

On the origin of the species  
Charles Darwin

Fortunately, Darwin was a gifted writer

This classic needs no introduction. It is mandatory reading for anyone pretending to know anything about the life sciences. Fortunately, Darwin was a gifted writer. It is very accessible. There is ample human interest in his personal experiences, whether sailing around the world on the HMS Beagle, exchanging correspondence with the leading minds of his day, or engaging his ever-curious mind in conversation with all whom he encountered in life.

Don't be afraid to give it to adolescents. I found a musty old volume in the UC Berkeley library at the age of fifteen and was fascinated. It is now, via Amazon and the Internet, much more accessible. Do it!