changed dramatically. In the United States, a stock market crash heralded the decade-long Great Depression that mired the country in despair and hopelessness. During those dark days, average citizens clung to even the smallest diversion that afforded hope or escape from their daily lives. An unlikely hero--a short, squat, and seemingly unfit racehorse--offered one such distraction, becoming a media darling and capturing the national imagination. In fact, in 1938, as the world teetered on the brink of World War II, the majority of new coverage was devoted not to politicians or warmongers but to one knobby-kneed horse nearly past his prime. Seabiscuit became a cultural icon, according to Hillenbrand, and offered hope to a generation of disadvantaged people: if he could overcome adversity and become a winner, so could they. From his initial outings in the dust of Tijuana to his grudge match with Triple Crown winner War Admiral, Seabiscuit epitomized the rags-to-riches American dream for millions of impoverished citizens who wondered whether the dream was still possible. (Amazon)

**Krakauer, Jon. *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster.***

This gripping true-life adventure tale tells the story of the disaster in which several climbers died on the slopes of Mt. Everest in 1996, as witnessed by Jon Krakauer, a journalist who is also one of the climbers to reach the summit that year. Led by Rob Hall, one of the most highly respected climbers in the world at that time, the team Krakauer climbs with becomes split up after a series of small incidents and a sudden change in the weather, leaving five of his teammates dead on the mountain. Another expedition led by the flamboyant Scott Fischer also loses climbers in the storm, including Fischer himself. Krakauer recounts the events of the ill-fated expeditions from his own personal experience and makes several suggestions as to what may have led to the climbers being caught high on the world's most sought-after "trophy summit."

**Kurlansky, Mark. *Salt: A World History.*** Salt, the only rock we eat, has made a glittering, often surprising contribution to the history of humankind. Until about a hundred years ago, when modern geology revealed its prevalence, salt was one of the world's most sought-after commodities. A substance so valuable it served as currency, salt has influenced the establishment of trade routes and cities, provoked and financed wars, secured empires and inspired revolutions. Populated by colorful characters and filled with fascinating details, Mark Kurlansky's kaleidoscopic and illuminating history is a multi-layered masterpiece that blends economic, scientific, political, religious, and culinary records into a rich and memorable tale.

**Levitt, Steve D. *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything.***

Through forceful storytelling and wry insight, Levitt and Dubner show that economics is, at root, the study of incentives—how people get what they want, or need, especially when other people want or need the same thing. In *Freakonomics*, they explore the hidden side of . . . well, everything. The inner workings of a crack gang. The truth about real-estate agents. The myths of campaign finance. The telltale marks of a cheating schoolteacher. The secrets of the Klu Klux Klan. What unites all these stories is a belief that the modern world, despite a great deal of complexity and downright deceit, is not impenetrable, is not unknowable, and—if the right questions are asked—is even more intriguing than we think. All it takes is a new way of looking. *Freakonomics* establishes this unconventional premise: If morality represents how we would like the world to work, then economics represents how it actually does work. It is true that readers of this book will be armed with enough riddles and stories to last a thousand cocktail parties. But *Freakonomics* can provide more than that. It will literally redefine the way we view the modern world. (Borders)

**McCullough, David. *1776.***

In this stirring book, David McCullough tells the intensely human story of those who marched with General George Washington in the year of the Declaration of Independence—when the whole American cause was riding on their success, without which all hope for independence would have been dashed and the noble ideals of the Declaration would have amounted to little more than words on paper. Based on extensive research in both American and British archives, *1776* is a powerful drama written with extraordinary narrative vitality. It is the story of Americans in the ranks, men of every shape, size, and color, farmers, schoolteachers, shoemakers, no-accounts, and mere boys turned soldiers. And it is the story of the King's men, the British commander, William Howe, and his highly disciplined redcoats who looked on their rebel foes with contempt and fought with a valor too little known. (Borders)

**Navasky, Victor S. *Naming Names.***

This book, written by a professor at Columbia University, is about the witchhunt for Communist—imagined to be lurking in every corner—during the age of Senator Joe McCarthy. It seems Hollywood insiders were particularly targeted and coerced into turning in friends and family for real or imagined Communist associations. The book focuses heavily on a few people who caved in and named names, a few others who stood strong, and how both sides lived afterwards with their choices.

**Philbrick, Nathaniel. *In the Heart of the Sea*.**

*In the Heart of the Sea* tells perhaps the greatest sea story ever. Philbrick interweaves his account of this extraordinary ordeal of ordinary men with a wealth of whale lore and with a brilliantly detailed portrait of the lost, unique community of Nantucket whalers. Impeccably researched and beautifully told, the book delivers the ultimate portrait of man against nature, drawing on a remarkable range of archival and modern sources, including a long-lost account by the ship's cabin boy. At once a literary companion and a page-turner that speaks to the same issues of class, race, and man's relationship to nature that permeate the works of Melville, *In the Heart of the Sea* will endure as a vital work of American history. (Borders)

**Pink, Daniel. *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*.**

The future belongs to a different kind of person with a different kind of mind: artists, inventors, storytellers-creative and holistic "right-brain" thinkers whose abilities mark the fault line between who gets ahead and who doesn't. Drawing on research from around the world, Pink outlines the six fundamentally human abilities that are absolute essentials for professional success and personal fulfillment-and reveals how to master them. *A Whole New Mind* takes readers to a daring new place, and a provocative and necessary new way of thinking about a future that's already here.

**Roberts, Cokie. *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation*.**

While much has been written about the men who signed the Declaration of Independence, battled the British, and framed the Constitution, the wives, mothers, sisters and daughters they left behind have been little noticed by history. #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Cokie Roberts brings us women who fought the Revolution as valiantly as the men, often defending their very doorsteps. Drawing upon personal correspondence, private journals, and even favored recipes, Roberts reveals the often surprising stories of these fascinating women, bringing to life the everyday trials and extraordinary triumphs of individuals like Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, Deborah Read Franklin, Eliza Pinckney, Catherine Littlefield Green, Esther DeBerdt Reed and Martha Washington-proving that without our exemplary women, the new country might have never survived. (Borders)

**Wolfe, Tom. *The Right Stuff*.**

After an opening chapter on the terror of being a test pilot's wife, the story cuts back to the late 1940s, when Americans were first attempting to break the sound barrier. Test pilots, we discover, are people who live fast lives with dangerous machines, not all of them airborne. Chuck Yeager was certainly among the fastest, and his determination to push through Mach 1--a feat that some had predicted would cause the destruction of any aircraft--makes him the book's guiding spirit. Yet soon the focus shifts to the seven initial astronauts. Wolfe traces Alan Shepard's suborbital flight and Gus Grissom's embarrassing panic on the high seas (making the controversial claim that Grissom flooded his Liberty capsule by blowing the escape hatch too soon). The author also produces an admiring portrait of John Glenn's apple-pie heroism and selfless dedication. By the time Wolfe concludes with a return to Yeager and his late-career exploits, the narrative's epic proportions and literary merits are secure. Certainly *The Right Stuff* is the best, the funniest, and the most vivid book ever written about America's manned space program. (Amazon)