



Black Snow

DELVE DEEPER READING LIST



This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Ann Howard, Library Branch Manager, MIS, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary Black Snow.

In a remote Siberian coal mining city, residents discover deadly gases seeping from an abandoned mine into their homes. Local journalist Natalia Zubkova begins investigating, but her viral reporting triggers an aggressive government cover-up. Facing mounting pressure from authorities, she risks everything to expose an environmental catastrophe that threatens her entire community.

Contributors



Ann Howard / MIS

I began my journey with the Bay County Public Library, Panama City, Florida, in 2017 as an entry-level circulation staff member. Over the years, I advanced to Circulation Department Manager, Interlibrary Loan Librarian, and now serve as Branch Manager. I earned my Master's of Information Science from Florida State University in 2024. Working in the library has been my true passion, and my library stories always make for the best conversations at parties.

ADULT NON-FICTION

Amos, Howard. *Russia Starts Here: Real Lives in the Ruins of Empire*. Bloomsbury Continuum, 2025.

This is a lyrical portrait of Russia where it meets NATO and the EU – a place of frontiers and boundaries that reveals unfamiliar and uncomfortable truths. In a country where history has been erased, manipulated, and marginalised, the voices Howard Amos spotlights are a powerful antidote against forgetting.

From the last inhabitants of a dying village to the long-term residents of a psychiatric hospital and a museum curator fighting local opposition to chronicle Pskov's forgotten Jewish heritage, Howard Amos uncovers compelling stories that are shaped by violence, tragedy, and loss. He also encounters some of the powerful men who have loomed over Pskov, leaving a troubling legacy in their wake, from far-right politicians to Putin's personal priest.

Bauman, Stephan, Matthew Soerens, and Issam Smeir. *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis*. Moody Publishers, 2016.

We can't ignore the refugee crisis—arguably the greatest geo-political issue of our time—but how do we even begin to respond to something so massive and complex? In *Seeking Refuge*, three experts from World Relief, a global organization serving refugees, offer a practical, well-rounded, well-researched guide to the issue.

Drawing from history, public policy, psychology, many personal stories, and their own unique Christian worldview, the authors offer a nuanced and compelling portrayal of the plight of refugees and the extraordinary opportunity we have to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Browder, Bill. *Red Notice: A True Story of High Finance, Murder, and One Man's Fight for Justice*. Simon & Schuster, 2015.

This is a story about an accidental activist. Bill Browder started out his adult life as the Wall Street maverick whose instincts led him to Russia just after the breakup of the Soviet Union, where he made his fortune.

Along the way, he exposed corruption, and when he did, he barely escaped with his life. His Russian lawyer, Sergei Magnitsky, wasn't so lucky: he ended up in jail, where he was tortured to death. That changed Browder forever. He saw the murderous heart of the Putin regime and has spent the last half-decade on a campaign to expose it. Because of that, he became Putin's number one enemy, especially after Browder succeeded in having a law passed in the United States—The Magnitsky Act—that punishes a list of Russians implicated in the lawyer's murder. Putin famously retaliated with a law that bans Americans from adopting Russian orphans.

A financial caper, a crime thriller, and a political crusade, *Red Notice* is the story of one man taking on overpowering odds to change the world, and also the story of how, without intending to, he found meaning in his life.

Politkovskaya, Anna. *Putin's Russia: Life in a Failing Democracy*. Holt Paperbacks, 2007.

Hailed as "a lone voice crying out in a moral wilderness" (New Statesman), Anna Politkovskaya made her name with her fearless reporting on the war in Chechnya. Here, she turned her steely gaze on the multiple threats to Russian stability, among them Vladimir Putin himself.

Sounding an urgent alarm, *Putin's Russia* is a gripping portrayal of a country in crisis and the testament of a great and intrepid reporter, who received death threats and survived assassination attempts for her scathing criticism of the Kremlin. Tragically, on October 7, 2006, Politkovskaya was shot and found dead in an elevator in her Moscow apartment building. After several years of investigations, five men were imprisoned for her murder.

Thomas, Erin Ann. *Coal in Our Veins: A Personal Journey*. Utah State University Press, 2012.

In *Coal in Our Veins*, Erin Thomas employs historical research, autobiography, and journalism to intertwine the history of coal, her ancestors' lives mining coal, and the societal and environmental impacts of the United States' dependency on coal as an energy source. In the first part of her book, she visits Wales, the native ground of British coal mining and her emigrant ancestors. The Thomases' move to the coal region of Utah—where they witnessed the Winter Quarters and Castle Gate mine explosions, two of the worst mining disasters in American history—and the history of coal development in Utah form the second part.

Then Thomas investigates coal mining and communities in West Virginia, near her East Coast home, looking at the Sago Mine collapse and more widespread impacts of mining, including population displacement, mountain top removal, coal dust dispersal, stream pollution, flooding, and decimation. The book's final part moves from Washington D.C.—and an examination of coal, CO₂, and national energy policy—back to Utah, for a tour of a coal mine, and a consideration of the Crandall Canyon mine cave-in, back to Wales and the closing of the oldest operating deep mine in the world and then to a look at energy alternatives, especially wind power, in West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

ADULT FICTION

Grisham, John. *Gray Mountain*. Vintage, 2015.

The year is 2008, and Samantha Kofer's career at a huge Wall Street law firm is on the fast track—until the recession hits and she is downsized, furloughed, and escorted out of the building. Samantha, though, is offered an opportunity to work at a legal aid clinic for one year without pay, all for a slim chance of getting rehired.

In a matter of days Samantha moves from Manhattan to Brady, Virginia, population 2,200, in the heart of Appalachia, a part of the world she has only read about. Samantha's new job takes her into the murky and dangerous world of coal mining, where laws are often broken, communities are divided, and the land itself is under attack. But some of the locals aren't so thrilled to have a big-city lawyer in town, and within weeks, Samantha is engulfed in litigation that turns deadly. Because like most small towns, Brady harbors big secrets that some will kill to conceal.

Hickam, Homer. *Carrying Albert Home: The Somewhat True Story of A Man, His Wife, and Her Alligator*. William Morrow Paperbacks, 2016.

Elsie Lavender and Homer Hickam (the father of the author) were high school classmates in the West Virginia coalfields, graduating just as the Great Depression began. When Homer asked for her hand, Elsie instead headed to Orlando, where she sparked with a dancing actor named Buddy Ebsen (yes, that Buddy Ebsen). But when Buddy headed for New York, Elsie's dreams of a life with him were crushed, and eventually she found herself back in the coalfields, married to Homer.

Unfulfilled as a miner's wife, Elsie was reminded of her carefree days with Buddy every day because of his unusual wedding gift: an alligator named Albert she raised in the only bathroom in the house. When Albert scared Homer by grabbing his pants, he gave Elsie an ultimatum: "Me or that alligator!" After giving it some thought, Elsie concluded there was only one thing to do: Carry Albert home.

Carrying Albert Home is the funny, sweet, and sometimes tragic tale of a young couple and a special alligator on a crazy 1,000-mile adventure. Told with the warmth and down-home charm that made *Rocket Boys* a beloved bestseller, Homer Hickam's rollicking tale is ultimately a testament to that strange and marvelous emotion we inadequately call love.

Russell, Mary Doria. *The Women of the Copper Country*. Atria Books, 2020.

In July 1913, twenty-five-year-old Annie Clements has seen enough of the world to know that it's unfair. She's spent her whole life in the mining town of Calumet, Michigan, where men risk their lives for meager salaries—and have barely enough to put food on the table for their families. The women labor in the houses of the elite, and send their husbands and sons deep underground each day, dreading the fateful call of the company man telling them their loved ones aren't coming home. So,

when Annie decides to stand up for the entire town of Calumet, nearly everyone believes she may have taken on more than she is prepared to handle.

Yet as Annie struggles to improve the future of her town, her husband becomes increasingly frustrated with her growing independence. She faces the threat of prison while also discovering a forbidden love. On her fierce quest for justice, Annie will see just how much she is willing to sacrifice for the families of Calumet.

Silva, Daniel. *Moscow Rules*. Putnam Adult, 2008.

The death of a journalist leads Gabriel Allon to Russia, where he finds that in terms of spycraft, even he has something to learn. He's playing by Moscow rules now.

It is not the grim, gray Moscow of Soviet times but a new Moscow, awash in oil wealth and choked with bulletproof Bentleys. A Moscow where power resides once more behind the walls of the Kremlin and where critics of the ruling class are ruthlessly silenced. Moscow is where a new generation of Stalinists is plotting to reclaim an empire lost and to challenge the global dominance of its old enemy, the United States.

One such man is Ivan Kharkov, a former KGB colonel who built a global investment empire on the rubble of the Soviet Union. Hidden within that empire, however, is a more lucrative and deadly business. Kharkov is an arms dealer - and he is about to deliver Russia's most sophisticated weapons to al-Qaeda. Unless Allon can learn the time and place of the delivery, the world will see the deadliest terror attacks since 9/11 - and the clock is ticking fast.

Wiseman, Ellen Marie. *Coal River: A Powerful and Unforgettable Story of 20th Century Injustice*. Kensington, 2020.

As a child, Emma Malloy left isolated Coal River, Pennsylvania, vowing never to return. Now, orphaned and penniless at nineteen, she accepts a train ticket from her aunt and uncle and travels back to the rough-hewn community. Treated like a servant by her relatives, Emma works for free in the company store. There, miners and their impoverished families must pay inflated prices for food, clothing, and tools, while those who owe money are turned away to starve.

Most heartrending of all are the breaker boys Emma sees around the village—young children who toil all day sorting coal amid treacherous machinery. Their soot-stained faces remind Emma of the little brother she lost long ago, and she begins leaving stolen food on families' doorsteps and marking the miners' bills as paid.

Though Emma's actions draw ire from the mine owner and police captain, they lead to an alliance with a charismatic miner who offers to help her expose the truth. And as the lines blur between what is legal and what is just, Emma must risk everything to follow her conscience.

Richardson, Kim Michele. *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*. Sourcebooks Landmark, 2019.

The hardscrabble folks of Troublesome Creek have to scrap for everything—everything except books, that is. Thanks to Roosevelt's Kentucky Pack Horse Library Project, Troublesome's got its very own traveling librarian, Cussy Mary Carter.

Cussy's not only a book woman, however, she's also the last of her kind, her skin a shade of blue unlike most anyone else. Not everyone is keen on Cussy's family or the Library Project, and a Blue is often blamed for any whiff of trouble. If Cussy wants to bring the joy of books to the hill folks, she's going to have to confront prejudice as old as the Appalachias and suspicion as deep as the holler.

Inspired by the true blue-skinned people of Kentucky and the brave and dedicated Kentucky Pack Horse library service of the 1930s, *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* is a story of raw courage, fierce strength, and one woman's belief that books can carry us anywhere—even back home.

YOUNG ADULT NON-FICTION

Gorokhova, Elena. *A Mountain of Crumbs: A Memoir*. Simon & Schuster, 2011.

Elena's country is no longer the majestic Russia of literature or the tsars, but a nation struggling to retain its power and its pride. Born with a desire to explore the world beyond her borders, Elena finds her passion in the complexity of the English language—but in the Soviet Union of the 1960s such a passion verges on the subversive. Elena is controlled by the state the same way she is controlled by her mother, a mirror image of her motherland: overbearing, protective, difficult to leave. In the battle

between a strong-willed daughter and her authoritarian mother, the daughter, in the end, must break free and leave in order to survive.

Through Elena's captivating voice, we learn not only the stories of Russian family life in the second half of the twentieth century, but also the story of one rebellious citizen whose curiosity and determination finally transport her to a new world. It is an elegy to the lost country of childhood, where those who leave can never return.

Phillips, Jennifer. *Nina Kosterina: A Young Communist in Stalinist Russia*. Jennifer Phillips, 2020.

Nina Kosterina was born in a revolutionary camp as the Bolsheviks took over Russia in the 1920s. She beat the odds of survival during the harsh early years and emerged in the 1930s as a young Communist woman in love with her country, her family, her city, her friends, politics, art and life.

Even when Joseph Stalin's regime tore apart her family and imprisoned her father, she remained loyal to her country and joined an elite group of young women turned guerrilla soldiers when the Germans invaded Russia in 1941. Nina perished in a Nazi ambush behind enemy lines.

After the war, her family found her diary hidden in a wardrobe. Years later, the diary was released as a book and became an international bestseller. Written from ages 15 to 20, the diary revealed a teenager transforming into an adult juxtaposed against one of the most dangerous and tumultuous periods in world history.

Fleischman, Paul. *Eyes Wide Open: Going Behind the Environmental Headlines*. Candlewick, 2014.

We're living in an Ah-Ha moment. Take 250 years of human ingenuity. Add abundant fossil fuels. The result: a population and lifestyle never before seen. The downsides weren't visible for centuries, but now they are. Suddenly everything needs rethinking — suburbs, cars, fast food, cheap prices. It's a changed world.

This book explains it. Not with isolated facts, but the principles driving attitudes and events, from vested interests to denial to big-country syndrome. Because money is as important as molecules in the environment, science is joined with politics, history, and psychology to provide the briefing needed to comprehend the 21st century.

Bartoletti, Susan Campbell. *Growing Up in Coal Country*. Clarion Books, 1999.

Inspired by her in-laws' recollections of working in coal country, Susan Campbell Bartoletti has gathered the voices of men, women, and children who immigrated to and worked in northeastern Pennsylvania at the turn of the century. The story that emerges is not just a story of long hours, little pay, and hazardous working conditions; it is also the uniquely American story of immigrant families working together to make a new life for themselves. It is a story of hardship and sacrifice, yet also of triumph and the fulfillment of hopes and dreams.

Raymond, Alyssa, Vecchione, Patrice. *Ink Knows No Borders: Poems of the Immigrant and Refugee Experience*. Triangle Square, 2019.

This collection of sixty-four poems by poets who come from all over the world shares the experience of first- and second-generation young adult immigrants and refugees. Whether it's cultural and language differences, homesickness, social exclusion, racism, stereotyping, or questions of identity, the Dreamers, immigrants, and refugee poets included here encourage readers to honor their roots as well as explore new paths, offering empathy and hope. Many of the struggles described are faced by young people everywhere: isolation, self-doubt, confusion, and emotional dislocation. But also joy, discovery, safety, and family. This is a hopeful, beautiful, and meaningful book for any reader.

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Sedgwick, Marcus. *Snowflake, AZ*. Norton Young Readers, 2019.

Ash boards a Greyhound bus heading to the place where Bly was last seen: Snowflake, Arizona. Six thousand feet up in the wide red desert, Ash meets Mona, her dog, her goat, and her neighbors, and finds stepbrother Bly, too.

In their ramshackle homes, the walls lined with tinfoil, almost all the residents of Snowflake are sick. But this isn't any ordinary sickness: the chemicals and technologies of modern life are poisoning them. They call themselves canaries, living warning signs that humans have pushed the environment too far, except no one seems to be taking their warnings seriously. The healthy "normies" of Snowflake have

written them off as a bunch of eccentrics, and when Ash too falls ill, the doctor's response is "It's all in your mind."

Snowflake, AZ contemplates illness and health—both our own and our planet's. As Ash lives through a cycle of illness and recovery and loss, the world beyond is succumbing to its own affliction: a breakdown of civilization only distantly perceived by Ash and the isolated residents of Snowflake, from which there may or may not be a chance for recovery. This provocative novel by one of our most admired storytellers explores the resilience of love and community in the face of crisis.

Hayder, Liz. *Bearmouth: A Novel*. Norton Young Readers, 2020.

Life in Bearmouth is one of hard labor and isolation, where daylight is a distant memory. Newt has lived in the mine since the age of four, and accepts everything from the harsh working conditions to the brutality of the overseers. Newt is described early on as "not a boy nor yet a wimmin," who lives and works in a mine named Bearmouth. All the boys and men there are trapped by low wages, cruel management, and a draconian religion, thus dooming them to a life of servitude.

When a new worker named Devlin is added to their crew, Newt is wary yet drawn to him. Devlin begins to plant seeds of revolution in Newt's mind, so when a secret is revealed and their way of life is challenged, Newt's eyes are opened to how very trapped they all are. Against a background of creeping violence and rising tensions, a chain of events confronts the pitiless Bearmouth system and threatens to destroy their entire world.

Locke, Katherine. *This Rebel Heart*. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2022.

A tumultuous tale of the student-led 1956 Hungarian revolution—and an all too timely look at the impact of Communism and the USSR in Eastern Europe. In the middle of Budapest, there is a river. Csilla knows the river is magic. During WWII, the river kept her family safe when they needed it most—safe from the Holocaust. But that was before the Communists seized power. Before her parents were murdered by the Soviet police. Before Csilla knew things about her father's legacy that she wishes she could forget.

Now Csilla keeps her head down, planning her escape from this country that has never loved her the way she loves it. But her carefully laid plans fall to pieces when her parents are unexpectedly, publicly exonerated. As the protests in other countries spur talk of a larger revolution in Hungary, Csilla must decide if she believes in the promise and magic of her deeply flawed country enough to risk her life to help save it, or if she should let it burn to the ground.

Standiford, Natalie. *The Boy on the Bridge*. Scholastic Press, 2013.

When Laura decides to spend a semester in Russia, it is for many reasons. She wants to learn the language. See the culture. Walk through the wintry streets. Escape all the confusion back home. She does not intend to fall in love. But there he is - the boy on the bridge. Alyosha. Fate pushes them together, and once they're there, neither one of them wants to let go. But what chance does their love

have in a place where the truth is dangerous and complicated, and the future seems as abstract as the present is real?

Smith, Mark. *The Boy on the Bridge*. Text Publishing Company, 2022.

Hesse lives in a small coastal town, where a coalmine and power station are a part of the scenery, and a part of the ever-growing problem of climate change. His mum is a member of a local environmental group campaigning to close the mine and shut down the power station. It's a no-brainer, of course, but Hesse is more interested in surfing—and Fenna, the new exchange student from the Netherlands.

But when someone seems to be trying to derail the campaign, and his friends' families face losing their jobs, Hesse begins to realise that things are complex. Even though he's reluctant to step into the spotlight, with Fenna's encouragement he decides it's time to make a stand. Because some things are too important to leave to everyone else. And even one small, nervous voice can make a difference.

Smith, Lindsay. *Sekret*. Roaring Brook Press, 2014.

Yulia knows she must hide her thoughts and control her emotions to survive in Communist Russia. But if she sometimes manipulates the black market traders by reading their thoughts when she touches their skin, so what? Anything to help her survive.

Russia's powerful spy agency, the KGB, is recruiting young people with mind-reading capabilities for their psychic espionage program. Their mission: protect the Soviet space program from American CIA spies. Why shouldn't the KGB use any means necessary to make the young psychic cooperate? Anything to beat the American capitalist scum to the moon.

Yulia is a survivor. She won't be controlled by the KGB, who want to harness her abilities for the State with no regard for her own hopes and dreams. She won't let handsome Sergei plan her life as a member of elite Soviet society, or allow brooding Valentin to consume her with his dangerous mind and even more dangerous ideas. And she certainly won't become the next victim of the powerful American spy who can scrub a brain raw—and seems to be targeting Yulia.

BOOKS FOR YOUNGER LEARNERS AND CHILDREN

Dr. Seuss. *The Lorax*. Random House Books for Young Readers, 1971.

Dr. Seuss's beloved story teaches kids to treat the planet with kindness and stand up and speak up for others. Experience the beauty of the Truffula Trees and the danger of taking our earth for granted in a story that is timely, playful, and hopeful. The book's final pages teach us that just one small seed, or one small child, can make a difference.

Tyler, Rebecca. *Colby the Coal Mining Bee*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013.

Colby is a sweet-natured bee who works hard for his colony. When he discovers what appears to be a swarm of enormous, flightless bees, he follows them underground to see if they have found a new source of pollen. Things don't go quite as he planned, but his creativity yields unexpected results!

Tarbescu, Edith. *Annushka's Voyage*. Clarion Books, 1998.

Set at the turn of the century, this sensitively told story, based on the true story of the author's own mother's journey to America, follows the journey of two young sisters as they travel from their small village in Russia to join their papa in New York. In her lively text, Edith Tarbescu communicates the hopes and fears of the two young immigrants. Expressive illustrations capture the many extraordinary moments of the sisters' transatlantic journey including their glorious reunion with Papa, made possible with the help of a pair of special Sabbath candlesticks.

Karst, Patrice. *The Invisible String*. Little Brown Books for Young Readers, 2018.

In this relatable and reassuring contemporary classic, a mother tells her two children that they're all connected by an invisible string. "That's impossible!" the children insist, but still they want to know more: "What kind of string?" The answer is the simple truth that binds us all: An Invisible String made of love. Even though you can't see it with your eyes, you can feel it deep in your heart, and know that you are always connected to the ones you love. Does everybody have an Invisible String? How far does it reach? Does it ever go away? This heartwarming picture book for all ages explores questions about the intangible yet unbreakable connections between us, and opens up deeper conversations about love.

Smith, Jane. *Hello, New House*. Albert Whitman & Company, 2020.

When a family moves cross-country, a young girl learns to adjust to her new home. There are new neighbors, new weather--and scary nighttime sounds! But she realizes that not everything is different: her family is still by an ocean, and, more importantly, still together. This heartwarming family story illustrates how some things change, but others remain the same.

Corrigan, Kelly. *Hello, World!*. Flamingo Books, 2021.

Hello World! is the perfect reminder that the journeys we take through life are all about the people we will meet along the way--people who will make us smarter, stronger, and more amazing than we ever thought possible. With her trademark inspirational wisdom, Kelly Corrigan writes the perfect book for anyone about to embark on a new adventure.