

8th Grade Summer Reading List

Books to Enjoy this Summer

2010

Please read and enjoy *at least one* of the following required books as you transition into 8th grade.

Novels

***Call of the Wild*, Jack London**

Jack London became one of, and perhaps the most successful writer of the turn of the 20th century. Fifty-one of his books, innumerable articles and short stories were published, and in addition, materials from his letters and personal journals were published posthumously. The best known of these books is “The Call of the Wild.” It was published as a serialized story on the Saturday Evening Post from June 20 to July 18, 1903.

The combination of man and dog against the elements of the then untamed North and the anything-goes adventurous nature of Buck, the protagonist, makes for exciting reading. London, the author, draws on his turn of the century experiences during the Goldrush in Alaska. The important element of the dogs in the life and survival of those adventurers brings an exciting element to the story. Dogs were as important as people, and London is at his best in describing this relationship through thick and thin.

(Publisher’s Synopsis)

***Thirteen Reasons Why*, Jay Asher**

When Clay Jenson plays the cassette tapes he received in a mysterious package, he's surprised to hear the voice of dead classmate Hannah Baker. He's one of 13 people who receive Hannah's story, which details the circumstances that led to her suicide. Clay spends the rest of the day and long into the night listening to Hannah's voice and going to the locations she wants him to visit. The text alternates, sometimes quickly, between Hannah's voice (italicized) and Clay's thoughts as he listens to her words, which illuminate betrayals and secrets that demonstrate the consequences of even small actions. Hannah, herself, is not free from guilt, her own inaction having played a part in an accidental auto-related death and a rape. The message about how we treat one another, although sometimes heavy, makes for compelling reading. (Amazon Review)

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, Sherman Alexie

Exploring Indian identity, both self and tribal, Alexie's first young adult novel is a semi-autobiographical chronicle of Arnold Spirit, aka Junior, a Spokane Indian from Wellpinit, WA. The bright 14-year-old was born with water on the brain, is regularly the target of bullies, and loves to draw. He says, "I think the world is a series of broken dams and floods, and my cartoons are tiny little lifeboats." He expects disaster when he transfers from the reservation school to the rich, white school in Reardan, but soon finds himself making friends with both geeky and popular students and starting on the basketball team. Meeting his old classmates on the court, Junior grapples with questions about what constitutes one's community, identity, and tribe. (Amazon Review)

Monster, Walter Dean Meyers

"Monster" is what the prosecutor called 16-year-old Steve Harmon for his supposed role in the fatal shooting of a convenience-store owner. But was Steve really the lookout who gave the "all clear" to the murderer, or was he just in the wrong place at the wrong time? In this innovative novel by Walter Dean Myers, the reader becomes both juror and witness during the trial of Steve's life. To calm his nerves as he sits in the courtroom, aspiring filmmaker Steve chronicles the proceedings in movie script format. Interspersed throughout his screenplay are journal writings that provide insight into Steve's life before the murder and his feelings about being held in prison during the trial. "They take away your shoelaces and your belt so you can't kill yourself no matter how bad it is. I guess making you live is part of the punishment." (Amazon Review)

Stargirl, Jerry Spinelli

"She was homeschooling gone amok." "She was an alien." "Her parents were circus acrobats." These are only a few of the theories concocted to explain Stargirl Caraway, a new 10th grader at Arizona's Mica Area High School who wears pioneer dresses and kimonos to school, strums a ukulele in the cafeteria, laughs when there are no jokes, and dances when there is no music. The whole school, not exactly a "hotbed of nonconformity," is stunned by her, including our 16-year-old narrator Leo Borlock: "She was elusive. She was today. She was tomorrow. She was the faintest scent of a cactus flower, the flitting shadow of an elf owl." Jerry Spinelli, author of Newbery Medalist *Maniac Magee*, Newbery Honor Book *Wringer*, and many other excellent books for teens, elegantly and accurately captures the collective, not-always-pretty emotions of a high school microcosm in which individuality is pitted against conformity. (Amazon Review)

***Catalyst*, Laurie Halse Anderson**

Meet Kate Malone—straight A science and math geek, minister's daughter, ace long-distance runner, girlfriend, unwilling family caretaker, emotional avoidance champion. Kate manages her life by organizing it, as logically as the periodic table. She can handle it all—or so she thinks. Then, like a string of chemical reactions, everything happens: the Malones' neighbors get burned out of their home and move in. Because her father is a Good Man of God (and a Not Very Thoughtful Parent), Kate has to share her room with her nemesis, Teri Litch, and Teri's adorable, troublemaking little brother. And through it all, she's still waiting to hear from the only college she has applied to: MIT. Kate's life is less and less under control—and then, something happens that blows it all apart, and forces her to examine her life, self, and heart for the first time. Set in the same community as the remarkable *Speak*, *Catalyst* is a novel that will make you think, laugh, cry, and rejoice—sometimes at the same time. (Publisher's Synopsis)

***Looking for Alaska*, John Green**

A deeply affecting coming-of-age story, *Looking for Alaska* traces the journey of Miles Halter, a misfit Florida teenager who leaves the safety of home for a boarding school in Alabama and a chance to explore the "Great Perhaps." Debut novelist and NPR commentator Green perfectly captures the intensity of feeling and despair that defines adolescence in this hip, shocking, and emotionally charged work of fiction.

Miles has a quirky interest in famous people's last words, especially François Rabelais's final statement, "I go to seek a Great Perhaps." Determined not to wait for death to begin a similar quest, Miles convinces his parents to let him leave home. Once settled at Culver Creek Preparatory School, he befriends a couple of equally gifted outcasts: his roommate Chip -- commonly known as the Colonel -- who has a predilection for memorizing long, alphabetical lists for fun; and the beautiful and unpredictable Alaska, whom Miles comes to adore.

The kids grow closer as they make their way through a school year filled with contraband, tests, pranks, breakups, and revelations about family and life. But as the story hurtles toward its shattering climax, chapter headings like "forty-six days before" and "the last day" portend a tragic event -- one that will change Miles forever and lead him to new conclusions about the value of his cherished "Great Perhaps." (Barnes & Noble Review from Discover Great New Writers)

The Hunger Games, Suzanne Collins

In the ruins of a place once known as North America lies the nation of Panem, a shining Capitol surrounded by twelve outlying districts. The Capitol is harsh and cruel and keeps the districts in line by forcing them all to send one boy and one girl between the ages of twelve and eighteen to participate in the annual Hunger Games, a fight to the death on live TV.

Sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen, who lives alone with her mother and younger sister, regards it as a death sentence when she steps forward to take her sister's place in the Games. But Katniss has been close to dead before--and survival, for her, is second nature. Without really meaning to, she becomes a contender. But if she is to win, she will have to start making choices that weigh survival against humanity and life against love.
(Publisher's Synopsis)

The Secret Life of Bees, Sue Monk Kidd

Sue Monk Kidd's ravishing debut novel has stolen the hearts of reviewers and readers alike with its strong, assured voice. Set in South Carolina in 1964, *The Secret Life of Bees* tells the story of Lily Owens, whose life has been shaped around the blurred memory of the afternoon her mother was killed. When Lily's fierce-hearted "stand-in mother," Rosaleen, insults three of the town's fiercest racists, Lily decides they should both escape to Tiburon, South Carolina--a town that holds the secret to her mother's past. There they are taken in by an eccentric trio of black beekeeping sisters who introduce Lily to a mesmerizing world of bees, honey, and the Black Madonna who presides over their household. This is a remarkable story about divine female power and the transforming power of love--a story that women will share and pass on to their daughters for years to come. (Publisher's Synopsis)

Non-Fiction

Shakespeare: The World as Stage, Bill Bryson

William Shakespeare, the most celebrated poet in the English language, left behind nearly a million words of text, but his biography has long been a thicket of wild supposition arranged around scant facts. With a steady hand and his trademark wit, Bill Bryson sorts through this colorful muddle to reveal the man himself.

Bryson documents the efforts of earlier scholars, from today's most respected academics to eccentrics like Delia Bacon, an American who developed a firm but unsubstantiated conviction that her namesake, Francis Bacon, was the true author of Shakespeare's plays. Emulating the style of his famous travelogues, Bryson records episodes in his research, including a visit to a bunkerlike room in Washington, D.C., where the world's largest collection of First Folios is housed.

Bryson celebrates Shakespeare as a writer of unimaginable talent and enormous inventiveness, a coiner of phrases ("vanish into thin air," "foregone conclusion," "one fell swoop") that even today have common currency. His Shakespeare is like no one else's—the beneficiary of Bryson's genial nature, his engaging skepticism, and a gift for storytelling unrivaled in our time. (Publisher's Synopsis)

Justice: What is the Right Thing to Do, Michael J. Sandel

What are our obligations to others as people in a free society? Should government tax the rich to help the poor? Is the free market fair? Is it sometimes wrong to tell the truth? Is killing sometimes morally required? Is it possible, or desirable, to legislate morality? Do individual rights and the common good conflict?

These questions are at the core of our public life today—and at the heart of *Justice*, in which Michael J. Sandel shows how a surer grasp of philosophy can help us to make sense of politics, morality, and our own convictions as well. Sandel's legendary Justice course is one of the most popular and influential at Harvard. Up to a thousand students pack the campus theater to hear Sandel relate the big questions of political philosophy to the most vexing issues of the day. In the fall of 2009, PBS [aired] a series based on the course.

Justice offers listeners the same exhilarating journey that captivates Harvard students—the challenge of thinking our way through the hard moral challenges we confront as citizens. It is a searching, lyrical exploration of the meaning of justice, a book that invites readers of all political persuasions to consider familiar controversies in fresh and illuminating ways. Affirmative action, same-sex marriage, physician-assisted suicide, abortion, national service, the moral limits of markets, patriotism and dissent—Sandel shows how even the most hotly contested issues can be illuminated by reasoned moral argument. *Justice* is lively, thought-provoking, and wise—an essential new addition to the small shelf of books that speak convincingly to the big questions of our civic life. (Publisher's Synopsis)