

The life canon



‘The greatest university of all is a collection of books’—[Thomas Carlyle](#)

What are the 10 essential books we need to help us flourish in the modern world?

This is a question we’ve asked ourselves at Life Squared and have arrived at an initial list of 10 important books. It includes books about history, the financial crisis and philosophy. It includes books to help us understand various aspects of our modern situation – it's a list for the times we live in, so it may be less relevant in a few years’ time.

The list is unashamedly accessible - it is not meant to be a presentation of the great cultural works of our time, but a set of books that provide perspective, ideas and inspiration in a wide range of areas of life.

These are books that will get you involved and interested – for example, there are thousands of books out there about the universe, but we’ve chosen one that will draw people in and try to make complex ideas both interesting and accessible.

Here is our initial top 10 list – including Bertrand Russell’s ‘History of Western Philosophy’. If you can't see the list, login or sign up now - it's free and it takes less than a minute to do it!

1. [Wonders of the Universe](#) - Professor Brian Cox

An accessible and awe-inspiring introduction to the universe around us. It'll give you a sense of perspective on your own life.

2. [What on Earth Happened?... in Brief: The Planet, Life and People from the Big Bang to the Present Day](#) - Christopher Lloyd

A very interesting, readable and accessible overview of the history of people and the planet from the Big Bang to the present day - in under 300 pages. A vital piece of perspective!

3. [History of Western Philosophy \(Routledge Classics\)](#) - Bertrand Russell

One of the great introductions to the ideas and history of philosophy. A wonderfully interesting book on a topic that everyone should have a basic understanding of.

4. **How Are We to Live?: Ethics in an Age of Self-Interest (OPUS)** – Peter Singer

A book about values and what it means to live in line with them. It'll make you think about about how you should live your life in an age of self-interest.

5. **Flat Earth News: An Award-winning Reporter Exposes Falsehood, Distortion and Propaganda in the Global Media** – Nick Davies

An important book exposing how the news media works, including how newspapers get their stories. Useful to help you think critically about how you get your information in life.

6. **Whoops!: Why everyone owes everyone and no one can pay** – John Lanchester

An accessible and entertaining book that helps you understand the recent financial crisis and the economic system around us in around 200 pages.

7. **Letters to a Young Contrarian** – Christopher Hitchens

A challenge to everyone to think critically and independently.

8. **Walden: Or, Life in the Woods (Dover Thrift)** – Henry David Thoreau

The classic and inspiring story of one man's escape from the encroachment of industrialisation to a cabin in the woods by a pond.

9. **Prosperity without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet** - Tim Jackson

A groundbreaking book that challenges the conventional view that endless economic growth is the panacea for global society. It provides a new vision of how human society can flourish within the ecological limits of a finite planet.

10. **Lost Art of Being Happy: Spirituality for Sceptics** – Tony Wilkinson

A no-nonsense, rational book that shows how a rich inner life is important for everyone - whether you are religious or not - and gives practical ideas on how we can cultivate the skills we need for a nourishing inner life.