

Christmas gift guide

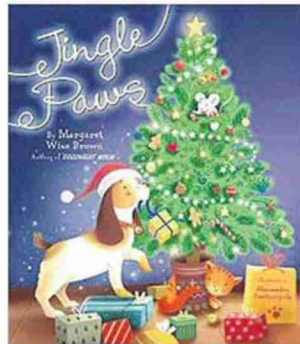
Books make ideal holiday presents, particularly during the colder months. Not much is better than curling up under a blanket in a comfy chair next to a roaring fireplace, hot chocolate beside you, and reading an excellent book.

Few gifts are as personal as books. Whether you share books that are meaningful to you or select works catered to the individual interests of your friends and family, you're not just handing over a block of paper; you're making a connection that demonstrates your thoughtfulness and care.

Here are some great books to give over the holidays:



FOR CHILDREN



"Jingle Paws" by Margaret Wise Brown, illustrated by Alessandra Psacharopulo, is a slim but oversized story book that reimagines "Twas the Night Before Christmas" to center around the pets in the house, who are, in fact, stirring. It's a great story to share with your child leading up

to Christmas or on the holiday itself. The full-color illustrations are appealing and cute.

"The Magical Tale of Santa Dust: A Christmas Tradition" by Patricia Cardello aims to start a new Christmas Eve tradition at your house. The story focuses on two children who are sad because Santa Claus never finds their house. With the help of an elf and some magic dust, however, Santa comes to visit them for the first time. The book is ornate and fancifully wrapped to include a keepsake ornament and a pouch of Santa dust. With your children's help, sprinkle a little dust around your house to make sure Santa finds his way.

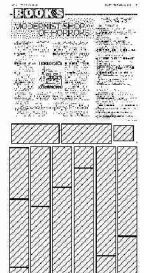
Children who enjoy aquariums will love **"Ocean: A Photicular Book" by Carol Kaufman and Dan Kainen**. The book uses lenticular imagery to immerse readers in an undersea world that's

shockingly accurate thanks to sliding lenses and four-color imagery. That's a complicated way to say that when you open the book, you'll see an octopus swimming, a shark opening and closing its mouth, a sea nettle undulating and more.

When you read the words "National Geographic," you probably don't think about the popular video game "Angry Birds." But the magazine has partnered with the game makers to publish **"Angry Birds Animal Showdown: 50 Wild and Crazy Animal Face-Offs" by Mel White**. The book, which introduces readers to various creatures and then pits them against each other, is colorful and fun but probably best for 'tweens. It includes a free "Angry Birds Rio" power-up code.

FOR ANIMAL LOVERS

Some animals are so



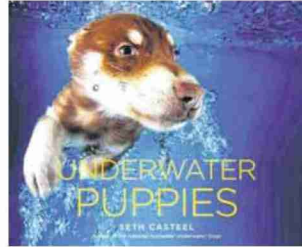
bizarre it's a wonder they exist at all. That inspired **Mara Grunbaum** to write **"WTF, Evolution?! A Theory of Unintelligible Design."** Grunbaum looks at some of nature's more misshapen creatures and postulates unscientific reasons for their existence. One simian creature, for example, looks like a sunburned, sad monkey prematurely aged beyond its years. "Oh no, Evolution," Grunbaum writes. "Whatever it was that the bald uakari did to anger you, surely it didn't deserve this."

Is there a cat lady in your life? Feed her feline habit by giving her **"Cat Lady Chic"** by **Diane Lovejoy**. The book is a photo collection of celebrities with their cats, paintings of cats and quotes about cats, including this one from actress Brigitte Bardot: "I am really a cat transformed into a woman. ... I purr. I scratch. And sometimes I bite."

Here's another option for the cat lover: **"67 Reasons Why Cats Are Better Than Dogs"** by **Jack Shepherd**, editorial director of BuzzFeed. The book contains comical misinterpretations of photos of cats and dogs, some of them laugh-out-loud funny. I won't ruin the punchlines for you.

"Unlikely Heroes: 37 Inspiring Stories of Courage and Heart from the Animal Kingdom" by **Jennifer S. Holland** will tug at readers' heartstrings. The animals in her book aren't just dogs and cats and other domes-

ticated pets; they're also real world creatures such as hippos and sea lions, gorillas and goats. There's a certain amount of anthropomorphizing these animals, but the stories are good and the pictures amazing. And there's a bionic dog. Really.



"Underwater Puppies" by **Seth Casteel** pretty much speaks for itself. It's an oversized photo book containing images of puppies submerged in water. Some look terrified, some angry and some perfectly comfortable. All are captured in high-quality photos that seem to want to swim off the page. The book is the sequel to Casteel's best-selling "Underwater Dogs."

OK, so you can't pet a dinosaur. That doesn't mean some people don't love them. **"Dinosaurs: The Grand Tour"** by **Keiron Pim** is a perfect gift for an older child who's fascinated by the extinct beasts or for parents who want to impress their dinosaur-loving kids. The oversized book is a fascinating and comprehensive guide to all things dinosaur. Right on the cover, it promises "everything worth knowing about dinosaurs from Aardonyx to Zuniceratops." Meticulously illustrated, informative, yet readable.

Sarcastic adults and children may enjoy **"Guide to Troubled Birds"** by **Mincing Mockingbird**. This slim, 64-page hardcover book is simply absurd. The cover promises that the book is "profusely illustrated," and that's no lie. It's filled with painted images of birds, each one linked to a statement or brief story. The title page notes that it's "an authoritative illustrated compendium to be consulted in the event of an infant or small child being torn apart by a murder of crows." The first photo is accompanied by this text: "He gave them the heebie-jeebies. He had nothing else to give." It's silly, quirky fun.

FICTION

"Booklist" describes **"The Tudor Vendetta"** by **C. W. Gortner** as "action-packed palace intrigue at its best." If that description appeals to you, you'll probably love this book, the third volume of Gortner's "Elizabeth I Spymaster Chronicles." It follows the rise of Brendan Prescott as a spymaster in the service of the queen as he seeks a lady-in-waiting who mysteriously vanished in Yorkshire.

"The Happiest People in the World" by **Brock Clarke** is a bleakly funny tale of a Danish cartoonist who comes to the U.S. under CIA protection after angering people with his drawings of Muhammad. Things go mad from there. "Take the format of a spy thriller,

shape it around real-life incidents involving international terrorism, leaven it with dark, dry humor, toss in a love rectangle, give everybody a gun, and let everything play out in the outer reaches of upstate New York — there you have an idea of ... Clarke's new novel," according to the book jacket. Clarke also is the author of the critically acclaimed "An Arsonist's Guide to Writers' Homes in New England."



Arnaldur Indridason is an exceptional suspense novelist. His latest, **"Strange Shores,"** is the eighth book in his Inspector Erlendur series, all set in his home country of Iceland. This time the taciturn Erlendur, whose life has been filled with tragedy, finds himself of a woman who went missing during a blizzard — just as his brother vanished many years before. Can he find the missing woman? Can he finally figure out what happened to his brother? And can he cope with whatever he learns? Indridason's books are still in stores; pick up several of his earlier works, starting with "Jar City," to give a great gift pack.

Best-selling novelist **Elin Hilderbrand** has written 14 popular novels, including her latest, **"Winter Street,"** which documents a dramatic Christmas in Nantucket. Kelley Quinn owns the Winter Street Inn there, and he's looking forward to spending the holiday with his four grown children. Each child brings a different burden with them, and when things turn chaotic, it's up to Quinn's ex-wife to save the day. As the book jacket notes: "Before the mulled cider is gone, the delightfully dysfunctional Quinn family will survive a love triangle, an unplanned pregnancy, a federal crime, a small house fire, many shots of whiskey, and endless rounds of Christmas caroling."

"Wonderland" by Stacy D'Erasmus tells the story of a middle-aged musical icon trying to make a comeback after seven years out of the public spotlight. Intense and vivid, it's as much about what's going on inside the protagonist's head as it is about the glitz and glamour that surrounds her. This is, she knows, her chance to share what she needs to say ... but how do you refine your thoughts into words that people will actually hear?

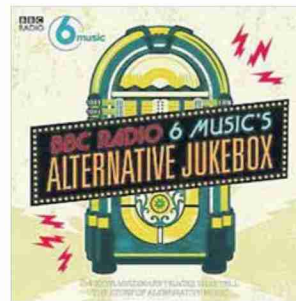
You probably know **B.J. Novak** best as Ryan, the scheming, noncommittal intern from the long-running American sitcom, "The Office." But Novak, who wrote some of the episodes, has a sly wit, which he shows off in

"One More Thing: Stories and Other Stories."

"Booklist" praised the story collection for its "dizzying array of subjects, from Aesop's fables to tabloid Elvis to our oracular enthrallment to the stock market. A master of cringe, Novak imagines a blind date with a warlord, a Comedy Central TV roast of Nelson Mandela, and a mortifying misunderstanding between mega-best-selling novelist John Grisham and his new editor." It's laugh-out-loud funny.

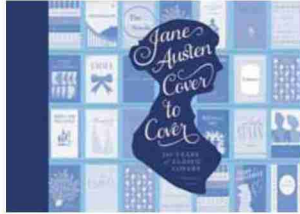
SEE GUIDE, BACK PAGE

NONFICTION



Back in the day, applying the label of "alternative" to music meant something. Tracks from alternative acts found air play on college radio stations, if at all. It was underground music, outside the mainstream. Now you can hear alternative music on Top 40 stations and in supermarkets. If you know someone who loves outsider music, consider buying them **"The Alternative Jukebox: 500 Extraordinary Tracks That Tell the Story of Alternative Music" by BBC Radio 6.** The book takes readers from the 1960s to today,

sharing the stories behind songs by everyone from Sly and the Family Stone to Alabama Shakes, including an extended stay in the 1980s.



Every family has at least one Jane Austen fan. Reward your favorite Austen-ite with **"Jane Austen Cover to Cover: 200 Years of Classic Covers"** by **Margaret C. Sullivan**, founder of AustenBlog.com and author of "The Jane Austen Handbook." Her new work compiles 200 years' worth of Austen book covers in chronological order, illustrating changing technology and social mores while at the same time taking readers through Austen's life story. It's a pretty book, one that many people will enjoy looking at time and again.

If you're up for spending some cash, consider **"Houses of Civil War America"** by **Hugh Howard with photographs by Roger Straus III**. It's a big, somberly beautiful book that could live on a coffee table, and it features the homes of Robert E. Lee, Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, Clara Barton, William Henry Seward, Horace Greeley and more.

Another great choice is **"Mark Twain's America"** by **Harry L. Katz and the**

Library of Congress. The oversized book focuses on Twain's life from 1850 to 1910, when he worked as a Mississippi riverboat pilot, California gold prospector, journalist, novelist, public speaker, political pundit and celebrity. The book includes excerpts of Twain's writings, as well as rare book illustrations, letters, journals, vintage photographs, caricatures and more. It's basically a must for the Twain fan.

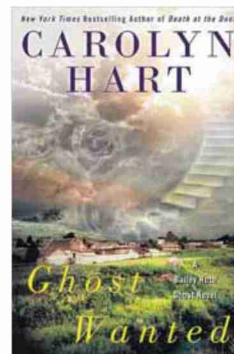
Modern America doesn't really have an equivalent of Mark Twain, but for the past 40 years, it has had "Saturday Night Live," the sketch comedy show that launched the movie careers of any number of comedians. **"Live from New York: The Complete, Uncensored History of Saturday Night Live as Told by Its Stars, Writers, and Guests"** by **James Andrew Miller and Tom Shales** is the comprehensive guide to the show and something of a love letter to it, too. Among the show's successful alums are Dan Aykroyd, Jane Curtin, Bill Murray, Chevy Chase, Mike Meyers, Molly Shannon, Julia Louis-Dreyfus and more. An earlier version of the book was published 10 years ago; the 2014 version includes almost 200 more pages of content.

Books about companies trampling on their employees are everywhere. **"Factory Man"** by **Beth Macy** tells a different tale. The book centers on John Bassett III and his family's Bassett Furni-

ture Company, at one time the world's largest manufacturer of wood furniture. Starting in the 1980s, the business began importing cheap Asian furniture and ultimately shifted most of its manufacturing to Asia. Customers noticed the difference, and Bassett fought back, returning manufacturing jobs to the U.S. and competing directly against the Asian importers. Along the way, he created American jobs and saved a town from collapse.

OKLAHOMA BOOKS

"The Splendid Things We Planned: A Family Portrait" by **Blake Bailey** is a sprawling memoir about Bailey's prominent Oklahoma family. In particular, it's about Bailey's brother, whose mental illness, substance abuse and general inability to take care of himself place everyone in his path in precarious positions. Bailey, a renowned biographer and Pulitzer finalist, infuses the story with blunt admissions and painful recollections, making it memorable yet, at times, difficult to read.

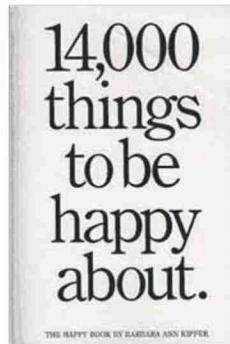


This has been the year of **Carolyn Hart**, Oklahoma City's prolific and successful mystery novelist. She has written close to 60 novels and was named a 2014 Grand Master by the Mystery Writers of America. Her most recent novel, "**Ghost Wanted**," came out in October. You can't go wrong with a gift pack of several of Hart's titles. For a seasonal title, pick up 2009's "Merry, Merry Ghost."

"**Turpen Time**" by **Mike Turpen** is a collection of short, insightful stories based on one-liners. Turpen — an Oklahoma City attorney, former state Attorney General, co-host of "Flash Point" and a well-connected politico — knows a lot about breaking the ice; after all, he's a sought-after speaker on the national stage. Turpen was tight with the Clinton administration. His book is full of insider tales and bits of wisdom.

You've probably never heard of **Herb McCutcheon**, a 72-year-old novelist from rural Oklahoma who has set out to donate copies of his books to every state library. His books are a little difficult to find to purchase, but with titles such as "**Okie**," "**Arlie McSpadden, Private Eye**" and "**The Indian Nations**," they are distinctly Oklahoman. The fonts are quite large, making the books easy for older folks to read. Buy them online at www.okiepressorderdesk.com.

FINALLY



Is there a Grinch in your household, unwilling to get into the holiday spirit? Maybe "**14,000 Things to Be Happy About**" by **Barbara Ann Kipfer** will help. It's a small book, maybe four inches by six inches by a bit over an inch, but it's jam-packed with reasons to be happy — a seemingly endless list, one right after the next, page after page after page with no ending punctuation. The last entry reads: "dozens of places to curl up with a book." Now that makes me happy.

BOOK SIGNINGS

BARNES & NOBLE, 540 Ed Noble Parkway, Norman
Krystle Nicole Martin will sign her inspirational book, "Home," from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Saturday.

BEST OF BOOKS, 1313 E Danforth, Edmond
Kent Frates will sign copies of "Oklahoma's Most Notorious Cases" from 3 to 4 p.m. Saturday.