

June 6, 2022

Dear Willow Hill Middle School Student,

Thank you for making last year's summer reading raffle such a success! We had such great responses that we will continue the summer reading raffle again this summer. As with last year, students who choose to complete the assignment will be entered into a raffle for a gift card.

The requirements are simple. We will provide you lists of recommended reading books to choose from. You choose a book from the list and read it. When you are finished reading the book, you will write a personal response. After you turn in your response, your name will be entered into a raffle to win a free gift card!

Requirements for personal response

Middle school students should write a **one-paragraph minimum personal response**. The response must include:

- 1) Your name
- 2) Title and author of the book
- 3) Briefly summarize key problems and events of the book (2-3 sentences)
- 4) Which character was most likeable for you? Why? (fiction) (3-4 sentences)
- 5) Which fact was most surprising or interesting for you? Why? (non-fiction) (3-4 sentences)

When your response is complete, it should be submitted to Jen McEnany: jmcenany@willowhillschool.org

Feel free to email if you have any questions, but check the **Frequently Asked Questions** section on the backside first.

Have a great summer and we can't wait to see you in the Fall!

Andrew Petzold-Eley
ELA Department Chair
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Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: Can I read a book that I have read before?

A: Expand into new books that you have not read before. If you did enjoy a particular book, look for other titles by the same author, or other books in a similar series or genre. You can also try something completely new!

Q: I don't know what book to read. Where should I start?

A: Think about topics you're interested in. Is there a topic you'd like to learn more about? Consider different genres and styles: Would you like to read a realistic novel about someone like you? Would you like to try a nonfiction book about someone from a different country or time period?

Q: Can I listen to the audio book instead of reading?

A: Listening is not the same as reading. It uses a different part of your brain and uses different skills than reading does. You may pair a "read-aloud" by listening to the audio book while you read along in the text, but you may not only listen to the book.

Q: I love reading! If I read fifteen books this summer, can I enter fifteen different times?

A: Great question, love your enthusiasm. Read and write as many responses as you like, and your name will be entered **up to three times**. This will give you an advantage to win, but also gives others a chance to win, too.

Q: What should I write about in my response?

A: Another great question. See "Requirements" above.

Q: Do I have to read it on my own? Can I read it with my mom or dad?

A: You are welcome to read along with someone at home. Take the opportunity at the end of each section or chapter to talk with them about what you're reading. Try to summarize what happened or make a prediction about what you think will happen next.

Q: If my library is still closed due to COVID, how can I get one of these books?

A: Excellent question! This is a good time to problem-solve. You can purchase books online through sellers like Amazon, or safely purchase from a brick-and-mortar store, such as Barnes & Noble. There are many great digital options as well. Check your local library website to see what digital options might be available for you. Also read the next page for options from the Willow Hill School library...

Middle School Summer Reading List

Across the Desert by Dusti Bowling Gr 3-7

School Library Journal starred (October 1, 2021)

Twelve-year-old Jolene is used to taking care of herself. Ever since a car accident severely injured her mother and caused her slide into opioid addiction, Jolene is alternately upset with and fiercely protective of her, despite their descent into poverty and occasional homelessness. She takes refuge from the Phoenix heat in the library each day, where she reserves travel books, draws maps, researches remarkable female pioneers, and follows live-streamer Addie Earhart's aerial adventures. Addie is grieving the loss of her father and flying their ultralight plane alone in the desert without her mother's knowledge, and the lonely pair strike up a connection. When Addie crash lands and the impact cuts off the feed, Jolene can't get anyone to go search for her. She has a pretty good idea of where Addie might be, and, realizing she's the only one who knows about the accident, scrounges meager supplies and sets out by bus to find her. Luckily for Jolene, she meets 17-year-old Marty on her journey, and the two end up searching for Addie together. Jolene's voice is instantly compelling, making suspending disbelief at the unique and dangerous scenario quite easy. The tension ratchets up insidiously as the desert heat rises and time seems to keep running out. Alongside the budding friendships, the depiction of parental addiction is utterly realistic and heartbreaking.

Amira & Hamza: The War to Save the Worlds by Samira Ahmed Gr 3-7

School Library Journal starred (September 1, 2021)

A middle grade fantasy that includes Islamic legends, magic, science, and the power of belief in oneself. While at their mosque, waiting for the super blue blood moon, Amira and her younger brother Hamza both happen to touch a supposedly broken ancient artifact, the Box of the Moon, which sets an equally ancient prophecy in motion. Everyone on Earth suddenly falls asleep, and jinn appear, claiming that Amira and Hamza have been chosen to save the magical world of Qaf, Earth, and life as they know it. Amira loves science, so she has her doubts about fulfilling a mystical prophecy at 12, while Hamza is thrilled to become important, like one of his favorite superheroes. Like any magical journey, this one is full of heart, humor, action, doubt, and the belief that even the most unexpected individuals can save the world. Amira's questions will resonate with skeptical readers, whereas Hamza urges her to let go and believe anyway. Amira and Hamza's adventure is emotionally believable, even as the siblings ride magical creatures to their next destination. Although some of the action might be intimidating for younger readers, this would still make for a great read-aloud.

Before the Ever After by Jacqueline Woodson Gr 4-8

School Library Journal starred (July 1, 2020)

What happens after all your dreams come true? ZJ's dad always wanted to be a football player. Through hard work, he achieved his goal and became an NFL player and hero to many. Unfortunately, his football fame came with a price. Now he experiences debilitating headaches,

mood swings, and forgetfulness brought on by one too many concussions. ZJ remembers a time before his father changed; when his father would laugh, play with him and his friends, and support him with his music. That was the before-now he lives in the after. All ZJ has is memories of the incredible man his father was, and the fear of the unknown issue causing his father's problems. Set in the early 2000s when concussion research on NFL players was at its inception, Woodson's latest novel in verse conveys that not all success stories have a fairy-tale ending. Readers will feel an immediate connection to ZJ and his group of authentic, complex friends and family. The idea of showing the dark side of fame through the experiences of a young family member is a unique perspective that will resonate with readers of all ages. ZJ's story will stay with the audience long after the last page is read.

Everything Sad is Untrue: (a true story) by Daniel Nayeri Gr 4-8

School Library Journal starred (July 1, 2020)

Nayeri weaves stories within stories in this fictionalized account of his formative years. He shares layers of rich information about life in Iran, refugee camps, and his experiences as an immigrant in the United States during the late 20th century. The themes of family, love, and truth are as strong as those of faith, endurance, memory, and storytelling as Khosrou (also known as Daniel) tries to tell the tales of his beautiful, complicated life and family. Nayeri provides clues about other characters without overexplaining them. Tough issues are discussed, particularly domestic violence, bullying, and life as a refugee and an immigrant, but there is humor, too. Khosrou's thoughts on Manwich sloppy joe sauce, using toilets in the U.S., and his father's overindulgence in Twinkies all lighten this tale. Without being didactic, the text communicates the universality of the human experience and the lack of empathy shown by some, not all, of those he encounters in the U.S. and in the refugee environments. The strongest developed characters are Daniel and his mother; however, readers experience varying levels of complexities of other characters like Daniel's father, stepfather, sister, teacher, and his friends (and enemies).

Frankie & Bug by Gayle Forman Gr 5-8

School Library Journal starred (October 1, 2021)

A heartwarming tale of friendship set in 1987. Beatrice, Bug for short, is devastated to find out her summer won't go as planned. Instead of going to the beach with her brother Danny, Bug must be babysat by her upstairs neighbors, Phillip and Hedvig. Her mother's promise that she will redeem her summer comes in the form of Phillip's nephew, Frankie, coming to visit. Bug thinks she'll finally have someone to go to the beach with, but she quickly realizes Frankie doesn't enjoy the same things she does and has his own interests, such as the Midnight Marauder, a serial killer on the loose in Los Angeles. To Bug's surprise, she enjoys helping Frankie with the hunt for the Midnight Marauder, and they grow close enough for Frankie to reveal his secret—he was born a girl, even though he has always felt like a boy. In the beginning of the story Bug is self-centered and whiny, which may lead readers to dislike her, but Frankie brings about a positive change in her behavior that makes her character more enjoyable to follow. Difficult themes such as racism and homophobia are included in the narrative, and how Bug comes to realize these things exist in the world is realistic and heartbreaking.

Hello Universe by Erin Entrada Kelly Gr 3-7

School Library Journal (January 1, 2017)

The universe comes together unexpectedly when a unique set of circumstances cause four tweens to cross paths. Central to the story is Virgil, an 11-year-old Filipino American whose grandmother, Lola, helps him to come out of his shell and face the world. When Virgil and his pet guinea pig, Gulliver, end up trapped in a well in the woods at the hands of a bully, Chet, it is up to the stars to align before it's too late. Coming together like spokes on a wheel, everyone converges in the woods-Valencia, a Deaf girl on whom Virgil has a crush; Kaori, an adolescent fortune-teller and free spirit; Kaori's sister, Gen, her jump-roping apprentice; a feral dog Valencia has befriended; and a snake, which is the only thing Chet fears. Unlikely friendships are formed and heroism abounds as the group of young people try to find their way in the world. Plucky protagonists and a deftly woven story will appeal to anyone who has ever felt a bit lost in the universe.

How to Find What You're Not Looking For by Veera Hiranandani Gr 3-7

School Library Journal starred (September 1, 2021)

It's 1967 and the United States is roiling with social unrest. Ari, a young white Jewish girl, lives in a small town in Connecticut with her family. When her older sister falls in love with Raj, a young man who recently immigrated to the United States from India, Ari's parents are vehemently opposed to the union. Torn between her love for her sister and her desire to keep her family together, Ari must find her own voice and fight for what she believes is right. This enthralling historical fiction provides a view into a momentous time in U.S. history from an uncommon perspective. As one of the few Jewish students in her town, Ari feels isolated, and her classmates see her as slow because of her dysgraphia, a learning disability that affects her ability to write. But after her teacher encourages her to try writing poetry, she finds freedom, a new way of expressing herself, and a newfound ability to connect with those around her. The story centers on a tough conflict, and Hiranandani delivers an authentic depiction of reconciliation, with all its messiness and hurt feelings. Importantly, both families have misgivings about the marriage, but their love for their children forces them to confront and overcome their own prejudices. Characters discuss critical events of the period, such as the Vietnam War, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., and *Loving v. Virginia*. Like many people, Ari and her parents initially see themselves as existing on the periphery of the critical events of their time, and it takes a personal crisis to jolt them out of this state of mind.

Golden Hour by Niki Smith (graphic novel) Gr 4-7

School Library Journal starred (October 1, 2021)

In the wake of witnessing gun violence at school, Manuel Soto struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and panic attacks. When a teacher pairs him with classmates Sebastian and Caysha for a group project, the ensuing friendship takes him by surprise. Manuel discovers that taking cell phone photos of Sebastian's family's cattle farm and his new friends anchors him when anxiety seems overwhelming. He joins the 4-H club to help Sebastian and Caysha prepare to show their animals at the county fair and finds the courage to enter his photography into a

contest. But he struggles to convey his anxiety and PTSD to his busy single mother, instead turning to gentle Sebastian, who seems to understand Manuel intuitively, as romance blossoms. Smith weaves a beautiful story of resilience and the sweet onset of first love. Scenes at Sebastian's farm rely on warm, comforting colors; when Manuel has panic attacks, the art turns dark and suffocating as artwork bleeds out of each panel. Smith knows when to let Manuel's burgeoning artistic identity speak, leaving whole pages free of dialogue to show him carefully framing a shot or considering how to capture a sunset. Manuel and Sebastian's queer first love subplot is affirming and positive. Manuel is Latinx, Sebastian is white, and Caysha is Black.

Girl Who Drank the Moon by Kelly Regan Barnhill Gr 4-6

School Library Journal (July 1, 2016)

Once a year in the Protectorate there is a Day of Sacrifice. The youngest baby is taken by the Elders and left in the forest to die, thus appeasing the witch who threatens to destroy the village if not obeyed. Unbeknownst to the people, Xan, the witch of the forest, is kind and compassionate. When she discovers the first baby left as a sacrifice, she has no idea why it has been abandoned. She rescues the infants, feeds each one starlight, and delivers the shining infants to parents in the Outside Cities who love and care for them. On one occasion, Xan accidentally feeds a baby moonlight along with starlight, filling her with glowing magic. Xan is smitten with the beautiful baby girl, who has a crescent moon birthmark on her forehead, and chooses to raise her as her own child. Twists and turns emerge as the identity of the true evil witch becomes apparent. The swiftly paced, highly imaginative plot draws a myriad of threads together to form a web of characters, magic, and integrated lives. Spiritual overtones encompass much of the storytelling with love as the glue that holds it all together.

The Legend of Auntie Po by Shing Yin Khor Gr 5-8

School Library Journal Xpress starred (July 9, 2021)

In Sierra Nevada in 1885, three years after the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act, 13-year-old pie maker Mei helps her father run the logging camp's kitchen. Mei, who is Chinese, also spends time with her best friend Beatrice (Bee) Andersen, who is white, and masterfully spins tall tales about a female Chinese folk hero named Po Pan Yin, aka Auntie Po, and her blue buffalo Pei Pei. As Mei grapples with her growing feelings for Bee, she suddenly starts to see Auntie Po and Pei Pei in real life. Rising racial tension in the area reaches a boiling point when Chinese cook Ah Sam and another Chinese worker are attacked on their way back to the logging camp. Changes are coming to Mei's life, and even the mother of all loggers, Auntie Po, can only do so much to help. The author interweaves fabulism and historical fiction into a well-designed, evenly paced, stirring narrative. There is a strong sense of place, thanks to stunning watercolors and Mei's informative narration of how a logging camp is run. The Auntie Po stories add a layer of humor or poignancy and act as an emotional channel for Mei's internal struggles. Mei's gradual queer awakening is treated sensitively as an important part of her story line. Mei; her father, Hao; Ah Sam; and some background logging camp characters are of Chinese heritage; the majority of the rest of lumberjacks are white; and there is a Black family living at the camp as well.

Lore by Alexandra Bracken Gr 9-up

School Library Journal (February 1, 2021)

Every seven years, nine Greek gods are called to walk the earth as mortals, hunted by the descendants of ancient bloodlines. Called the Agon, these descendants have the opportunity to seize an ancient god and take their power and immortality. Descended from Perseus, Lore left that life behind after her family was gruesomely murdered. Even though she's vowed to never return, the heroine can't pass up an opportunity for justice and revenge offered by a goddess. Throughout the story, Lore tries to figure out where she belongs in this fantastical world. The protagonist is bold, fierce, and powerful and takes nothing for granted. Her best friend Miles, who is gay, supports her every step of the way. This fast-paced narrative is filled with action, intensity, and gripping details. Most main characters are coded as white.

Lu (Track Book 4) by Jason Reynolds Grades 5-8

Booklist starred (October 1, 2018 (Vol. 115, No. 3))

Lu is the man, the kid, the guy. The one and only. Not only was he a miracle baby but he is albino. He's special down to his gold chains and diamond earrings, but he feels a little less once-in-a-lifetime when his parents tell him they're pregnant again. On top of this sobering news, he's leading the Defenders alongside a co-captain who isn't pleased about sharing the title; and he's training for the 110-meter hurdles, choking at every leap. As the championship approaches, can he prove his uniqueness one final time? As with the prior titles, the final installment in the four-book *Track* series is uplifting and moving, full of athletic energy and eye-level insight into the inner-city middle-school track-team experience. While it must be said that Lu has the least distinct voice of the four narrators—and given that Reynolds has proven himself to be an absolute master of voice, that is disappointing—this story is not a letdown. Virtually every subplot is a moving moral lesson on integrity, humility, or reconciliation, and Reynolds wraps up his powerful series with a surprising ending, all while scattering rewarding details about *Ghost*, *Patina*, and *Sunny* to let the reader truly revel in this multidimensional world as it comes to a close.

Punching the Air by Ibi Aanu Zobo Gr 8-up

School Library Journal starred (August 1, 2020)

Sixteen-year-old Amal is tried and convicted of an act of violence against a white boy. While there is a sense that he might not have done what he was accused of doing, it is unimportant whether this is the case for the book to work. Through Amal's first-person verse narration, readers learn about his aspirations as a poet and artist, as well as his experience entering the prison system as a young Black man. It is clear that Amal has had a complex relationship with his education, particularly with his art teacher, who clearly saw his talent but also did not work very hard to support Amal's burgeoning interest, and did a bad job of being a character witness at his trial. The authors do an excellent job of showing how the prison experience can dehumanize young men and how their inherent talents can be overshadowed by their feelings of powerlessness and rage. Coauthored by Zobo and Salaam, who is one of the Exonerated Five and, as such, has firsthand experience of serving an unfair and unjust prison sentence, this book is not a memoir. Instead, it can be seen as an important statement about widespread experiences

and the prison industrial complex, rather than the depiction of a single, notable case. What is clear is that this is not an isolated story.

Solimar: The Sword of the Monarchs by Pam Munoz Ryan Gr 3-6

School Library Journal Xpress (February 11, 2022)

Solimar is turning 15, preparing to have her *quinceañera* and be crowned as princess of San Gregorio. Her older brother, Campeó, is the heir apparent to the kingdom, though he doesn't wish to be. Meanwhile, her parents, the king and queen, are in danger from the neighboring king, who wishes to take their land. On their land is the magical *oyamel* forest, known for the migrating monarch butterflies. When Solimar crosses the river to see the butterflies, they magically settle upon her. After she returns home, her *rebozo* (a scarflike shawl) starts to glisten and Solimar learns she has inherited an unusual power. She is able to see into the near future while wearing the rebozo, making her a target and a risk to the butterflies and those she loves. It's up to Solimar to single-handedly save the butterflies and the entire kingdom, including her family. But difficulties abound, including a kidnapping and travels down the treacherous Rio Diablo river with her sidekicks Quetzal, Lazaro, an enchanted doll named Zarita, and a young boy named Berto in tow. Solimar's relationship with her abuela is touching, and the characters are all well developed. The story is rich with vibrant imagery, suspense, and humor.

Sunshine by Marion Dane Bauer Gr 4-7

School Library Journal (April 1, 2021)

Ben, a young white boy, and his dog Sunshine are spending a week with Ben's mom in northern Minnesota. Exploring the lakes and islands of the region, Ben sees moose, white-tailed deer, and a blue heron. His mother left when Ben was three, and his plan is to bring her back home to St. Paul. Living on a remote island, in a cabin with no electricity, Ben's mom doesn't seem afraid of anything. But Ben is a "what-if" kid; scared of heights, the dark, and getting lost. With Sunshine at his side, he can be brave. After Ben's mom discovers he has an imaginary dog, she explains, to Ben's delight, that Sunshine is his guardian spirit. However, when encountering bears, Ben calls out a warning to Sunshine, and endangers their lives. Now his mom suggests it's time to give up his pretend dog. Bauer keeps the reader wondering why Ben's mom left the family, creating a sensitive portrait of a woman victim to an abusive mother. That Ben is hiding his anger beneath a multitude of fears feels authentic, and his deep need for the adoring Sunshine will resonate for dog lovers. Descriptive passages of the islands and the trio's adventures in the Minnesota wilderness are sure to appeal to outdoorsy readers. But the central theme of the book, Ben's sense of loss and abandonment, informs every part of the narrative as he vacillates between trying to connect with his mother and the anger that's expressed in his shrugging off her touch.

This is My Brain in Love by I. W. Gregorio Gr 8-up

School Library Journal (March 1, 2020)

Jocelyn Wu has a plan to save her family's struggling Chinese restaurant in Utica, NY. With her father's reluctant approval she decides to hire a summer intern to help out at the restaurant and increase its online presence. Enter William Domenici, new intern and aspiring journalist looking for a story. Will and Jos hit it off; although they are very different, they have a lot in common.

Jos, an American-born Chinese girl, and Will, the son of a Nigerian doctor and an Italian lawyer, are both entering junior year of high school and don't exactly blend into the background of their predominantly white, upstate New York town. Told in alternating first-person chapters, the story quickly immerses readers in the drama that unfolds over the course of the summer: Can the restaurant be saved? Will Jos and Will get together despite Mr. Wu's strict rules? Issues of mental health also come into play. Will, diagnosed with an anxiety disorder when he was younger, has spent years learning how to manage his anxiety with the help of his therapist. It is his sensitivity to mental health issues that enables him to encourage Jos to seek help for her depression.

White Bird by R.J. Palacio (graphic novel) Gr. 6-9

Booklist (October 15, 2019 (Vol. 116, No. 4))

Palacio adds another layer to the Wonder universe with this graphic novel debut. Julian calls his grandmother, Sara, to interview her for a class project. What follows is a story of resistance, bravery, and survival, beginning in unoccupied France, during Hitler's rise. While her non-observant, affluent Jewish family is safe for some time, it isn't long before Sara's mother disappears and Jewish students are taken from the school. She escapes the roundup by hiding in the school and is discovered by Julian, an ostracized classmate badly disabled by a childhood bout of polio. Julian hides Sara in a barn near his house, where his family keeps her safe until the end of the war. It is this friend whom her grandson Julian is named for. This compelling story is served well by the graphic novel format; muted background colors and an emphasis on facial expressions center the emotional intensity of the story. The author effectively ties atrocities of WWII to current political issues, ending with a declaration of "Never Again."

When Stars are Scattered by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed Gr. 6-8

Booklist starred (March 15, 2020 (Vol. 116, No. 14))

Omar Mohamed was a child when soldiers attacked his village in Somalia. Separated from his parents, he and his younger brother, Hassan, eventually made their way to Dadaab, a crowded refugee camp in Kenya where he now spends his days scrambling for food and taking care of Hassan, who is nonverbal and suffers from debilitating seizures. A chance to attend school is a dream come true, but the opportunity weighs heavily on Omar; school is a selfish choice when you have no parents and a brother who needs constant looking after. Debut author Mohamed shares his absorbing story with absolute honesty, laying bare every aspect of his life's many challenges; even after surviving unimaginable circumstances, he remains compassionate—to others as well as himself. While Mohamed's story is riveting in its own right, the illustrations bring warmth and depth to the tale. Drawing with evident empathy and deep respect, Jamieson captures the many significant moments in Mohamed's life with charming detail. Wonderfully expressive figures convey complex and conflicted emotions, and the rich colors imbue the story with life. Mohamed's experience is unfortunately not unique, but it is told with grace, humility, and forgiveness. This beautiful memoir is not to be missed.

Wonderstruck by Brian Selznick Gr. 5-8

Ben and Rose secretly wish their lives were different. Ben longs for the father he has never known. Rose dreams of a mysterious actress whose life she chronicles in a scrapbook. When Ben discovers a puzzling clue in his mother's room and Rose reads an enticing heading in the newspaper, both children set out alone on desperate quests to find what they are missing. Set fifty years apart, these independent stories - Ben's told in words, Rose's in picture-weave back and forth with mesmerizing symmetry. How they unfold and ultimately intertwine will surprise you, challenge you, and leave you breathless with wonder.

Ghost by Jason Reynolds Gr. 5-6

Four kids from wildly different backgrounds with personalities that are explosive when they clash. But they are also four kids chosen for an elite middle school track team -- a team that could qualify them for the Junior Olympics if they can get their acts together. They all have a lot to lose, but they also have a lot to prove, not only to each other, but to themselves. A National Book Award Finalist, a Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award Winning Author.

The Crossover by Kwame Alexander Gr 6-10

School Library Journal (March 1, 2014)

Twins Josh and Jordan are junior high basketball stars, thanks in large part to the coaching of their dad, a former professional baller who was forced to quit playing for health reasons, and the firm, but loving support of their assistant-principal mom. Josh, better known as Filthy McNasty, earned his nickname for his enviable skills on the court: "When Filthy gets hot/He has a SLAMMERIFIC SHOT." In this novel in verse, the brothers begin moving apart from each other for the first time. Jordan starts dating the "pulchritudinous" Miss Sweet Tea, and Josh has a tough time keeping his jealousy and feelings of abandonment in control. Alexander's poems vary from the pulsing, aggressive beats of a basketball game ("My shot is F L O W I N G, Flying, fluttering.. ringaling and SWINGALING/Swish. Game/over") to the more introspective musings of a child struggling into adolescence ("Sit beside JB at dinner. He moves./Tell him a joke. He doesn't even smile..Say I'm sorry/but he won't listen"). Despite his immaturity, Josh is a likable, funny, and authentic character. Underscoring the sports and the fraternal tension is a portrait of a family that truly loves and supports one another. Alexander has crafted a story that vibrates with energy and heart and begs to be read aloud. A slam dunk.

King and the dragonflies by Kacen Callender Gr. 4-7

Booklist starred (January 1, 2020 (Vol. 116, No. 9))

This incredible middle-grade follow-up to Callender's debut novel *Hurricane Child* (2018) delves into one boy's journey to self-acceptance while wading through the profound grief that has engulfed his family. King, a Black child living by the bayous of Louisiana, is dealt the double blow of losing his beloved older brother while trying to contain an identity he is sure will cause his father to stop loving him. When his former best friend, the gay son of the local sheriff, runs away, the weight of expectations and secrets leads King to examine everything he thinks he knows about being brave, being a man, and being himself. Callender handles these threads with a

dexterity that deftly weaves them all together into a cohesive whole and a dynamic tale that will resonate with children struggling to reconcile who they are with what they think society wants them to be. While the adults in this story struggle to adapt to their new reality, their ability to embrace love and assuage King's doubts about his place in his family is wonderfully affirming for children of all identities.

A Kind of Spark by Ell McNicoll Gr 5-up

School Library Journal starred (September 1, 2021)

Middle schooler Addie is autistic, and this year will be one of great change. When the teacher she had hoped for gets sick, she is stuck with Ms. Murphy, a bully who doesn't want Addie in her class just because she is different. When Addie learns that her small Scottish village used to put "suspicious" women on trial and execute them as witches, she feels a deep and concerning connection with these outcasts. She realizes that it is up to her to ensure that this piece of history, and these women, are not forgotten. But will Addie be able to pull strength from her family and herself while facing opposition from school and the city council because of her autism? This deeply honest, at times painful story brings a much-needed look at middle school from the perspective of neurodiverse students. Addie's twin older sisters, one of whom is also autistic, provide strong examples of healthy family relationships, and her new friend Audrey loves Addie for who she is. This debut novel from neurodivergent author McNicoll will bring readers to tears and have them cheering for Addie as she learns how much she has to offer the world. Addie and her family are coded as white.

Dress Coded by Carrie Firestone Gr. 6-8

School Library Journal (May 1, 2020)

When eighth grader Molly Fisher becomes fed up with her school's unfair enforcement of the dress code policy, she starts a podcast in protest. Through interviews she conducts with her classmates, Molly educates her listeners (and readers) on how the dress code is enforced almost exclusively through young women, and disproportionately affects those who have developed sooner or more than their classmates. Outside of school, her family is in crisis after they discover that Molly's brother has been selling tobacco vape pods to younger kids on the bus. The issues are timely without seeming trendy, and Firestone's crackling writing makes every day in Molly's life interesting to read about—even one of the most boring events on Earth, a school board meeting. By painting such a full picture of Molly's life, Firestone shows how difficult it can be to simply exist in the world of middle school. VERDICT: Hand this first purchase to blossoming activists of every cause; this is a deeply, often scathingly honest work of modern fiction.

Merci Suarez can't Dance by Meg Medina Gr 4-7

School Library Journal (March 1, 2021)

Now in seventh grade, Merci Suárez finds that a new school year means new responsibilities and challenges. Merci has been enlisted to work in the school store alongside her classmate Wilson, who she might have a crush on, and is still at odds with classmate Edna, who is planning the Heart Ball and maybe stealing one of Merci's best friends. At home, Merci feels unprepared for the changes in her family: Her grandfather's Alzheimer's is worsening, and Tía Inez has started

dating. At heart, Merci remains true to the character readers met in *Merci Suárez Changes Gears* and has grown alongside her readership. However, seventh grade Merci is not without her flaws. She and Edna still don't get along, and she spies on Tía Inez even when she isn't supposed to. When Merci is roped into running a photography booth at the Heart Ball and the equipment breaks, she tries to solve the problem herself instead of telling an adult. The struggles with friendships, responsibility, school, crushes, and jealousy that Merci and her friends face will strike a chord with many readers. A subplot about Tía Inez keeping dance classes alive for neighborhood kids who have nowhere to go after school serves as a subtle reminder of Merci's Cuban American heritage and the socioeconomic status of families in Merci's neighborhood versus at school. The plot moves along at a consistent and page-turning pace, and as usual Medina's characters are excellently written and developed. Medina also touches on racism and how shared cultural heritage can bring people together unexpectedly.

Ground Zero by Alan Gratz Gr 4-7

Horn Book Magazine (March/April, 2021)

Nine-year-old Brandon Chavez has been suspended from school for fighting, so he goes to work with his father at Windows on the World, a restaurant on the 107th floor in the North Tower of the World Trade Center. It is September 11, 2001. Brandon gets separated from his father before the disaster begins, then has to rely on, and help, strangers to survive. Fast-forward to September 2019, where Reshmina is an eleven-year-old Afghan girl living in a village miles from the capital of Kabul. Her older sister had been killed on her wedding day by an American drone, and her family struggles with the fear and poverty caused by a lifetime of war. Reshmina tries to talk her twin brother out of joining the Taliban for work and revenge, while reluctantly giving shelter to a wounded American soldier. Gratz moves back and forth between the two narratives in short, nail-biting chapters that create a vivid picture of each setting and make readers feel invested in each character's relationships and choices, and in the high-stakes global forces that affect the intimate details of their lives. Big and small questions and lessons offered within the story worlds make this a great discussion starter (though some readers may benefit from additional context about Islam). A detailed author's note explains how Gratz used historical fact to inform his thought-provoking novel.

Sara and the Search for Normal by Wesley King Gr. 4-8

School Library Journal (May 1, 2020)

King has done it again with this in-depth look into life-altering mental health issues. Sara, who was a supporting character in King's book *OCDaniel*, gets to tell her own story. Sara is 12 years old and has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and schizophrenia. She also is selectively mute; she only speaks to four people in her life when the story begins. Sara's goal in life is to become normal, and she has 154 rules for achieving it. Rule number one is, "Stop taking your pills." We follow Sara as she goes to therapy, faces horrible bullying, finally makes a friend, and faces both setbacks and success. Mental health stigma is still so strong and easy to internalize. The stigma against schizophrenia is especially strong, and this book portrays Sara's symptoms from her own point of view. They are frightening to her, but her symptoms don't make her dangerous to anyone else. There is a teachable moment about the use of the "R word" and learning differences, and child abuse and alcoholism are also discussed.

The story is not didactic in addressing these issues, so conversations with students reading the book may be necessary. The one aspect of the book that pushes suspension of disbelief is that it is very rare for someone of Sara's age to be diagnosed with bipolar disorder or schizophrenia; the narrative implies that Sara was diagnosed quickly at the age of five or six.

Tiger Honor by Yoon Ha Lee Gr 3-7

School Library Journal Xpress (April 29, 2022)

This sequel to *The Dragon Pearl* follows Sebin, a nonbinary tiger spirit from the Juhwang Clan, as they train to become a battle cruiser captain like their favorite Uncle Hwan. Unfortunately, news of Sebin's acceptance into the Thousand Worlds Space Forces Cadet Program comes at the same time as news that their Uncle Hwan has been accused of treason. Sebin travels from their home planet of Yonggi to Starbase Borasaekbam, where they've been summoned, only to find that their uncle has stowed away on the ship and plans to take it under his control-with the help of Min, a fox spirit (whom fans will recognize from the first book), and a group of stowaway mercenaries. Sebin swore allegiance to the Tiger Clan before they left home, but the Space Forces will require them to protect the Thousand Worlds-and they'll need to decide where their loyalties truly lie before the starship Haetae reaches its destination. Themes of personal integrity, courage, friendship, and loyalty are delivered in a fast-paced plot filled with engaging twists, turns, and near-misses, though at times they come at the expense of character development. Nonbinary characters and women in positions of military power are refreshingly commonplace in this original space opera interwoven with Korean mythology.

The Storm Runner by Jennifer Cervantes Gr. 4-7

Booklist starred (August 2018 (Vol. 114, No. 22))

Fans of Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series, or stories based on mythology in general, will be raving over Cervantes' series starter. Zane Obispo is content exploring the volcano in his backyard with his dog, Rosie, and doing what he can to please his mother, who works hard for little. He's got one foot smaller than the other, and one leg shorter than the other, which complicates things a bit. But then he meets Brooks, a girl who appears after a mysterious plane crash, and she warns him, first, that he's in danger, and, second, that he's destined to release the lord of death, darkness, and despair from imprisonment, and his whole world goes topsy-turvy. Zane is an instantly relatable character: he's frustrated by his circumstances and wants to do the right thing, though he often gets into trouble for fighting bullies or wandering off alone. Cervantes wastes no time getting right into the action, and her conversational tone and suspenseful pacing will keep the pages turning as the tension escalates and the characters face deepening stakes. Plentiful references to Maya mythology and culture are bound to send readers searching for more background info, even with the glossary in the back matter. Don't miss this rip-roaring adventure.

Living with Viola by Rosena Fung (Graphic novel) (graphic novel) Gr. 4-8

School Library Journal starred (October 1, 2021)

Olivia "Livy" Siu Leen Tong, a new student at Alison Berry Middle School, is achingly lonely. She has new friends, but they tease her for eating fried rice and salty fish, and she wonders what

they'd say if they knew her father is a janitor and that she carries a stuffed unicorn in her backpack. At home Livy tries to be a dutiful Chinese daughter, but after her relatives visit from Hong Kong, the weight of their expectations almost crushes her, and she fears that her dream to become an artist would disappoint her family, much like her cousin Leonard's mysterious moods, which resulted in him being sent to England. Stuck in her head, Livy struggles with feelings of anxiety, fear, and unworthiness that manifest themselves as Viola, an evil twin-like figure who affirms her destructive thoughts. This is an intimate and unforgettable work that focuses on themes of belonging and identity. Confronting mental illness in a perceptive, tangible way, Fung offers a visual window into Livy's world; personifying her anxiety allows readers to understand Livy's reality. Tones of reds and purples illustrate Livy's varied emotions, and the crowded speech boxes give the book a suffocating feel.

We are displaced: My journey and stories from Refugee girls around the world by Malala Yousafzai Grade 7-up

School Library Journal (April 1, 2019)

While Yousafzai's autobiography, *I Am Malala*, describes her life in Pakistan culminating in her dramatic altercation with the Taliban, this book highlights some of the work Yousafzai has done since she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The first part provides additional information on Yousafzai's life in Pakistan with an emphasis on her experience as an internally displaced person and the later challenges of acclimating to life as a refugee in Great Britain. In the second part of the book, readers are provided with narratives from other refugee girls who met with Yousafzai in different stages of her work. These stories depict the lives of girls from all over the world, pushed from their homes for different reasons and yet, Yousafzai highlights consistent themes found in each one. From the Middle East to South America, Africa to Asia, these girls and their families faced the same challenge: leaving their homes and the communities they love. Yousafzai writes with gut-wrenching detail, showing readers the many complex layers of life as a refugee including the struggle of escape, the frustrations of bureaucracy in the face of mortal danger, and the painful goodbyes along the way. She shines a light on the personal side of this international crisis and pushes every individual to find a way to contribute to the solution.

The Fountains of Silence by Ruta Sepetys Gr. 7-up

School Library Journal (September 1, 2019)

In her latest historical novel, Sepetys illuminates dark secrets about Francisco Franco's fascist rule of Spain. In 1957 Madrid, 18-year-old aspiring photojournalist Daniel Matheson is staying at the luxurious Castellana Hilton Hotel with his Texas oil tycoon father and Spanish mother. Daniel befriends Ana, a hotel employee, whose attraction to Daniel is constrained by fear about losing her job and by silence about her family tragedies. When Daniel turns his camera lens on local people and places, he captures provocative images of nuns and orphans, infant burials, an impassioned, struggling bullfighter, the intimidating Guardia Civil military police, Ana's impoverished home life, and his father shaking hands with Franco. Gradually, Daniel discovers that beneath the bustling tourist and business vibe of Madrid lurks the dark realities of Franco's regime: stolen children, sinister church and government collusion, murder of Franco's political adversaries, and the abuse and re-education of surviving children-like Ana and her siblings.

Troubled by unanswered questions, Daniel returns to the U.S. with his parents and a newly adopted sister. He revisits Spain with his sister 18 years later, after Franco's death. As he introduces his sister to her original culture, he fondly reconnects with Ana and learns the truth of his sister's parentage. This multidimensional story contains a rich cast of characters with different perspectives, vivid descriptions, romance, and cultural insights. Multiple narrative threads are skillfully woven together. Official quotations from academic and foreign service archives are interspersed among the chapters and document the conflicted relationship between the U.S. and Franco.

Under the Mesquite by Guadalupe Garcia McCall Gr. 5-up

Library Media Connection (January/February 2012)

The mesquite tree is resilient; it survives the harshest of climates and its roots can survive even when torn from the ground. It is an appropriate symbol in this story, told in verse, of Lupita. Based on the author's teenage years, the book is an homage to survival despite great tragedy. Using beautiful metaphors and lyrical Spanish words, McCall writes simply of what it is to love and lose and to find strength in nature. Lupita is a memorable character who takes care of her family through her mother's illness. To cope with the pain, she writes about her feelings while under the mesquite tree. McCall is an established poet, but this is her first novel. It is eloquently written and strong in its sparseness. Young readers will find a sister in Lupita and will remember her words long after finishing the book.

We are not Free by Traci Chee Gr. 7-up

Fourteen teens form a bond growing up together in California. They go to school, work hard to be good kids in their community, and try their best to find happiness in various hobbies. American-born, they are of Japanese descent, and surrounded by people who do not trust their right to be in the U.S. World War II turns their already strained lives upside down. Taken and forced into desolate internment camps, these young kids must rally together as racism threatens to tear them apart. This novel evokes powerful emotions by using a variety of well-researched elements to tell the teens' stories, creating a thorough picture of their thoughts and feelings through poetry, diary-style entries, and drawings. As Chee mentions in the author's note, her family experienced the impact of being marked as "other" and therefore "dangerous," and were forcibly uprooted from their homes and incarcerated in internment camps. The novel may be fiction, but it will be hard for readers not to fall deep into the harsh realities these teens face. The writing is engaging and emotionally charged, allowing the readers to connect with each character.

The poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo Gr. 7-up

School Library Journal (March 1, 2018)

Magnificently crafted, Acevedo's bildungsroman in verse is a stunning account of a teen girl's path to poetry. Sophomore Xiomara Batista is simultaneously invisible and hyper-visible at home, school, and in her largely Dominican community in Harlem—her body is "unhide-able" she tells readers early on, yet she bristles at how others project their desires, insecurities, failures, patriarchal attitudes toward her. Though she is quick to battle and defend herself and her twin

brother Xavier, Xiomara's inner life sensitively grapples with these projections and the expectations of her strict, religious mother. Acevedo's depiction of a faith in crisis is exceedingly relatable and teens, especially those going through the sacrament of Confirmation, will deeply appreciate Xiomara's thoughtful questioning of the Church and how it treats women. Forbidden kisses with a crush and an impromptu performance at an open mic prove to be euphoric, affirming moments for Xiomara: "it's beautiful and real and what I wanted." Acevedo's poetry is skillfully and gorgeously crafted, each verse can be savored on its own, but together they create a portrait of a young poet sure to resonate with readers long after the book's end.

Almost American Girl by Robin Ha (graphic novel) Gr. 7-up

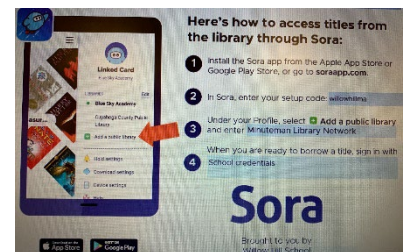
School Library Journal (November 1, 2019)

Ha's touching graphic memoir depicts her lonely first year as a teenage immigrant to America. When her single mother brought her from Seoul, South Korea, to Huntsville, AL, in 1995, 14-year-old Chuna (the author's Korean name) thought it was just another vacation, but she quickly discovered that her mother intended to marry a fellow Korean immigrant, Mr. Kim. Chuna and her mother moved in with Mr. Kim's extended family, and Chuna joined her new step cousins at school. Stranded in a sea of indecipherable English and racist bullies, she realized that the glossy America she saw on television was far from reality. But Chuna began to take a clear-eyed look at her home country, particularly the prejudice she faced because her mother was unmarried, and came to understand her mother's choice to leave Seoul. Eventually, Chuna joined a comic book course and bonded with her classmates. Illustrations include dynamic sound effects and convey overwrought emotion. The sepia-toned flashbacks to life in Seoul at first seem nostalgic, but as the teen reflects on how conservative Korean culture was, the monochromatic scenes feel far more bleak. Ha's all too infrequent fantasy sequences are gloriously colorful, especially the scene when Chuna takes solace in her favorite fantasy universe.

School is closed, but the library is open virtually.

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