

June 6, 2023

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](mailto: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  
[apetzold-eley@willowhillschool.org](mailto:apetzold-eley@willowhillschool.org)

## **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

## ***The 9.09 Project* by Mark H Parsons**

*School Library Journal* starred (January 1, 2023)

**Grades 7 and up** - Jamison is a photographer-he eats, sleeps, and breathes the images he captures. His ritual is to go to the same street corner at 9:09 every night and snap whoever is walking by with his Nikon. The time is so specific because that's the time, two years ago, his mother passed away after a long battle with cancer. Jamison has a strong relationship with his younger sister, Ollie, who starts as a freshman in his high school. Her instant popularity helps open doors for Jamison's nonexistent social life, especially with his longtime crush, Kennedy, who takes advantage of his photography skills to put together her modeling portfolio. Kennedy's subsequent disinterest in him, combined with the negative attention he receives from his new classmate nicknamed AK-47, drives him to focus on creating a website to highlight his photos of what he calls "The 9:09 Project." Jamison's isolation and sadness from the loss of his mother will be instantly relatable to teens. The descriptions of Jamison's synesthesia and how he visually perceives numbers and concepts is a great introduction on how a large segment of the population perceives the world in a completely different way. Jamison talks about how he has adapted and learned to live his life with synesthesia; his mother shared his perceptual condition and could understand him in a way that he feels other members of his family can't.

## ***Answers in the Pages* by David Levithan**

*School Library Journal* starred (May 1, 2022)

**Grades 5 and up** - A timely and relevant release from prolific author Levithan, this slim tale showcases the turbulence and confusion of fifth grade as a school community tackles a classroom book challenge. The challenge is mainly rooted in a single sentence at the end of the assigned book that a mother happens to read when her son leaves it on the counter. Suddenly the classroom is in an uproar, with readers getting the play-by-play from a number of sources: Donovan, the kid who left the book out and whose mother is challenging it; Gideon and Roberto, two students paired up for a language arts project; and Rick and Oliver, the main characters in the controversial book. The interpretation of the novel and the nature of the challenge become a philosophical quagmire that the school leaders, parents, and students have to traverse, leaving family and friends on both sides of the issue. Levithan deftly addresses the heart of the problem with the words and mind of a student, "We are who we are...and we'll be who we'll be. A book can make us feel that, but it can't invent that. It's already inside us." The alternating points of view gives readers varying perspectives in the chaos. It is a swift ride highlighting the disconnect between students and adults, seemingly unbreakable alliances, and what happens when the weight of history enters the conversation. This heartfelt treatise on book banning and equality showcases how it feels to be stuck in the middle of a generational fight. Levithan has crafted a story that provides a window into a uniquely transitory age, one ripe for exploring the nuance of identity and the nature of personal prohibition, and which ultimately celebrates the messiness of being human, no matter the age

## ***Attack of the Black Rectangles* by A.S. King**

*School Library Journal* starred (September 1, 2022)

**Grades 5 and up** - King's latest novel is so timely and relevant, some readers may feel like the author has been privy to what's going on in their own schools. Mac is in the sixth grade and is a kid who knows his own mind. His teacher is known around town to be a strong, conservative influencer - for reasons that are never explained. Ms. Sett runs her classroom like she seems to run their small town, with antiquated rules and expectations. Girls aren't allowed to wear shorts to school and no junk food is available, and these are enforced city ordinances. Ms. Sett is a conundrum when she doesn't tolerate bullying and is an advocate of children but then censors books in her classroom including the book Mac is reading, *The Devil's Arithmetic*, in a literature circle. When Mac and his classmates find black marker has been used in all the books to mark out words thought to be inappropriate for sixth graders, Ms. Sett has gone too far (not even canceling Halloween got the kids as riled up as the "black rectangles"). While Mac and his friends work against censorship, Mac is also dealing with his father's mental illness. He has a good mom and grandad to support him when things get very confusing with his dad. Readers will find it easy to side with the outraged students and parents who go to the principal and then the school board to protest censorship and make sure the rules will protect everyone, and not just the opinions of one person. This title is slightly more sophisticated and mature than Alan Gratz's *Ban This Book* but is equally satisfying.

## ***Aviva vs. the Dybbuk* by Mari Lowe**

*School Library Journal* (February 1, 2022)

**Gr 3-7**-After losing her father in a terrible accident, 11-year-old Aviva Jacobs and her mother move into a small apartment above the local mikvah, a traditional bathhouse for orthodox Jewish women. Aviva's mother takes care of the mikvah and those who visit it, and Aviva takes care of the dybbuk, a mischievous spirit in Jewish folklore. Aviva's dybbuk is a real troublemaker. From tearing up checks to spilling out the contents of visitor's purses, it keeps Aviva on her toes. As Aviva tries to manage the dybbuk, she must also work with her ex-best friend to plan the most amazing Bat Mitzvah Bash that her school has ever seen. As she juggles the stresses of school, friends, and an increasingly tense situation at home, Aviva discovers her inner strength and the resilience of her community. Many readers will find Aviva charming and relatable as she navigates the roller coaster that is growing up.

## ***Big Tree* by Brian Selznick**

**Grades 2-8** – Selznick returns with a majestically illustrated, modern-day parable. Sycamore seeds Louise and Merwin are suddenly separated from their mama tree due to a conflagration. They are thrust into a dangerous world of dinosaurs and volcanoes, hoping to set down roots somewhere safe. Throughout their treacherous journey, the stars speak to Louise, hinting at a possible life-changing event on the horizon. Along the way, they meet The Ambassadors (mycorrhizal fungi), Spot (a butterfly), King Seaweed, and The Scientists (Foraminifera). Originally meant for a Spielberg-produced animated film, this tale, with its combination of a childlike narrative and profound illustrations, presents a big, universal story of taking care of the miraculous Earth on which we live. Selznick's signature art was created with pencil on hot pressed watercolor paper, and the texture and nuance of these nearly 300 pages will strike wonder in every reader. In the back matter, Selznick explains the science behind the story, including dinosaurs, asteroids, and the beginning of life on Earth. It also features a selected

bibliography and a poem by W.S. Merwin, the seed's namesake. Weighty themes of connectedness, conservation, and the impact that one small voice can have on the fate of the universe might feel unfathomable and too big for children, but in Selznick's hands, this poignant fable will resonate with all readers, young and old.

### ***The Boy at the Back of the Class* by Onjali Q Rauf**

*School Library Journal* (June 1, 2019)

**Grades 4-6** –When a new boy named Ahmed joins Alexa's class at her London school, all of the students have questions: Why does the new boy never go to lunch or recess with the other kids, and why doesn't he talk to anyone? Everyone has different theories, but when Alexa and her friends are waiting after school to give Ahmed some fruit and other small gifts, they overhear two adults saying that Ahmed is a refugee and no one speaks his language. Gradually, as they befriend Ahmed and speak to him through the assistant the school hires to translate, they piece together his story: how he and his family escaped from the bombs in Syria, how his little sister drowned in the sea, and how he was separated from his parents and doesn't know how to find them again. When Alexa learns that the United Kingdom is about to close its borders to refugees, she and her friends embark on a bold and dangerous plan to persuade the Queen to intervene on Ahmed's behalf. Filled with engaging characters and a compelling plot, this moving novel adroitly portrays the plight of refugees from Syria and other parts of the world. In her quest to help Ahmed, Alexa is forced to confront not only the school bully but also the bigotry of her neighbor and other adults, some of whom imply that Alexa herself and her Indonesian mother don't belong. She also learns that her own grandmother was a refugee during World War II who not only evaded the Nazis but helped others escape as well. Information about refugees and ways to help are included, as well as discussion questions and an author's note explaining how the novel was inspired by the true story of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old refugee who drowned during his family's escape across the Aegean Sea

### ***Caprice* by Coe Booth**

*School Library Journal* (June 1, 2022)

**Grades 5 and up** – Soon-to-be eighth grader Caprice has just finished up a summer leadership program at a boarding school and is faced with a choice: take a spot in the yearlong program at that school, or spend her eighth grade year in Newark with her best friend Nicole. However, when her grandmother falls ill, Caprice, who is Black, must go back to Baltimore and face a deep secret she's suppressed. When she was young, Caprice's uncle abused her in her grandmother's home. In this tale of pain and reclaiming the power of one's story, Caprice has to find her voice to face not only her past, but her future as well. Booth's novel uses a mix of verse poetry, flashbacks, and time-stamped present-day narrative. The chapters are short and maintain the book's quick pace. Told with unflinching honesty and an accessible way for the intended audience, Caprice's story can be hard to read at times but offers hope to survivors of abuse while educating readers about what survivors experience. Also included are resources for national organizations dedicated to supporting children like Caprice

### ***Cress Watercress* by Gregory Maguire**

*School Library Journal Xpress* starred (April 29, 2022)

**Grades 3-7** – When Maguire (*Wicked*) and illustrator Litchfield merge their creative geniuses, a spectacular woodland adventure full of quirky animal characters emerges. Cress, the "teenage"

bunny of the family, along with Mama, and baby brother Kip (with his ever in tow, stuffed carrot Rotty), are sad to leave their warren without their beloved missing Papa. They arrive at Mr. Owl's rotten tree, "The Broken Arms," and attempt to start over in a tiny basement flat. The woodland setting is visually stunning, with Litchfield's enchanting full-color illustrations, bringing the motley crew of animal characters to life. There's Lady Agatha Cabbage, the snooty chinchilla-wearing skunk and Tunk the Honeybear, and they must always watch out for "Final Drainpipe," the snake. Maguire is a master of telling a fast-moving adventure full of wry humor, with memorable multidimensional characters to cheer both for and against. Young Cress encounters heart-stopping dangers and adventures, while the creative duo of Maguire and Litchfield weave symbolism and beautiful imagery throughout the text. Cress will appeal to most readers, who will be able to identify with that awkward in-between time during one's youth when they are wishing for independence from their family, while still very much needing them for comfort.

### ***Door of No Return* by Kwame Alexander**

*School Library Journal* starred (September 1, 2022)

**Grades 5 and up** – The beginning of a planned trilogy set in western Africa in 1860, the latest offering from Newbery winner Alexander introduces readers to Kofi Offin. His experiences are a window to what life would have been like for a boy growing up in that specific place and time. He has a crush on Ama. He loves his grandfather's stories. He has learned English in school but speaks Twi with his family and friends. His cousin bullies him and he challenges him to a swimming race. When Kofi's brother accidentally kills his opponent in a wrestling match, the gentle verse narrative is disrupted because the family of the dead wrestler captures Kofi and his brother. They take them away from their village to the coast; Kofi goes through the door of no return and is put on a boat where things get very bad very quickly. The cliff-hanger ensures that future volumes will tackle the rest of Kofi's story. Books with enslaved main characters certainly exist in juvenile fiction, but the reality of the transatlantic slave trade hasn't been so adeptly captured for young readers to date. This important book is ideal for classroom discussion; shelve alongside Sharon Draper's *Copper Sun* and Julius Lester's *Day of Tears*.

### ***Everything Sad is Untrue* by Daniel Nayeri**

A sprawling, evocative, and groundbreaking autobiographical novel told in the unforgettable and hilarious voice of a young Iranian refugee. It is a powerfully layered novel that poses the questions: Who owns the truth? Who speaks it? Who believes it? A patchwork story is the shame of the refugee, Nayeri writes early in the novel. In an Oklahoman middle school, Khosrou (whom everyone calls Daniel) stands in front of a skeptical audience of classmates, telling the tales of his family's history, stretching back years, decades, and centuries. At the core is Daniel's story of how they became refugees--starting with his mother's vocal embrace of Christianity in a country that made such a thing a capital offense, and continuing through their midnight flight from the secret police, bribing their way onto a plane-to-anywhere. Anywhere becomes the sad, cement refugee camps of Italy, and then finally asylum in the U.S. Implementing a distinct literary style and challenging western narrative structures, Nayeri deftly weaves through stories of the long and beautiful history of his family in Iran, adding a richness of ancient tales and Persian folklore. Like *Scheherazade* of *One Thousand and One Nights* in a hostile classroom, Daniel spins a tale to save his own life: to stake his claim to the truth. *EVERYTHING SAD IS*

*UNTRUE* (a true story) is a tale of heartbreak and resilience and urges readers to speak their truth and be heard.

### ***Fish in a Tree* by Linda Mullaly Hunt**

*School Library Journal* (January 1, 2015)

**Grades 4-6** – In her second middle grade novel (*One for the Murphys*, 2012), Mullaly Hunt again paints a nuanced portrayal of a sensitive, smart girl struggling with circumstances beyond her control. Ally is great at math, and her ability to visualize moving pictures makes her an amazing artist, but she has a terrible secret: reading is almost impossible for her. By using her wits and adopting a troublemaking persona, she's been able to avoid anyone finding out a truth she is deeply ashamed of, but a new teacher at school seems to see right through the defenses she's built. While Ally struggles to accept the help that Mr. Daniels offers, she also deals with a father deployed in the Middle East, crushing loneliness, and an authentically awful set of mean girls at school. Ally's raw pain and depression are vividly rendered, while the diverse supporting cast feels fully developed. As the perceptive teacher who finally offers the diagnosis of dyslexia, Mr. Daniels is an inspirational educator whose warmth radiates off the page. Best of all, Mullaly Hunt eschews the unrealistic feel-good ending for one with hard work and small changes. Ally's journey is heartwarming but refreshingly devoid of schmaltz.

### ***Fuzzy Mud* by Louis Sachar**

*School Library Journal* (November 1, 2015)

**Grades 5 and up** – To avoid being beaten up by bully Chad, fifth grader Tamaya and her seventh grader friend Marshall take a shortcut home through the forbidden woods that surround their private school. When Chad forces a confrontation, Tamaya throws some "fuzzy mud" in his face, unwittingly unleashing an environmental and medical disaster that will affect thousands of people and animals. The fuzzy mud is actually a scientific breakthrough gone wrong, but will this disaster be enough to stop further experimentation? With appropriate sound effects and outstanding narration, Kathleen McInerney and a full cast skillfully create two scenarios, each occurring in a different time and place but which complement each other and keep the suspense high until the last chapter. Sachar deftly combines a lesson about bullying, a reflection on virtues, a suggestion of possible ramifications of our ever-growing population, and a message about tampering with natural science, all without becoming preachy or overly scientific. A reading by the author of "Can Virtue Be Taught?" will compel listeners to reflect on the book's themes.

### ***Ground Zero* by Alan Gratz**

*School Library Journal* starred (February 1, 2021)

**Grades 4-7** – Gratz (*Refugee*) writes a searing indictment of America's involvement in Afghanistan, told through two gripping parallel narratives. On September 11, 2001, nine-year-old Brandon accompanies his father to his job at New York City's World Trade Center. The two are separated during the ensuing terrorist attack, and, with help from others, Brandon survives. Eighteen years later, 11-year-old Reshmina, living in a remote Afghan village, sees her country and family devastated by the Taliban and the U.S. military, despite both armies' claims of protection. Brandon's and Reshmina's lives intertwine in a fateful encounter that challenges America's policies as well as its presence in Afghanistan, and puts a human face on the resulting suffering. Vivid details immerse readers in the two disparate settings. The plot starts at a heart-

pounding pace and never relents: Brandon and Reshmina's lives are in danger at every turn. In a superbly structured plot, the two protagonists experience similar perils, and both respond with determination and hope. Gratz provides readers with a brief history of Afghanistan and its occupation by foreign powers. Speaking through Reshmina, he concludes "the United States had surely destroyed Afghanistan." The book includes extensive back matter, making it an excellent choice for classroom discussion.

### ***Honestly Elliott* by Gillian McDunn**

*School Library Journal* starred (April 1, 2022)

**Grades 4-7** – A novel full of heart, humor, and honesty. Elliott is your typical kid dealing with his parents' divorce, his best friend moving away, a baby brother being born, not fitting in at his new school, nearly failing sixth grade-and on top of it all, Attention Deficient Hyperactivity Disorder. His passion for cooking drives him to want to do better so he can go to an awesome cooking camp in the summer. When his big school project comes up, he sees it as an opportunity to pay for camp and prove to his dad that cooking is a worthwhile endeavor. But when Elliott's so-called friends refuse to work with him, he ends up making an unexpected ally and convincing her that his cooking skills can get her an A. Elliot is an instantly lovable character, and readers will be hooked from the very first chapter. McDunn provides an honest look into ADHD and normalizes male characters exploring their feelings through therapy, which is a refreshing take on navigating a complicated dad-son relationship. Middle graders will be able to see themselves as Elliot through his various interests and relationships. Those with ADHD may appreciate this reflective text as a glimpse inside the brain of a middle schooler with ADHD.

### ***Jennifer Chan is Not Alone* by Tae Keller**

*School Library Journal* starred (April 1, 2022)

**Grades 5-7** – “There are also things I don't know. Like, do some people really just have popularity? Or is it given, or taken, or some combination of both?” Mallory Moss ponders this question as she struggles to find her place in middle school and in the world at large. Jennifer Chan, a new girl from Chicago, has just moved to Norwell, FL, and the rumors about her are already swirling. As Jennifer's neighbor, Mallory discovers that Jennifer's strength and quirky personality, along with her firm belief in aliens, are a recipe for disaster for the upcoming seventh grade year. Jennifer, on the other hand, is thrilled to have a new friend, but is stunned to learn that their budding friendship means nothing at school, because Mallory is one of the mean girls. When Jennifer goes missing, Mallory's world is shaken; she knows that she must revisit the bullying Jennifer experienced to get to the truth and hope it's not too late to save her. Written from Mallory's perspective in chapters that alternate between "Then" and "Now," Newbery-winning author Keller's book contains an exciting mix of mystery, adventure, and science fiction. Readers will bond with Mallory and stay engaged in the well-paced plot. Mallory and Jennifer are both Asian, while most friends read as white.

### ***Kaleidoscope* by Brian Selznick**

*School Library Journal* starred (November 1, 2021)

**Grades 6 and up** – Author and artist Selznick delivers big in his ambitious new short story collection. While the page count may be slight in comparison to some of his best-known titles (including *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, *Wonder*), this is by far his most complex work to date. Divided into thirds - Morning, Afternoon, Evening - this book explores the relationship of an



unnamed narrator and their companion, James (both characters adhere to the white default). The stories' connections come into sharper focus as the reader moves from Morning to Evening, though a great deal is left entirely open to interpretation. Key themes include friendship, love, grief, dreams, reality, and god-heavy fare for readers both young and old. The stories cover myriad genres, but even as the characters shift and change, "I" and "James" are constants (of a sort). Each story is prefaced by two illustrations: a representational image and a kaleidoscopic abstraction. Selznick has rendered the powerful illustrations in his signature black and white, with rich tonal work and keen details; the book's cover is stunningly executed in colored pencil.

### ***The Language of Seabirds* by Will Taylor**

*School Library Journal Xpress* (January 27, 2023)

**Grades 6 and up** – Jeremy is being forced to spend two weeks on the Oregon coast with his dad and his uncle as his mom moves out of the house due to his parents' divorce. Jeremy has recently discovered his interest in boys and hopes to keep it a secret while trying to figure out where he belongs in his new family dynamic. When he arrives at the coast and sees Evan running on the beach, his summer and his life are changed forever. As the two boys grow closer, they use the language of birds, words they associate with different types of birds, to communicate and express their feelings. Readers will empathize with Jeremy as he hides his true self and deals with his dad's erratic behavior and the divorce. Jeremy's father uses drinking as a coping mechanism, which causes Jeremy to take on the parental role at times and out himself before he is ready. Character development is excellent, and the boys' romance is tender and will resonate with young readers. The narrative shows how though a relationship may not be permanent, the personal growth and journey are important regardless of whether there is a happily ever after.

### ***The Last Mapmaker* by Christina Soontornvat**

*School Library Journal* starred (May 1, 2022)

**Grades 3-6** – Living a squalid life helping her conman father with his get-rich-quick schemes, Sodsai Mudawan uses her own cunning to secure an Assistantship with the Master Mapmaker of the Kingdom of Mangkon. Fortune favors her bravery even further when a declaration from the Queen provides an opportunity to join her master Paiyoon on a daring voyage to chart the shadowy Sunderlands, a region rich with secrets and sea monsters. The monetary prize attached to the expedition is just what Sai needs to free herself from her troubled past, but as her master wrestles with his culpability in the kingdom's expansion, Sai begins to have her own conflicted feelings over what she is willing to do (and sacrifice) to make her dream a reality. The spare, evocative prose immediately places readers in the hold of the story, and the Dickensian colorfulness of the characters and Sai's clipped delivery will have kids tearing through pages at an eager pace. Soontornvat brings a naturalness to her worldbuilding in this Thai-inspired landscape that will allow fans of magical realism and high adventure to find a tale worth cherishing.

### ***The Marvellers* by Dhonielle Clayton**

*School Library Journal* starred (June 1, 2022)

**Grades 3-7** – Eleven-year-old Ella Durand is excited to be the first Conjuror to attend the Arcanum Training Institute for Marvelous and Uncanny Endeavors. At the institute in the sky, aspiring Marvellers from all over the world study and hone their skills with the hope of being sorted into one of five paragons: touch, vision, spirit, sound, and taste. Unfortunately, Ella has to

contend with her classmates' preconceived notions of Conjurors being unnatural, bad, and untrustworthy. Despite a few missteps, Ella makes new friends, excels in her class, and learns from her favorite teacher and mentor. Things take a turn for the worse when the Ace of Anarchy, an infamous criminal, escapes from prison. People assume the escape was with a Conjuror's help, making them even more suspicious of Ella and her fellow Conjurors. As if things weren't bad enough, Ella's beloved mentor also disappears. It's up to Ella and her friends to get to the bottom of things and prove once and for all that she belongs. Ella is an inspirational heroine who has the formidable task of being the first Conjuror at the institute. Though her classmates' snide comments upset her, she doesn't back down from them, stares right back when they glare at her, and speaks up for herself and her friends. Thanks to the unique magic system and the descriptive worldbuilding, readers will find themselves transported. As with many description-heavy fantasy texts, readers should expect a steady yet entertaining read. This novel is an exemplary example of diversity with a Black girl protagonist, and characters representing a variety of cultures, skin tones, gender identities, sexual orientations, and religious affiliations.

### ***My Own Lightening* by Lauren Wolk**

*Publishers Weekly* starred (March 28, 2022)

**Grades 3-7** - Set in 1944, one year after her Newbery Honor-winning *Wolf Hollow*, in the same rural Pennsylvania community, Wolk crafts an exceptional sequel that both builds on the complexity of the previous installment and also stands on its own merit. After lightning strikes Annabelle in a sudden storm, and a "mystery hero" with rough hands restarts her heart, she suddenly becomes attuned to sensory input and the feelings of animals, including the injured and maltreated dogs nurtured by fellow hollow dweller Nora. Subsequently unraveling the truth behind canine cruelty in her community, Annabelle repeatedly encounters known bully Andy Woodberry, whose cruel actions previously led to tragedy. The narrative grapples with nuances and contradictions as Annabelle first resents Andy for the trauma he once caused, then weighs other factors, including his kind actions with animals, in reevaluating his character and motivations. With a memorable heroine, a finely honed voice, a distinctive setting, and deeply grounded relationships, this thought-provoking novel raises ethical issues about personal flaws and forgiveness.

### **Pride: an inspirational history of the LGBTQ+ movement**

*School Library Journal* starred (April 1, 2022)

**Grades 6 and up** – A short but global view of LGBTQIA+ milestones and important figures, this vibrant book shines all the colors of the rainbow on history that's largely only been told in black and white. Bright infographics, time lines, and notable quotations add visual interest, while one-page profiles of notable figures such as Oscar Wilde, Audre Lorde, and Marsha P. Johnson will be sure to motivate readers to seek out additional sources on their own. Starting with ancient human societies across the globe and moving through the centuries to today, this bird's eye view of LGBTQIA+ history will help young people find hope in how far we've come and gain inspiration for the necessary work still ahead. The author never balks at sharing hard truths about the hate and violence that many folks have faced throughout history; however, the major notes are positive, affirming, and full of pride. Inspiring messages from modern-day young adults offer many diverse perspectives and serve as a cleansing breath at the end of each chapter.

### ***Restart* by Gordon Korman**

*School Library Journal* (May 1, 2017)

**Grades 3-7** – What would it be like to forget your whole life, your family, your friends, and even who you are? After falling off his roof, 13-year-old Chase Ambrose learns the hard way that reinventing himself can be pretty hard, especially when his past is not what he wants for his future. Before his fall, Chase was a jock, captain of the football team, following in his father's footsteps. He was also the biggest bully in his middle school, had made many students' lives miserable, and was serving a community service sentence for the damage that his bullying had caused. Even Chase's little stepsister was afraid of him. If it were up to his dad and his former best friends, Bear and Aaron, Chase would go right back to his bully-jock ways. However, the new Chase is a kinder, more sympathetic person who struggles with his past and becomes friends with his former victims. As he works with the video club geeks, he forms a relationship with elderly Mr. Solway. Korman juxtaposes Mr. Solway's sharing of his Korean War memories with Chase's search for his own past. Despite the strong antibullying theme, the story is never preachy or trite but thoughtfully presents questions about loyalty, identity, and the possibility of a new start in a way that appropriately fits the middle school setting.

### ***Starfish* by Lisa Fipps**

*School Library Journal* starred (February 1, 2021)

**Grades 5 and up** – A charming novel in verse about a girl struggling with self-worth. Ellie is a middle school girl who is bullied every day for her weight. Whether it comes from classmates, siblings, or even her mother, Ellie is constantly bombarded with comments about her size. Luckily, her friends help keep her head up most of the time. When her best friend Viv moves away, a new friend, Catalina, fits right into her place. Ellie's dad is also an ally; he stands up to Ellie's mom and decides to take Ellie to a therapist. With the help of Dr. Wood, Ellie learns how to feel comfortable in her own skin. Once readers start, it will be difficult for them to put this book down. Ellie's story is heartbreaking and raw at times, and Fipps paints a realistic picture of bullying in a world that equates thinness with beauty. Ellie's own family, except for her dad, also buy into that ideal, calling her "Splash," making fun of her, and cataloging everything she eats. True joy comes in watching Ellie gain confidence in herself and standing up to the bullies, even when they're family. The race of most characters is not mentioned. Catalina and her family are Mexican American.

### ***The Season of Styx Malone* by Kekla Magoon**

*School Library Journal* (June 1, 2018)

**Grades 4-7** – Summertime in small-town Indiana only heightens 10-year-old Caleb's frustrations with feeling ordinary. When he and his older brother, Bobby Gene, meet smooth-talking 16-year-old Styx Malone, a whole new world of excitement, and its frequent companion trouble, opens up. Enthralled by cool kid Styx, Caleb and Bobby Gene are roped into an "escalator trade," whereby the boys attempt to trade small things for increasingly more valuable items in the hopes of eventually trading up to a shiny moped. The characters are magnetic; Styx in particular unfolds into a touchingly human young man withstanding the buffets of foster care. The themes of friendship, trust, rebellion, and safety strongly flavor the book without overpowering the easy fun.

## ***Squire* by Sara Alfageeh (Graphic Novel)**

*School Library Journal* (April 1, 2022)

**Grades 7 and up** – In a Middle Eastern fantasy setting, this is the story of a young Ornu girl growing up in the Bayt-Sajii Empire. Aiza and her family are forced to live in a community for the marginalized Ornu people, which provides them safety within the Empire but not much more. She dreams of leaving her small farming community to become a hero, and when an opportunity arises to join the army in hopes of becoming a squire (and eventually a knight, which would grant her citizenship), she is eager to serve the Empire. Yet almost immediately, she begins to question the history being taught to the new recruits: that the Empire is at war only because other nations refuse to return to the golden age, when all nations flourished as one. Over time, Aiza learns what it truly means to be a hero and the ways in which historical narratives are used to manipulate people. Alfageeh's artwork is stunning, with inspiration taken from Middle Eastern countries, specifically Turkey and Jordan. The recruits train in a place reminiscent of Petra, with buildings carved into red-toned cliffs, and Aiza and the majority of characters are depicted in various tones of brown skin and hair. Extensive author and artist notes on the process of creating the book are included

## ***Star Child: A Biographical Constellation of Octavia Estelle Butler* by Ibi Aanu Zobi**

*School Library Journal* starred (March 1, 2022)

**Grades 5 and up** – Zobi's biography of science fiction author Octavia Estelle Butler details her life from birth in Pasadena, CA, to her legacy as an author. Raised by her mother and grandmother after losing her father when she was four, Butler grew up in a non-segregated town filled with opportunities that her mother worked hard to give her. After struggling with dyslexia in school, Butler found reading and storytelling as a way to escape the schoolyard banter, where she found it difficult to connect with her classmates. Butler's life story is complemented by the history she grew up within, providing context of the Great Depression, World War II, the space race, the red scare, and the Civil Rights movement. Told through poetry, narrative, photographs, newspaper clippings, handwritten notes, story drafts, childhood sketches, quotes, report cards, and war propaganda, this stunning biography is a one-of-a-kind masterpiece of literature. Zobi carefully crafts each chapter of Butler's life with various types of poetry, using clever rhymes and rhythmic stanzas. Each poem and section of prose elegantly connects to the space theme, painting the picture of Butler as a star child, born out of stardust. The vivid poetry will fill readers' heads with imagery of the historic journey Zobi presents. The quick-paced chapters and rich voice will draw readers of all ages into this nontraditional biography.

## ***Summer of June* by Jamie Sumner**

*Publishers Weekly* (April 18, 2022)

Tired of "being the nervous mouse girl who is scared all the time," 11-year-old June – who quiets anxious thoughts by pulling out strands of her hair – shaves her head at the beginning of summer, deciding that she and her single librarian mother will "own our power as fierce, independent females." Though eliminating this coping mechanism doesn't curb the "itchy worry," it does lead to her wearing an electric blue wig. And her new vibe attracts the friendship of poetry-reciting Homer Juarez, whom June meets at the library. Following an incident with her mother's strict boss, who attempts to destroy Miss Rumphius-inspired seedlings, Homer and June start a secret garden behind the library, where June finds respite in caring for vulnerable plants. Soon, though,

the garden and emboldening wig lead to June impulsively stopping her anxiety meds, with disastrous results. In a love letter to libraries told in June's thoughtful voice, Sumner (*Tune It Out*) vividly traces one adolescent's anxiety and its attendant difficulties. June and her mom are white; racial diversity is implied for secondary characters.

### ***Wave* by Diana Farid**

*School Library Journal* (January 1, 2022)

**Grades 5 and up** – Ava's eighth grade year goes with the tumble of the waves she loves to surf as the young Persian girl battles the weight of her mother's expectations against her love for music and her best friend, Phoenix. When Phoenix's cancer comes back, Ava's grief takes over as they fight against the odds and for every moment with each other. Farid's poetry rides the page like a wave, charting the ups and downs of Ava's emotions. Small, thoughtful illustrations are peppered throughout—a beating heart, a wave, a mixtape—further making this tale feel fully devoted to Ava's consciousness. The verse format makes this text extremely accessible, and readers will be delighted to find elements of Ava's Persian heritage and 1980s childhood also woven throughout.

### ***A Wish in the Dark* by Christina Soontornvat**

*School Library Journal* (February 1, 2020)

**Grades 4 and up** – Years ago, the city of Chattana burned to the ground in a Great Fire and was thrown into chaos. The Governor restored peace to the city and powered it magically with orbs that gave light, heat, and power. Pong was born in Namwon Prison. Those lights represent freedom; but when he escapes from prison, he learns that the Governor controls who is in light and who is in darkness. In this society, everyone is beholden to the Governor and no one is truly free. Nok's father, born into society and now the prison warden, is disgraced when the 12-year-old Pong escapes. Unable to bear her father's shame, Nok embarks on a quest to find Pong and avenge her father's reputation. As she does, she learns that things are not always as fair and simple as she was taught in school. Nuanced questions of morality, oppression, and being defined by one's circumstances are compounded with exciting action in this novel inspired by Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. The characters are resonant, and the action is enhanced by the fantastical Thailand-like setting.

### ***Wingbearer* by Marjorie M Liu (Graphic Novel)**

*School Library Journal* starred (March 1, 2022)

**Grades 5-8** – Zuli, a Black child and the only one of her kind, lives in a sacred tree that holds the souls of birds that have died and are waiting to be reborn. Zuli was raised with love by the Wings, the guardians of birds' souls, who taught her to work with them. The birds' souls tell her their stories as she helps them move on, which always makes her wonder where she came from and what the world is like beyond the tree. One day, everything changes—birds are dying, but their souls aren't returning to the tree to be reborn. The Wings, ever protective of Zuli, reluctantly let her leave the safety of the tree to find out what's happening. She encounters mystical creatures, frightening situations, and surprising revelations about her origins. Zuli's companion, Frowly the owl, adds some humor to this dramatic story. Liu (*Monstress*) creates a dreamy, thrilling narrative. Issakhanian's artwork is the perfect complement to the story; the illustrations are gorgeous, the facial expressions dynamic, and color deftly depicts the ethereal spirit worlds, contrasted with the more dramatic worlds and creatures Zuli visits.