

Roselle Park School District
Summer Reading List/Requirements
Roselle Park Middle School
2009

This year, we have restructured our summer reading curriculum in order to offer students a more diverse list of titles. Students will be given a selection of novels to choose from. All students going into grades 6-8 must read **one** of the books listed below for their grade level. Honors students going into 8th grade will also have an additional title that is required, for a total of **two** books to read during the summer. Although we encourage students to read more than one novel, they will not be awarded extra credit for additional novels. Students are required to complete a Summer Reading Document Form and one project for a total of 15% of the first marking period grade, in lieu of a multiple choice/essay test on the novel. The Summer Reading Document Form along with the selected project (see attached) is due to the teacher by **Friday, September 11, 2009**. Books will be reviewed in class during the week of September 14. The titles on the list were chosen because they have proven to be of “high interest” to readers. Parents/guardians are advised to become involved with your son or daughter’s choice of reading.

Those who will be entering Grade 6, will choose one of the following titles to read:

Pinballs by Betsy Byars (LL600) Carlie knows she's got no say in what happens to her. Stuck in a foster home with two other kids, Harvey and Thomas J, she's just a pinball being bounced from bumper to bumper. As soon as you get settled, somebody puts another coin in the machine and off you go again. But against her will and her better judgment, Carlie and the boys become friends. And all three of them start to see that they can take control of their own lives.

Number the Stars by Lois Lowry (LL670)

The author of the Anastasia books as well as more serious fiction (Rabbi Starkey, 1987) offers her first historical fiction--a story about the escape of the Jews from Denmark in 1943. Five years younger than Lisa in Matas' book (below), Annemarie Johansen has, at ten, known three years of Nazi occupation. Though ever cautious and fearful of the ubiquitous soldiers, she is largely unaware of the extent of the danger around her; the Resistance kept even its participants safer by telling them as little as possible, and Annemarie has never been told that her older sister Lise died in its service. When the Germans plan to round up the Jews, the Johansens take in Annemarie's friend, Ellen Rosen, and pretend she is their daughter; later, they travel to Uncle Hendrik's house on the coast, where the Rosens and other Jews are transported by fishing boat to Sweden. Apart from Lise's offstage death, there is little violence here; like Annemarie, the reader is protected from the full implications of events--but will be caught up in the suspense and menace of several encounters with soldiers and in Annemarie's courageous run as courier on the night of the escape. The book concludes with the Jews' return, after the war, to homes well kept for them by their neighbors. A deftly told story that dramatizes how Danes appointed themselves bodyguards--not only for their king, who was in the habit of riding alone in Copenhagen, but for their Jews.

Tale of Despereaux by Kate DiCamillo (LL670)

Forgiveness, light, love, and soup. These essential ingredients combine into a tale that is as soul stirring as it is delicious. Despereaux, a tiny mouse with huge ears, is the bane of his family's existence. He has fallen in love with the

young princess who lives in the castle where he resides and, having read of knights and their ladies, vows to "honor her. "But his unmouse-like behavior gets him banished to the dungeon, where a swarm of rats kill whoever falls into their clutches. Another story strand revolves around Miggery, traded into service by her father, who got a tablecloth in return. Mig's desire to be a princess, a rat's yen for soup (a food banished from the kingdom after a rat fell in a bowl and killed the queen), and Despereaux's quest to save his princess after she is kidnapped climax in a classic fairy tale, rich and satisfying. Part of the charm comes from DiCamillo's deceptively simple style and short chapters in which the author addresses the reader: "Do you think rats do not have hearts? Wrong. All living things have a heart. "And as with the best stories, there are important messages tucked in here and there, so subtly that children who are carried away by the words won't realize they have been uplifted until much later. Ering's soft pencil illustrations reflect the story's charm.

Esperanza Rising by Pam Munoz Ryan (LL750)

Moving from a Mexican ranch to the company labor camps of California, Ryan's lyrical novel manages the contradictory: a story of migration and movement deeply rooted in the earth. When 14-year-old Esperanza's father is killed, she and her mother must emigrate to the U.S., where a family of former ranch workers has helped them find jobs in the agricultural labor camps. Coming from such privilege, Esperanza is ill prepared for the hard work and difficult conditions she now faces. She quickly learns household chores, though, and when her mother falls ill, she works packing produce until she makes enough money to bring her beloved *abuelita* to the U.S. Set during the Great Depression, the story weaves cultural, economic, and political unrest into Esperanza's poignant tale of growing up: she witnesses strikes, government sweeps, and deep injustice while finding strength and love in her family and romance with a childhood friend. The symbolism is heavy-handed, as when Esperanza ominously pricks her finger on a rose thorn just before her father is killed. But Ryan writes movingly in clear, poetic language that children will sink into, and the book offers excellent opportunities for discussion and curriculum support.

Summer Ball by Mike Lupica (LL910) Danny Walker is back in this sequel to *Travel Team* (2004). This installment takes Danny to a summer basketball camp, where the scrappy hero faces some of the country's best players in his age group. Early on, Danny finds himself spending a lot of time on the bench because his coach (a retired college coach) determines that he is too short for the game. Danny suspects, however, that the coach's antagonism may have more to do with an old grudge the coach holds against Danny's dad, a former basketball star. Eventually, though, Danny's tough-minded determination wins the day as he helps lead his team to victory. Lupica is at his best when he puts the reader right in the center of the action on the court. His game descriptions are fast, accurate, and exciting. Young sports-fiction fans will eat this up.

Those who will be in Grade 7, will choose one of the following titles to read:

City of Ember by Jeanne DuPrau (LL680)

Ember, a 241-year-old, ruined domed city surrounded by a dark unknown, was built to ensure that humans would continue to exist on Earth, and the instructions for getting out have been lost and forgotten. On Assignment Day, 12-year-olds leave school and receive their lifetime job assignments. Lina Mayfleet becomes a messenger, and her friend Doon Harrow ends up in the Pipeworks beneath the city, where the failing electric generator has been ineffectually patched together. Both Lina and Doon are convinced that their survival means finding a way out of the city, and after Lina discovers pieces of the instructions, she and Doon work together to interpret the fragmented document. Life in this post-holocaust city is well limned--the frequent blackouts, the food shortage, the public panic, the search for answers, and the actions of the powerful, who are taking selfish advantage of the situation. Readers will relate to Lina and Doon's resourcefulness and courage in the face of ominous odds.

The Giver by Lois Lowry (LL760)

In a complete departure from her other novels, Lowry has written an intriguing story set in a society that is uniformly run by a Committee of Elders. Twelve-year-old Jonas's confidence in his comfortable "normal" existence as a member of this well-ordered community is shaken when he is assigned his life's work as the Receiver. The Giver, who passes on to Jonas the burden of being the holder for the community of all memory "back and back and back," teaches him the cost of living in an environment that is "without color, pain, or past." The tension leading up to the Ceremony, in

which children are promoted not to another grade but to another stage in their life, and the drama and responsibility of the sessions with The Giver are gripping. The final flight for survival is as riveting as it is inevitable. The author makes real abstract concepts, such as the meaning of a life in which there are virtually no choices to be made and no experiences with deep feelings. This tightly plotted story and its believable characters will stay with readers for a long time. --Amy Kellman, The Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh

Ask Me No Questions by Marina Budhos (LL790)

What is it like to be an illegal alien in New York now? In a moving first-person, present-tense narrative, Nadira, 14, relates how her family left Bangladesh, came to the U. S. on a tourist visa, and stayed long after the visa expired ("Everyone does it. You buy a fake social security number for a few hundred dollars and then you can work."). Their illegal status is discovered, however, following 9/11, when immigration regulations are tightened. When the family hurriedly seeks asylum in Canada, they are turned back, and Nadira's father, Abba, is detained because his passport is no longer valid. The secrets are dramatic ("Go to school. Never let anyone know. Never."), and so are the family dynamics, especially Nadira's furious envy of her gifted older sister, Aisha. But Aisha breaks down, and Nadira must take over the struggle to get Abba out of detention and prevent the family's deportation. The teen voice is wonderfully immediate, revealing Nadira's mixed-up feelings as well as the diversity in her family and in the Muslim community. There's also a real drama that builds to a tense climax: Did Abba give funds to a political organization? Where has the money gone? Will Immigration hear his appeal? The answer is a surprise that grows organically from the family's story. Readers will feel the heartbreak, prejudice, kindness, and fear. Add this to the titles in "New Immigration Materials" in the August 2005 issue's Spotlight on Immigration.

Invention of Hugo Cabret by Brian Selznick (LL820)

Selznick's "novel in words and pictures," an intriguing mystery set in 1930s Paris about an orphan, a salvaged clockwork invention, and a celebrated filmmaker, resuscitates an anemic genre--the illustrated novel--and takes it to a whole new level. The result is somewhat similar to a graphic novel, but experiencing its mix of silvery pencil drawings and narrative interludes is ultimately more akin to watching a silent film. Indeed, movies and the wonder they inspire, "like seeing dreams in the middle of the day," are central to the story, and Selznick expresses an obvious passion for cinema in ways both visual (successive pictures, set against black frames as if projected on a darkened screen, mimic slow zooms and dramatic cuts) and thematic (the convoluted plot involves director Georges Méliès, particularly his fanciful 1902 masterpiece, *A Trip to the Moon*.) This hybrid creation, which also includes movie stills and archival photographs, is surprising and often lovely, but the orphan's story is overshadowed by the book's artistic and historical concerns (the heady extent of which are revealed in concluding notes about Selznick's inspirations, from the Lumière brothers to François Truffaut). Nonetheless, bookmaking this ambitious demands and deserves attention--which it will surely receive from children attracted by a novel in which a complex narrative is equally advanced by things both read and seen.

Heat by Mike Lupica (LL940) Gr. 6--9. Michael Arroyo is a 13-year-old Cuban American who lives in the shadow of Yankee Stadium. Yes, he is a Little League ballplayer, and, yes, he has a dream: to pitch in the Little League World Series. To do so, his South Bronx All-Stars will need to beat the best the greater New York area has to offer in the regional championship, to be played in--you guessed it--Yankee Stadium. This setup sounds like yet another *Rocky* meets *Bad News Bears* tearjerker: the immigrants from the Bronx take on the white-bread rich kids from the suburbs. It is that (with some notable twists), but it's much more, too. Michael and his brother, 17-year-old Carlos, have a problem: their beloved father is dead, and the boys are hoping to avoid a foster home by pretending Papi is visiting a sick relative in Miami. Lupica wrings plenty of genuine emotion from the melodramatic frame story, but he sidesteps the slough of social significance by building characters who speak for themselves, not the author, and by enlivening the story with a teen version of street humor. The dialogue crackles, and the rich cast of supporting characters--especially Michael's battery mate, catcher and raconteur Manny--nearly steals the show. Top-notch entertainment in the Carl Hiaasen mold.

Those who will be in Grade 8, will choose one of the following titles to read:

Maximum Ride: The Angel Experiment by James Patterson (LL700)

Fourteen-year-old Max (short for Maximum Ride) leads an usual group of children, escapees from an institution that

designed them by "grafting avian DNA onto human genes. "Yup, these kids have wings. When Angel, the smallest of the group, is kidnapped by mutants and taken back to the "school," Max and her family determine to get her back--no matter what. Patterson occasionally forgets his audience here, as evidenced by his sardonic tone and such glib adult asides as "they found their prey: moi, "but he's picked a comfortable formula (orphans protecting one another and making a home together), which he's cushioned with an abundance of slaving beasts, childhood heartaches, and unresolved issues--all in preparation for the sequel in 2006, in which Max will, presumably, assume the role she's been assigned here: savior of the world.

Colibri by Ann Cameron (LL730) Twelve-year-old Rosa remembers only a few things about the home she shared with her loving parents in a Mayan village before she was kidnapped at the age of four. Since then, she has traveled with Uncle, an abusive con artist. After being convinced by a fortune-teller that Rosa will make him rich, Uncle embarks on an obsessive treasure hunt, forcing Rosa to join in his scams for food and money. Rosa hates Uncle's dishonesty and anger, and she feels trapped. Then Uncle consults another fortune-teller, a kind, wise woman who gives Rosa the courage to escape. Uncle remains a dark, mortal threat, though, and his search for riches coincides with Rosa's search for identity. The taut, chilling suspense and search for riches will keep readers flying through the pages. But it's Cameron's beautiful language and Rosa's larger identity quest that make this novel extraordinary. Her poetic words evoke Guatemalan towns and lush forests where the earth smells "as if it were singing. "Rosa narrates in a voice that sometimes seems to belong to an older, wiser self, but readers will be deeply moved by her intense yearning for security, love, and integrity and her sense of a spiritual world that is felt but never fully known.

Airborn by Kenneth Oppel (LL760) In a breathtaking opening sequence, cabin boy Matt Cruse on the airship Aurora spies a hot-air balloon slowly sinking in the night sky, its pilot unconscious in the gondola. Within minutes Matt is harnessed and swinging four hundred feet above the ocean for a daring midair rescue. Though Matt saves balloonist Benjamin Molloy, the elderly man dies the following day after mumbling some cryptic words about "beautiful creatures." A year later, Molloy's granddaughter Kate travels on the Aurora hoping to learn more about the strange winged mammals the balloonist wrote about in his journal. "Cloud cats"--magnificent creatures that live solely in the air--are among several fanciful elements in this novel, which is set in an alternate Edwardian-styled past that's both familiar (wireless radios, Lumiere projectors) and exotic (giant "hydrium"-filled airships traverse the "Pacificus" and "Atlanticus" oceans). Matt is a wonderfully enthusiastic narrator whose passion for flight is evident on every page, and he's well matched by the strong-willed, intellectually curious Kate. Their adventures in this fast-paced, buoyant novel have a sweeping, cinematic feel as pirates attack the Aurora, the vessel is shipwrecked, and Matt and Kate escape imprisonment just in time to dispatch the bad guys, save the Aurora and its passengers, and, of course, fall in love.

The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho (LL910) This simple, yet eloquent parable celebrates the richness of the human spirit. A young Spanish shepherd seeking his destiny travels to Egypt where he learns many lessons, particularly from a wise old alchemist. The real alchemy here, however, is the transmuting of youthful idealism into mature wisdom. The blending of conventional ideas with an exotic setting makes old truths seem new again. This shepherd takes the advice Hamlet did not heed, learning to trust his heart and commune with it as a treasured friend. Enjoyable and easy to read, this timeless fantasy validates the aspirations and dreams of youth.

The Pact by Drs. Samson Davis, George Jenkins, Rameck Hunk

(LL940) Growing up is tough. But growing up in Newark, a city recently ranked one of the worst places in the country to raise children, is even tougher. Especially when, a young black man, reaching your 21st birthday is an enormous feat. Those were just some of the odds faced by Sampson Davis, Rameck Hunt, and George Jenkins. In 1989, when they were just 16, the young men made a promise to each other to attend college--Seton Hall University--and later become doctors.

Required Read for 8th Grade Honors

The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien (LL1000) Bilbo Baggins, a hobbit, becomes a thief for a band of dwarves and soon finds himself in the midst of a war with the evil goblins and wargs, and forced to make a decision between the call of duty and the pull of the simple life.