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Popular Nonfiction Titles for 1998/99

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Popular Non-Fiction Titles for 1998/99

by Françoise Crowell (Bibliographer, YBP) <FCrowell@YBP.com>

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Scholarly books are not the only ones we send out each week to our customers. All academic book vendors, in fact, need a category to define what we call our “Popular content level” at YBP. We do a brisk trade in some of these titles, which in a few cases outsell most of the scholarly and scientific monographs which are our usual bread and butter. Here are YBP’s 50 top-selling “Popular” books, in non-fiction, for the past year.

They break down into categories which themselves are not a bad index of our national preoccupations today. Self-help books of one kind or another outnumber everything else. Medicine, health, fitness, and psychological well-being form the largest category of these, at twenty titles, led by The Osteoporosis Book (Oxford). Advice on law and money is bound up together in five titles, for example in Bankruptcy: Is it the Right Solution to Your Debt Problems? (Nolo). Other how-to-do-it topics range from Origami Omnibus (Japan Publications), to Car Smarts (John Muir).

Coffee table books, another popular genre, tend to cluster in natural history and gardening, where our list records such books as The American Robin (Univ of Texas) and The Free-Spirited Garden (Chronicle). Interior decoration dots the list with such entries as Williamsburg: Decorating with Style (Clarkson Potter). Travel and self-improvement are linked together twice, first by London Theatre Walks (Applause), and by the last title on our list, which has sold 33 copies to date, America’s Scientific Treasures (American Chemical Society).

“Self-knowledge,” finally, might be considered a category of its own. Search: A Handbook for Adopters and Birthparents (Oryx) was inspired by the author’s search for her own birthparents. Finding Your Roots: How to Trace Your Ancestors at Home and Abroad (Putnam’s) is among the most recent in what has become a very long family tree of genealogy books published over the past 25 years. Our best-selling “popular” title, however, was Tibet: Through the Red Box (Farrar, Strauss), by Peter Sis, the author’s account of his search for knowledge about his father. This was a crossover book, in that it is one of few where the publisher has been able to attract the attention of adult readers as well as that of readers who are children or young adults. It’s an ALA Notable Children’s Book and a Caldecott Medal honors book too. YBP customers have bought more than 200 copies to date.

Sis, Peter. Tibet: Through the Red Box. Farrar, Strauss 1998 $25.00 Cloth 0374375532.


Olson, Kent C. Legal Information: How To Find It, How To Use It. Oxry 1999 $59.95 Cloth 0897749618.

Lane, Nancy E. Osteoporosis Book. Oxford Univ Press 1999 $25.00 Cloth 019511602x.

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Gould, Grant B. First Aid in the Workplace: What to Do in the First Five Minutes. Brady Medical 1998 $18.60 Paper 083595109X.


Williamsburg: Decorating with Style. Clarkson Potter 1998 $30.00 Cloth 0609600494.

Clarke, Peter. Surviving Modern Medicine: How to Get the Best from Doctors, Family and Friends. Rutgers Univ Press 1998 $38.00 Cloth 0813525551.


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