



May 2026

Dear Rising 7th Grade Students and Parents,

I am excited to work with you next school year! I hope you have a fun, restful summer and you also get to spend your vacation with a few good books. Your required summer reading assignment is to read **TWO** books from the list below, and journal about character or theme (see pages 2-5 of this letter). Every fifty pages, respond to either a character or theme prompt in two paragraphs. You should have at least three entries on character and three entries on theme for both books.

Choose **TWO** of the following books selected from the [Lone Star reading list](#):

- *The Beat I Drum* - Dusti Bowling
- *Blood in the Water* - Tiffany D. Jackson
- *The Factory* - Catherine Egan
- *Last Chance Academy* - Debbi Michiko Florence
- *The Trouble With Heroes* - Kate Messner
- *The Wrong Way Home* - Kate O'Shaughnessy
- *Bye Forever, I Guess* - Jodi Meadows
- *Keeping Pace* - Laurie Morrison

Complete your journal in a five-subject spiral notebook, which will become your Language Arts notebook for the entire school year. The purpose of these journal entries is to think critically about what you are reading and share your understanding in unique and creative ways. Your journals are due on the first day of school, **Wednesday, August 19, 2026**.

Please don't hesitate to email me over the summer if you have any questions. I can't wait to share these summer book journals and celebrate your hard work in the fall. I look forward to seeing you next year. Have a wonderful summer!

Sincerely,

Mrs. Block
7th Grade Language Arts Teacher
jblock@stmes.org



Response Journal: Exploring Characters

Instructions: For each journal entry, choose a character from the book you chose and respond to **ONE** of the following prompts. You'll need to choose **THREE** different prompts for both books. You may use the same prompt for each book, but not the same prompt twice for one book. For each prompt, find at least **ONE** example from the book that supports your thoughts or ideas. **You must complete ONE extension activity for each book. You must pick ONE from the character and ONE from the theme section.**

Title each entry as follows: Entry # [], [Date]: Character Focus: [Character's Name]

1. **First Impressions:** What were your initial thoughts and feelings about this character when you first met them in the book? What did they say or do that made you feel this way?
2. **Appearance and Actions:** Describe the character's physical appearance (if the author provides details). How do they act or behave in different situations? What are some of their key actions?
3. **Dialogue and Thoughts:** What does this character say? How do they speak? What do their words reveal about their personality or feelings? (If the book reveals their thoughts, what do those thoughts tell you?)
4. **Character Traits:** Based on their appearance, actions, dialogue, and thoughts, what are some of the key character traits you would use to describe this person? (Think about words like brave, kind, selfish, curious, determined, shy, etc. List at least 3-4 traits.)
5. **Character Motivation:** What seems to drive this character? What are their goals, desires, or fears? Why do they do the things they do?
6. **Character Change (if applicable):** Has this character changed in any way so far in the book? If so, how? What events or interactions might have caused this change? If not, do you predict they will change?
7. **Your Connection:** Do you relate to this character in any way? Why or why not? What do you think about their choices and actions?
8. **Advice:** If you could give this character one piece of advice, what would it be and why?



Extension Activities (complete at least one):

- **Character Sketch:** Draw a picture of the character based on the descriptions in the text. Label your drawing with some of their key character traits.
- **Character Interview:** Imagine you are interviewing this character. Write down three questions you would ask them and what you think their answers might be.
- **Character Comparison:** Choose another character from the book, and compare and contrast their traits and motivations with the character you focused on in this entry.
- **Character's Perspective:** Rewrite a short scene from the story from the perspective of the character you are focusing on. How would they describe the events and other characters?
- **Character's Inner Monologue:** Write a short paragraph describing what this character might be thinking or feeling during a specific moment in the book.



Response Journal: Uncovering the Message (Theme)

Instructions: For each entry, think about the book you chose and respond to one of the following prompts, focusing on what big ideas or messages the author might be trying to share. You'll need to choose **THREE** different prompts for BOTH books. You may use the same prompt for each book, but not the same prompt twice for one book. For each prompt, find at least **ONE** example from the book that supports your thoughts or ideas. **You must complete ONE extension activity for each book. You must pick one from the character and one from the theme section.**

Title each entry as follows: Entry # [], [Date]: Theme Focus: [Possible Them— e.g., Friendship, Courage, Prejudice]

1. **What is a Theme?** In your own words, what do you think a "theme" of this book is? (Hint: It's not the plot, but the underlying message or idea.)
2. **Initial Thoughts on Themes:** After reading the book, what are some big ideas or messages that seem important? List at least two or three possibilities.
3. **Focusing on One Theme:** For this entry, focus on one theme. Why do you think this could be an important theme in this book?
4. **Character Connection to the Theme:** How do the characters in the book demonstrate or explore this theme? Which characters seem to learn something about this theme? How do their actions or experiences highlight the theme?
5. **Author's Message (Your Interpretation):** Based on the examples you found, what do you think the author might be trying to say about [chosen theme]? What message or lesson might they be trying to share with the reader?
6. **Real-World Connections:** Can you think of any examples of this theme in your own life, in the news, or in other stories you've read or seen? How does the book's exploration of this theme relate to the real world?
7. **Challenging the Theme:** Do you agree with the message the author seems to be presenting about this theme? Why or why not? Are there other ways to look at this idea?
8. **Questions about Theme:** If you could ask the author one question about this theme in the story, what would it be?



Extension Activities (complete at least one):

- **Theme Poster:** Create a visual representation of the chosen theme using images, symbols, and a short sentence explaining the theme as it appears in the book.
- **Theme Song:** Choose a song that you think connects to the chosen theme in the book. Explain why you chose that song and how the lyrics relate to the book.
- **Theme Scene Rewrite:** Choose a scene from the book and rewrite it to emphasize the chosen theme even more strongly.
- **Theme Debate:** Prepare arguments for or against the importance or portrayal of the chosen theme in the book.
- **Theme Comparison:** If you've identified multiple possible themes, compare and contrast how two different themes are explored in the book.