Colour, by Victoria Finlay
In this vivid and captivating journey through the colours of an artist’s palette, Victoria Finlay takes us on an enthralling adventure around the world and through the ages, illuminating how the colours we choose to value have determined the history of culture itself. How did the most precious colour blue travel all the way from remote lapis mines in Afghanistan to Michelangelo’s brush? What is the connection between brown paint and ancient Egyptian mummies? In Colour, Finlay explores the physical materials that colour our world, such as precious minerals and insect blood, as well as the social and political meanings that colour has carried through time.

At home: a short history of private life, by Bill Bryson
Bill Bryson was struck one day by the thought that we devote a lot more time to studying the battles and wars of history than to considering what history really consists of: centuries of people quietly going about their daily business—eating, sleeping, and merely endeavouring to get more comfortable. And that most of the key discoveries for humankind can be found in the very fabric of the houses in which we live. He did a prodigious amount of research on the history of anything and everything, from architecture to electricity, from food preservation to epidemics, from the spice trade to the Eiffel Tower, from cinnolines to toilets; and on the brilliant, creative and often eccentric minds behind them.

Garbage Land, by Elizabeth Royte
Out of sight, out of mind...into our trash cans go dead batteries, dirty diapers, bygone burritos, broken toys, tattered socks, eight-track cassettes, scratched CDs, banana peels.... But where do these things go next? In a country that consumes and then casts off more and more, what actually happens to the things we throw away? In Garbage Land, acclaimed science writer Elizabeth Royte leads us on the wild adventure that begins once our trash hits the bottom of the can.

The Surgeon of Crowthorne, by Simon Winchester
The making of the “Oxford English Dictionary” was a monumental fifty-year task requiring the assistance of thousands of writers. One of the keenest was a certain W.C. Minor, who astonished and dismayed everyone by declining ever to come to Oxford to receive his congratulations until, reputedly, his refusal eventually prompted the Dictionary's editor to travel down to Crowthorne to meet him. What he found was incredible. Minor was a millionaire American Civil War surgeon turned to Crowthorne to meet him. What he found was incredible, prompted the Dictionary’s editor to travel down everyone by declining ever to come to Oxford to receive his monumental fifty-year task requiring the

On the map, by Simon Garfield
Maps fascinate us. They chart our understanding of the world and they log our progress, but above all they tell our stories. From the early sketches of philosophers and explorers through to Google Maps and beyond, Simon Garfield examines how maps both relate and realign our history. With a historical sweep ranging from Ptolemy to Twitter, Garfield explores the legendary, impassable (and non-existent) mountains of Kong, the role of cartography in combating cholera, the 17th-century Dutch craze for Atlases, the Norse discovery of America, how a Venetian monk mapped the world from his cell and the Muppets’ knack of instant map-travel.

Woolloomooloo, by Louis Nowra
Told in his vivid and entertaining style, Louis Nowra writes Woolloomooloo’s biography, drink in hand, from the vantage point of the Old Fitzroy Hotel, the cozy, eccentric and wonderful pub on Dowling Street, Woolloomooloo. It’s a world of sea, sin, sly grog, sailors, razor gangs, larrikins, workers, artisans, murderers, fishermen, activists, drinkers, fashion designers, tradies, artists and the downright dangerous. It’s also a story of courage, resilience, tolerance, compassion. And though the pub has a real theatre, it’s the cast of real-life characters that are the stars of this show.

Jewels: a secret history, by Victoria Finlay
The author leads the reader on a treasure hunt for some of the most valuable, glamorous, and mysterious substances on earth. Journey from the underground opal churches of Outback Australia to the once pearl-rich rivers of Scotland; from the peridot mines on an Apache reservation in Arizona to the remote ruby mines in the mountains of northern Burma.

Salt: a world history, by Mark Kurlansky
The only rock we eat, salt has shaped civilization from the very beginning, and its story is a glittering, often surprising part of the history of humankind. 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 an unending series of fascinating details, Salt by Mark Kurlansky is a supremely entertaining, multi-layered masterpiece.

Moby-Duck, by Donovan Hohn
This is the remarkable story of how 28,904 bath toys spilled into the Pacific and have been washing up along beaches ever since. Setting out on a series of journeys to track the renegade rubber ducks, this is an adventure into the heart of the sea through science, myth, the global economy and some of the worst weather imaginable.