

Required Reading for Summer 2026
Penn's Grove Language Arts Department

Entering 8th Grade

All students must choose **one of the themed clusters** listed below (Cluster 1-4) and complete the reading of **two texts**. Students may not mix and match texts from different clusters. Within each cluster, students **must read the non-fiction**, but they may **choose one** of the three **fiction** texts listed. Students must complete the attached questions for each book (a total of 6 questions for each book) and turn them into their Language Arts teacher at the beginning of the year.

DUE DATE: Wednesday, September 30, 2026

EMERGING LEVEL- cluster 1



* # *One Crazy Summer* by Rita Williams-Garcia (fiction)

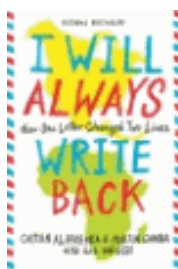
In the summer of 1968, after traveling from Brooklyn to Oakland, California, to spend a month with the mother they barely know, eleven-year-old Delphine and her two younger sisters arrive to a cold welcome as they discover that their mother, a dedicated poet and printer, is resentful of the intrusion of their visit and wants them to attend a nearby Black Panther summer camp. 750 L



The Crossover by Kwame Alexander (fiction)

"With a bolt of lightning on my kicks . . . The court is SIZZLING. My sweat is DRIZZLING. Stop all that quivering. Cuz tonight I'm delivering," announces dread-locked, 12-year old Josh Bell. He and his twin brother Jordan are awesome on the court. But Josh has more than basketball in his blood, he's got mad beats, too, that tell his family's story in verse, in this fast and furious novel of family and brotherhood. 750 L

I Will Always Write Back: How One Letter Changed Two Lives by Caitlin Alifirenka – (nonfiction- required to read in this cluster)



lives. 790 L

The true story of an all-American girl and a boy from Zimbabwe and the letter that changed both of their lives forever. It started as an assignment. Everyone in Caitlin's class wrote to an unknown student somewhere in a distant place. Martin was lucky to even receive a penpal letter. There were only ten letters, and fifty kids in his class. But he was the top student, so he got the first one. That letter was the beginning of a correspondence that spanned six years and changed two



Tex- S.E. Hinton- (fiction)

Even though his classmates from first grade on have considered him strange and a loser, Daniel Zinkoff's optimism and exuberance and the support of his loving family do not allow him to feel that way about himself. 710 L.

*May contain sensitive content

eBook available through Penn's Grove catalog

L = Lexile measure

ON LEVEL- cluster 2



The Tequila Worm by Viola Canales (fiction)

Sofia comes from a family of storytellers. Here are her tales of growing up in the barrio, full of the magic and mystery of family traditions: making Easter *cascarones*, celebrating *el Dia de los Muertos*, preparing for *quincea-era*, rejoicing in the Christmas *nacimiento*, and curing homesickness by eating the tequila worm. When Sofia is singled out to receive a scholarship to an elite boarding school, she longs to explore life beyond the barrio, even though it means leaving her family to navigate a strange world of rich, privileged kids. It's a different *mundo*, but one where Sofia's traditions take on new meaning and illuminate her path. – 830 L



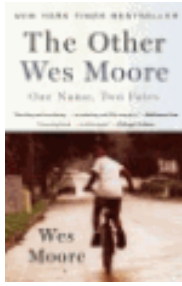
The Schwa Was Here by Neal Shusterman (fiction)

A Brooklyn eighth-grader nicknamed Antsy befriends the Schwa, an "invisible-ish" boy who is tired of blending into his surroundings and going unnoticed by nearly everyone. 790 L



Almost Astronauts: 13 Women Who Dared to Dream -by Tanya Lee Stone (**nonfiction**)

“Space gals. Astronettes. Astrodolls . . . Who do these women think they are?” The media mocked them. Male astronauts did not want them, and neither did then vice-president Lyndon Johnson. If they were to let women into the space program, blacks and other minorities would be next. Nearly 20 years before the U.S. officially admitted women into the astronaut program, 13 women, known as the Mercury 13, fought for the right to soar into space. Covers their stories and the breakthrough science and technology surrounding space exploration, including details of the would-be astronauts’ tests and training. – 980 L



**The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates* by Wes Moore

(nonfiction)

The author, a Rhodes scholar and combat veteran, analyzes the various sociocultural factors that influenced him as well as another man of the same name and from the same neighborhood who was drawn into a life of drugs and crime and ended up serving life in prison, focusing on the influence of relatives, mentors, and social expectations that could have led either of them on different paths. 990 L

****There are 2 non-fiction choices for this cluster- you must read 1 non-fiction book**

*May contain sensitive content

eBook available through Penn's Grove catalog

L = Lexile measure

ON LEVEL- cluster 3



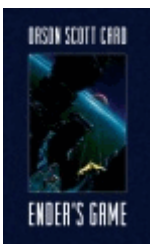
Wonder by R.J. Palacio – (fiction)

Ten-year-old Auggie Pullman, who was born with extreme facial abnormalities and was not expected to survive, goes from being home-schooled to entering fifth grade at a private middle school in Manhattan, which entails enduring the taunts and fear of his classmates as he struggles to be seen as just another student. 790 L



* # *Watership Down* by Richard Adams – (fiction)

A group of hardy Berkshire rabbits share many adventures together as they search for a safe place to establish a new warren after the destruction of their community. 880 Lexile level



* # *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card – (fiction)

Young Ender Wiggin may prove to be the military genius Earth needs to fight a desperate battle against a deadly alien race that will determine the future of the human race. 780 L



Bomb: The Race to Build—and Steal—the World's Most Dangerous Weapon by Steve Sheinkin – (nonfiction- required to read for this cluster)
Examines the history of the atomic bomb, discussing the discovery of the behavior of uranium when placed next to radioactive material, the race to build a bomb, and the impact of the weapon on societies around the world. 920 L

*May contain sensitive content

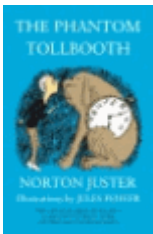
eBook available through Penn's Grove catalog

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ABOVE GRADE LEVEL- cluster 4



* # *The Midwife's Apprentice* by Karen Cushman – (fiction)
The girl known only as Brat has no family, no home, and no future until she meets Jane the Midwife and becomes her apprentice. As she helps the sharp-tempered Jane deliver babies, Brat — who renames herself Alyce — gains knowledge, confidence, and the courage to want something from life 1240 L



The Phantom Tollbooth by Norton Juster – (fiction)
Milo travels through a magical tollbooth and begins a journey to the Kingdom of Wisdom, where he and a "watch" dog named Tock try to end the feud between numbers and words. 1000 L



* # *The Boys in the Boat: The True Story of an American Team's Epic Journey to Win Gold at the 1936 Olympics* by Daniel James Brown – (nonfiction- required to read in this cluster)

"Out of the depths of the Great Depression comes the astonishing tale of nine working-class boys from the American West who at the 1936 Olympics showed the world what true grit really meant." 1000 L



Dairy Queen by Catherine Gilbert Murdock – (fiction)

After spending her summer running the family farm and training the quarterback for her school's rival football team, sixteen-year-old D.J. decides to go out for the sport herself, not anticipating the reactions of those around her. 990 L

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	<u>Non-Fiction Prompts/Questions</u>
Remembering <u>CHOOSE ONE</u>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What is the main idea of the book?2. Give a one paragraph summary of any chapter in the book.3. What problems does the person have, and how does he or she solve it?
Understanding <u>CHOOSE ONE</u>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Name five facts from the text and justify how you know they are facts.5. Tell in your own words how the setting (time the book took place) affected the person the book is about.6. Describe the mood of a specific scene from the book using at least two relevant details.
Applying <u>CHOOSE ONE</u>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">7. Could you relate the book to yourself? Why or why not?8. Write a letter to a friend recommending this book.9. Identify a situation in which the central person showed courage. Describe how you would have reacted in the same situation.

<p>Analyzing</p> <p><u>CHOOSE ONE</u></p>	<p>10. In the cluster you chose, compare and contrast the fiction book to the non-fiction book.</p> <p>11. The summer book choices give you insight to history. What surprised you as you were reading?</p> <p>12. Find an Internet article from a primary source connected to an issue from the book. Record your source (title of article, title of publication, the Web site, author, and date of publication). Write a minimum 10-sentence summary of the article. (Wikipedia, Google, etc., are not primary sources)</p>
<p>Evaluating</p> <p><u>CHOOSE ONE</u></p>	<p>13. Did you like the non-fiction book? Why or why not?</p> <p>14. Would you like to meet the person the book was about? Why? What questions would you ask him?</p> <p>15. Why do you think the author wanted to write this book? What was the intention?</p>
<p>Creating</p> <p><u>CHOOSE ONE</u></p>	<p>16. Think of ONE gift you would like to give the person you read about based on that character's specific needs. Explain why you gave that gift.</p> <p>17. If a biography/ memoir was written about you in the future, what would it tell us about you?</p> <p>18. Choose a short paragraph from the book that stands out to you. Explain why you chose it and what made it stand out.</p>

	<u>Fiction Prompts/Questions</u>
<p>Remembering</p> <p><u>CHOOSE ONE</u></p>	<p>1. What is the main setting of the novel? List the places mentioned in the book.</p> <p>2. Who is the protagonist? Who or what is the main antagonist? (see example above)</p> <p>3. What problems does one of the characters have, and how does he or she solve it?</p>

<p>Understanding</p> <p><u>CHOOSE ONE</u></p>	<p>4. Give an example of indirect characterization: personality traits shown through actions and dialogue. (For example: <i>Jimmy walked down the street frowning</i>. Reader infers Jimmy is upset.)</p> <p>5. Tell in your own words how the setting of the story affected a character.</p> <p>6. Describe the mood of a specific scene from the novel using at least two relevant details.</p>
<p>Applying</p> <p><u>CHOOSE ONE</u></p>	<p>7. Did this book give you any new ideas about yourself? Why or why not?</p> <p>8. Write a letter to a friend recommending this book.</p> <p>9. Identify a situation in which the protagonist showed courage. Describe how you would have reacted in the same situation.</p> <p>10. Tell 5 ways in which you are like the main character.</p>
<p>Analyzing</p> <p><u>CHOOSE ONE</u></p>	<p>11. Compare and contrast two of the characters in this book.</p> <p>12. Compare the novel you read this summer to a novel you read last year.</p> <p>13. The summer book choices are realistic novels. Which event in the novel you read seems most unbelievable?</p> <p>14. Find an Internet article from a primary source connected to a social issue from the novel (i.e. bullying, abuse, mental illness, etc.). Record your source (title of article, title of publication, the Web site, author, and date of publication). Write a minimum 10-sentence summary of the article. (Wikipedia, Google, etc., are <u>not</u> primary sources)</p>
<p>Evaluating</p> <p><u>CHOOSE ONE</u></p>	<p>15. Do you like the way the story ended? Why or why not?</p> <p>16. Which character would you most like to meet and why?</p> <p>17. Describe a situation in which a character is treated unfairly and explain how it is unfair to that character.</p>
<p>Creating</p> <p><u>CHOOSE ONE</u></p>	<p>18. Choose a character from your book, then think of ONE gift you would like to give him/her based on that character's specific needs. Explain why you gave that gift.</p> <p>19. Choose a character from the novel and write a creative continuation of his/her story.</p>

	<p>20. Choose a character from the novel and think of a shape that fits that character's traits. Draw the shape, describe the character inside the shape, and explain why you chose the shape outside of it.</p>
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