

# The Top 20 Reference Titles of the Year

**The 2004 list from ALA's Reference and User Services Association features must-have encyclopedias selected by public and academic librarians** by Michael Levine-Clark

**W**hat do you get when you put nine librarians and about 75 reference titles in hundreds of volumes together in a room for three days? If the librarians are members of the Reference and User Services Association's (RUSA) Reference Sources Committee, the result is hours of fascinating debate on the merits of each book, lengthy and interesting discussions about what factors make a great reference source, and, ultimately, a list of the 20 best reference titles published during the past year.

The committee's deliberations during ALA's Mid-winter Meeting in San Diego culminated a year of work during which committee members pored over publisher's catalogs and websites, reading every review they could find in order to identify the year's outstanding titles suitable for small and medium-sized public and academic libraries.

The committee begins its work early in the year, with each member taking one or more broad subject areas to review and organizing preliminary lists of nominees in each designated area. In October, the chair receives the information and compiles the first of many lists of all nominated titles, the last of which is usually dashed off on the way to the airport at the conclusion of the Mid-

winter Meeting. Everyone on the committee makes an effort to evaluate each title in light of the fact that only books that have been screened by all members make the final list. Throughout the process, publishers generously provide review copies.

Books are evaluated on many criteria: suitability for the intended audience, price, quality of design and construction, quality of scholarship and writing, ease of use, and often, the need for a book on a given topic. None of these criteria alone would be sufficient for a title's inclusion, but this year's 20 selections embody most or all of the required standards.

Though price is considered, expense alone is not sufficient to exclude a title. Several sources on this year's list, such as the *Encyclopedia of American History*, *Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia*, and *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Economic History*, are relatively expensive, but were deemed to be of such high quality that most libraries would want to acquire them anyway.

The committee does not generally consider second and later editions, but often a title such as the *Encyclopedia of Education* is updated and expanded to such an extent that the committee judges it to be worthy of inclusion. Two updates of classic works are included on this year's list. It was also an outstanding year for publishing in the humanities and social sciences. Titles such as *The Advertising Age Encyclopedia of Advertising* and the *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture* will long remain classic works.

The list of Outstanding Reference Sources is also available on RUSA's website at [www.ala.org/rusa/bestref.html](http://www.ala.org/rusa/bestref.html).

---

MICHAEL LEVINE-CLARK is interim coordinator of collection development, assistant professor, and reference librarian at the University of Denver's Penrose Library. As chair of RUSA's Reference Sources Committee, he wrote the introduction for this article and edited the annotations written by committee members.

*Encyclopedia of the Victorian Age* and *Darwin's Legacy* 1,839 2003 \$595

This come e variety human ticipate scope, butions most s include source Popula guide

*Encyclopedia of James* Refer

The past th ence s a wort 850 an contri rewrit pendix state d cases i page i

*Encyclopedia of the American West* ner. 5 2408

The of the Unive tor on ume e subje chron list of maps the w

*Handbook of D. Br* 2003

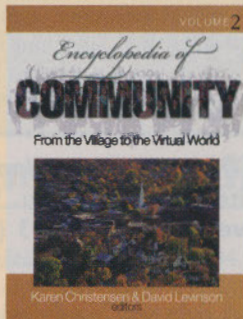
Mo resea discip Prese and s



## SOCIAL ISSUES

***Encyclopedia of Community: From the Village to the Virtual World*, edited by Karen Christensen and David Levinson. 4 vols. 1,839 p. Sage Publications, 2003 (0-7619-2598-8), \$595.**

This encyclopedia is a welcome exploration of the great variety of social networks that human beings create and participate in. Interdisciplinary in scope, the set includes contributions from some of the foremost scholars studying community today. Appendixes include an extensive bibliography, a collection of resource guides, an annotated guide to "Community in Popular Culture," and "Libraries Build Community," a guide for librarians.



***Encyclopedia of Education, 2nd ed.*, edited by James W. Guthrie. 8 vols. 3,357 p. Macmillan Reference USA, 2003 (0-02-865594-X), \$1,125.**

The first edition, published in 1971, served for the past three decades as the most comprehensive reference source on education. The revised version proves a worthy successor. Its eight volumes contain over 850 articles written or reworked by more than 1,000 contributors. Nearly every article has been completely rewritten, with many new topics added. The six appendixes include information on achievement tests, state departments of education, legislation and court cases important to the field of education, and a 138-page index.

***Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, by Harvey W. Kushner. 552 p. Sage Publications, 2003 (0-7619-2408-6), \$125.**

The author, a renowned terrorism expert and chair of the Department of Criminal Justice at Long Island University in New York City, is a frequent commentator on CNN. He has produced an engaging single-volume encyclopedia, with over 300 entries, on the subject of terrorism worldwide. Appendixes include a chronology of terrorism from 1865 to the present, a list of web resources, an extensive bibliography, and maps noting the locations of terrorist activities around the world.

***Handbook of Death and Dying*, edited by Clifton D. Bryant. 2 vols. 1,144 p. Sage Publications, 2003 (0-7619-2514-7), \$350.**

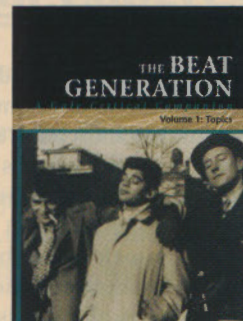
More than 100 scholars contributed to this carefully researched, well-organized, informative, and multidisciplinary source on death studies. Volume 1, "The Presence of Death," examines the cultural, historical, and societal frameworks of death, such as the univer-

sal fear of death, spirituality and various religions, the legal definition of death, suicide, and capital punishment. Volume 2, "The Response to Death," covers such topics as rites and ceremonies, grief and bereavement, and legal matters after death.

## LITERATURE

***The Beat Generation: A Gale Critical Companion*, edited by Lynn M. Zott. 3 vols. 1,622 p. Gale, 2003 (0-7876-7569-5), \$350.**

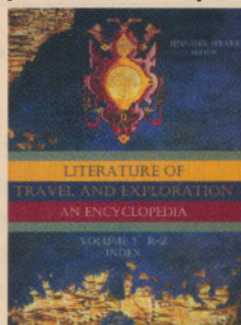
The second title in the new Gale Critical Companion Collection series focusing on important literary movements brings together the salient topics, representative works, and major writers of Beat literature. Volume one presents thematic chapters covering the Beat scene. Volumes two and three consist of introductory articles to the lives, works, themes, and critical receptions of 28 quintessential writers. Designed for high school and college students, this companion gains its value from assembled articles that highlight primary and secondary materials and reprinted criticism on important writers and works of this generation.



***Holocaust Literature: An Encyclopedia of Writers and Their Work*, edited by S. Lillian Kremer. 2 vols. 1,499 p. Routledge, 2003 (0-415-92985-7), \$295.**

This encyclopedia offers an authoritative and comprehensive survey of the important writers and works that form the literature about the Holocaust and its consequences. The collection is alphabetically arranged and consists of high-quality biocritical essays on 309 writers who are first-, second-, and third-generation survivors or important thinkers and spokespersons on the Holocaust. An essential literary reference work, this publication is an important addition to the genre and a solid value for public and academic libraries.

***Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Jennifer Speake. 3 vols. 1,520 p. Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003 (1-57958-247-8), \$375.**



Connoisseurs of travel writing and those planning a trip will delight in this new encyclopedia. Entries describe journeys, voyages, and routes; world travelers and their writings in diaries, letters, logbooks, and postcards; remarkable destinations; geographers and cartographers; and contemporary travel writers and their works. Author entries include biographical profiles. Each entry is complete with a list of references and further read-

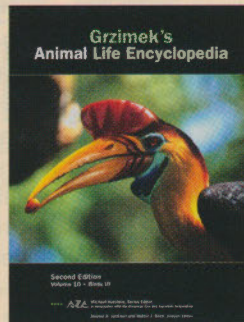


ings. Volume one contains two listings that are useful for browsing the three-volume set—an alphabetical listing of entries and a thematic list of entries. Volume three has a bibliography of all works and articles referenced in the entries as well as a general index.

### SCIENCE AND PSYCHOLOGY

**Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia, 2nd ed.,** edited by Michael Hutchins. 17 vols. 9,609 p. Gale, 2003 (0-7876-5362-4), \$1,595.

This is a revised and updated edition of one of the most authoritative and comprehensive sources on the world's animals. Similar to the first edition written by noted zoologist Bernhard Grzimek and published in 1972, the second edition covers all types of animals in geographic areas around the world. It includes high-quality photographs and illustrations and a comprehensive index to all volumes.



**Magill's Encyclopedia of Social Science: Psychology,** edited by Nancy A. Piotrowski. 4 vols. 1,200 p. Salem Press, 2003 (1-58765-130-0), \$404.

A comprehensive introduction to psychology, this work will find a home in a broad range of library collections. Each topical entry includes notes on the type of psychology and field of study covered, a list of key concepts related to the essay, and an annotated list of sources for further study. Entries on mental disorders include sidebars with the characteristic criteria for that diagnosis. High school students, undergraduates, and others will find a wealth of information in this useful set.

### BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

**The Advertising Age Encyclopedia of Advertising,** edited by John McDonough and Karen Egolf.



3 vols. 1,958 p. Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003 (1-57958-172-2), \$385.

The first comprehensive resource on this central element of our culture, this work is a valuable tool for students in a variety of disciplines, professionals in the field, and nostalgia seekers. Selected color plates complement entries on major advertising agencies and classic campaigns.

There is also substantive coverage of issues such as the representation of women and ethnic minorities as well as professional ethics.

### Other RUSA "Best" Lists Available

Visit [www.ala.org/ala/rusa/](http://www.ala.org/ala/rusa/) for RUSA's Machine-Assisted Reference Section annual list of Best Free Reference Web Sites and for the Best of the Best Business Web Sites, compiled by the RUSA Business Reference and Services Section's Education Committee.

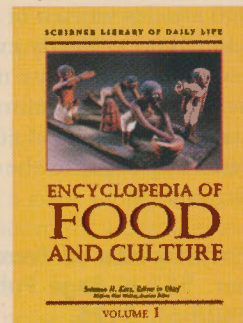
**The Oxford Encyclopedia of Economic History,** edited by Joel Mokyr. 5 vols. 2,824 p. Oxford University Press, 2003 (0-19-510507-9), \$695.

While many dictionaries of economics are available for purchase, this title is unique because of its greater depth of treatment. It offers histories and backgrounds on a significant number of economic topics, not only for the United States but also for other countries and geographic regions. Entries cover such topics as economic concepts; markets and industries; economic development in various countries; biographical essays on key people in economics and business; business products, including coffee, gas, and oil; and the economic aspects of historical events and time periods, including the Great Depression.

### CULTURE

**Encyclopedia of Food and Culture,** edited by Solomon H. Katz. 3 vols. 2,004 p. Scribner's, 2003 (0-684-80568-5), \$400.

This stunning source explores the nutritional and cultural impact of food, with articles written by anthropologists, chefs, food historians, nutritionists, agronomists, food stylists, and other food researchers. The well-written and informative entries cover the history of regional cuisines, major festivals and feasts, and general subjects that examine the cultural, sociological, and psychological perspectives of food. *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture* will be a classic for years to come.



**The Museum of Broadcast Communications Encyclopedia of Radio,** edited by Christopher H. Sterling. 3 vols. 1,696 p. Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003 (1-57958-249-4), \$375.

A premise of this unique encyclopedia is that radio broadcasting is so pervasive that its importance can be easily overlooked. More than 600 articles provide ample illustration of the role this medium plays throughout the world. From radio's invention to radio on the Internet, the cross-referenced and thoroughly indexed articles analyze over 100 years of topics, programs, issues, people, and places, and provide leads to further reading. Some 250 photographs "give visual context to an often-unseen world." Scholars, old-time-radio admirers, and



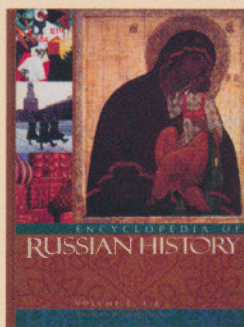
curious readers will appreciate the unparalleled comprehensiveness of this source.

### HISTORY AND CIVILIZATION

***Encyclopedia of American History*, edited by Gary B. Nash. 11 vols. 4,864 p. Facts On File, 2003 (0-8160-4371-X), \$841.50.**

Offering 11 volumes and about 3,500 entries, this comprehensive set follows the congressional-mandated National Standards for United States History—a project coedited by the editor of this encyclopedia. Each of the first 10 volumes covers a different period in American history with an alphabetical listing of entries. A chronology of important events for that period, reprints of important documents, and an index specific to each volume are included. The last volume includes a comprehensive index.

***Encyclopedia of Russian History*, edited by James R. Millar. 4 vols. 1,828 p. Macmillan Reference USA, 2003 (0-02-865693-8), \$475.**



This four-volume set features nearly 1,500 entries by experts on all aspects of Russian history, including important biographical figures, geographical areas, ethnographic groups, cultural landmarks, military campaigns, and social issues.

***Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era, 1760–1850*, edited by Christopher John Murray. 2 vols. 1,328 p. Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003 (1-57958-361-X), \$250.**

Written to stress the crosscurrent of ideas, this cultural encyclopedia provides clearly written and authoritative articles. Thoughts, themes, people, and nations that define the Romantic Era, as well as some frequently overlooked topics, receive their first encyclopedic treatment in 850 signed articles, with bibliographies and coverage of historical antecedents and lingering influences of romanticism. Even casual browsers will discover much to enjoy here.

***The Oxford Dictionary of the Renaissance*, by Gordon Campbell. 912 p. Oxford University Press, 2003 (0-19-860175-1), \$150.**

It is rare to find a comprehensive dictionary on such a vast topic in one volume. It is also uncommon to discover that the majority of the book's high-quality entries were written by one scholar. The breadth and depth of this publication are impressive, covering science and law as well as literature, philosophy, art, and religion.

***Reader's Guide to British History*, edited by David Loades. 2 vols. 1,648 p. Fitzroy**

**Dearborn, 2003 (1-57958-242-7), \$295.**

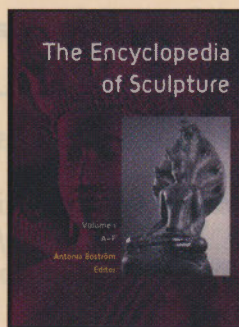
A masterful attempt to describe the historical secondary literature of the British Isles—from prehistory to present day—the set is comprised of substantial essays of 1,000 to 3,000 words each on a wide array of subjects—all written by pre-eminent scholars in language accessible to beginning students and advanced researchers. Each listed essay title is given a thorough annotation.

### THE ARTS

***Encyclopedia of American Folk Art*, edited by Gerard C. Wertkin. 704 p. Routledge, 2003 (0-415-92986-5), \$125.**

Written by 92 specialists in association with the American Folk Art Museum, the 600 cross-referenced and indexed articles, with bibliographies, included in this selection are the first comprehensive treatment of this influential art form. It includes information on bottle-cap art, canes, carousel art, scrimshaw, quilts, beadwork, and many other genres, as well as information on several visionary artists who still practice their crafts. This work has special appeal for folklorists.

***The Encyclopedia of Sculpture*, edited by Antonia Boström. 3 vols. 1,952 p. Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003 (1-57958-248-6), \$375.**



This work, covering the entire history of three-dimensional art, is a valuable addition to a core art-reference collection. International in scope, the encyclopedia—which contains strong supporting materials—provides 600 detailed entries of information on artists, major works, movements, media, techniques, regions, and nations. ♦



Patricia A. Coodes

**Members of the Reference Sources Committee (standing from left): Jeff Schwartz, Jeff Kempe, Deborah Costa, Katharine Dean, and Nevin Mayer; (seated from left) Edward Kownslar, Emily Horning, Michael Levine-Clark, and Matt Wayman.**