

Suggested Summer Reading List (2026)

Incoming Grade 8

Directions: Read one of the required books listed below for the summer reading assignment.

Anything But Typical by Nora Raleigh Baskin

Jason Blake is an autistic twelve-year-old living in a neurotypical world. Most days it's just a matter of time before something goes wrong. But Jason finds a glimmer of understanding when he comes across PhoenixBird, who posts stories to the same online site as he does. Jason can be himself when he writes and he thinks that PhoenixBird--her name is Rebecca--could be his first real friend. But as desperate as Jason is to meet her, he's terrified that if they do meet, Rebecca will only see his autism and not who Jason really is.

Believe: The Victorious Story of Eric LeGrand Young Readers' Edition Hardcover by Eric LeGrand and with Mike Yorkey

Believe is the profoundly moving story of Eric LeGrand, the former defensive tackle for the Rutgers University Scarlet Knights football team, who suffered a severe spinal cord injury and was left paralyzed by a crushing on-field tackle during a heated game with Army. A remarkable true account of a courageous young athlete whose unshakable faith, spirit, positive outlook, and rousing motto, "BELIEVE!" would serve as inspiration to legions of fans—and as motivation in his own quest to walk again—Eric's story has received national attention, heavily covered by ESPN and *Sports Illustrated*. It will lift the hearts of every reader.

Ghost (Track) by Jason Reynolds

Running. That's all Ghost (real name Castle Cranshaw) has ever known. But Ghost has been running for the wrong reasons—it all started with running away from his father, who, when Ghost was a very little boy, chased him and his mother through their apartment, then down the street, with a loaded gun, aiming to kill. Since then, Ghost has been the one causing problems—and running away from them—until he meets Coach, an ex-Olympic Medalist who sees something in Ghost: crazy natural talent. If Ghost can stay on track, literally and figuratively, he could be the best sprinter in the city. Can Ghost harness his raw talent for speed, or will his past finally catch up to him.

Ground Zero by Alan Gratz

September 11, 2001, New York City: Brandon is visiting his dad at work, on the 107th floor of the World Trade Center. Out of nowhere, an airplane slams into the tower, creating a fiery nightmare of terror and confusion.

And Brandon is in the middle of it all. Can he survive - and escape?

September 11, 2020, Afghanistan: Reshmina has grown up in the shadow of war, but she dreams of peace and progress. When a battle erupts in her village, Reshmina stumbles upon a wounded American soldier named Taz.

Should she help Taz - and put herself and her family in mortal danger?

Two kids. One devastating day. Nothing will ever be the same.

Hour of the Bees by Lindsay Eagar

While her friends are spending their summers having pool parties and sleepovers, twelve-year-old Carolina — Carol — is spending hers in the New Mexico desert, helping her parents move her grandfather into a home for people with dementia. At first, Carol avoids prickly Grandpa Serge. But as the summer wears on, Carol finds herself drawn to him, fascinated by the crazy stories he tells her about a healing tree, a green-glass lake, and the bees that will bring back the rain and end a hundred years of drought. As the line between magic and reality starts to blur, Carol must decide for herself what is possible — and what it means to be true to her roots.

Below is a list of **optional** titles in the event that you would like to read more books.

Blackbird Fly by Erin Entrada Kelly

Apple has always felt a little different from her classmates. She and her mother moved to Louisiana from the Philippines when she was little, and her mother still cooks Filipino foods and chastises Apple for becoming “too American.” When Apple’s friends turn on her and everything about her life starts to seem weird and embarrassing, Apple turns to music. If she can just save enough to buy a guitar and learn to play, maybe she can change herself. It might be the music that saves her . . . or it might be her two new friends, who show her how special she really is.

Blended by Sharon Draper

Eleven-year-old Isabella’s parents are divorced, so she has to switch lives every week: One week she’s Isabella with her dad, his girlfriend Anastasia, and her son Darren living in a fancy house where they are one of the only black families in the neighborhood. The next week she’s Izzy with her mom and her boyfriend John-Mark in a small, not-so-fancy house that she loves.

Because of this, Isabella has always felt pulled between two worlds. And now that her parents are divorced, it seems their fights are even worse, and they’re always about HER. Isabella feels completely stuck in the middle, split and divided between them more than ever. And she is beginning to realize that being split between Mom and Dad involves more than switching houses, switching nicknames, switching backpacks: it’s also about switching identities. Her dad is black, her mom is white, and strangers are always commenting: “You’re so

exotic!” “You look so unusual.” “But what are you really?” She knows what they’re really saying: “You don’t look like your parents.” “You’re different.” “What race are you really?” And when her parents, who both get engaged at the same time, get in their biggest fight ever, Isabella doesn’t just feel divided, she feels ripped in two. What does it mean to be half white or half black? To belong to half mom and half dad? And if you’re only seen as half of this and half of that, how can you ever feel whole?

Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson

Raised in South Carolina and New York, Jacqueline Woodson always felt halfway home in each place. In vivid poems, she shares what it was like to grow up as an African American in the 1960s and 70s, living with the remnants of Jim Crow and her growing awareness of the Civil Rights movement. Touching and powerful, each poem is both accessible and emotionally charged, providing a glimpse into a child’s soul as she finds her voice through writing and searches for her place in the world.

Teeming with feeling and deeply personal, *Brown Girl Dreaming* is the groundbreaking chronicle of Woodson’s journey to storytelling, and a beautiful portrayal of physical, emotional, and spiritual growth.

Fever 1793 by Laurie Halse Anderson

During the summer of 1793, Mattie Cook lives above the family coffee shop with her widowed mother and grandfather. Mattie spends her days avoiding chores and making plans to turn the family business into the finest Philadelphia has ever seen. But then the fever breaks out.

Disease sweeps the streets, destroying everything in its path and turning Mattie's world upside down. At her feverish mother's insistence, Mattie flees the city with her grandfather. But she soon discovers that the sickness is everywhere, and Mattie must learn quickly how to survive in a city turned frantic with disease.

Fish in a Tree by Lynda Mullaly Hunt

Ally has been smart enough to fool a lot of smart people. Every time she lands in a new school, she is able to hide her inability to read by creating clever yet disruptive distractions. She is afraid to ask for help; after all, how can you cure dumb? However, her newest teacher Mr. Daniels sees the bright, creative kid underneath the trouble maker. With his help, Ally learns not to be so hard on herself and that dyslexia is nothing to be ashamed of. As her confidence grows, Ally feels free to be herself and the world starts opening up with possibilities. She discovers that there’s a lot more to her—and to everyone—than a label, and that great minds don’t always think alike.

Heat by Mike Lupica

Michael Arroyo has a pitching arm that throws serious heat. But his firepower is nothing compared to the heat Michael faces in his day-to-day life. Newly orphaned after his father led the family’s escape from Cuba, Michael’s only family is his seventeen-year-old brother Carlos. If Social Services hears of their situation, they

will be separated in the foster-care system—or worse, sent back to Cuba. Together, the boys carry on alone, dodging bills and anyone who asks too many questions. But then someone wonders how a twelve-year-old boy could possibly throw with as much power as Michael Arroyo throws. With no way to prove his age, no birth certificate, and no parent to fight for his cause, Michael's secret world is blown wide open, and he discovers that family can come from the most unexpected sources.

Heaven Looks A Lot Like a Mall by Wendy Mass

When 16-year-old Tessa suffers a shocking accident in gym class, she finds herself in heaven (or what she thinks is heaven), which happens to bear a striking resemblance to her hometown mall. In the tradition of *It's a Wonderful Life* and *The Christmas Carol*, Tessa starts reliving her life up until that moment. She sees some things she'd rather forget, learns some things about herself she'd rather not know, and ultimately must find the answer to one burning question--if only she knew what the question was.

Written in sharp, witty verse, Wendy Mass crafts an extraordinary tale of a spunky heroine who hasn't always made the right choices, but needs to discover what makes life worth living.

I am Number Four by Pittacus Lore

John Smith seems like an ordinary teenager, living a normal life with his guardian Henri in Paradise, Ohio. But for John, keeping a low profile is essential, because he is *not* an ordinary teenager. He's an alien from the planet Lorien, and he's on the run. A group of evil aliens from the planet Mogadore, who destroyed his world, are hunting anyone who escaped.

Nine Loric children were sent to Earth to live in hiding until they grew up and developed their Legacies, powers that would help them fight back and help them save us. Three of them are now dead. John is Number Four, and he knows he's next .

Life as We Knew It by Susan Beth Pfeffer

When a meteor knocks the moon closer to earth, Miranda, a high school sophomore, takes shelter with her family. Told in a year's worth of journal entries, *Life as We Knew It* chronicles the human struggle to hold on to the most important resource of all—hope—in an increasingly desperate and unfamiliar world.

As August turns dark and wintry in northeastern Pennsylvania, Miranda, her two brothers, and their mother retreat to the unexpected safe haven of their sunroom, where they subsist on stockpiled food and limited water in the warmth of a wood-burning stove.

One the Devil's Court by Carl Deuker

What would you give to be your school's superstar? After reading Dr. Faustus, Joe considers the merits of selling his soul to the devil. Suddenly, he finds himself changing from a lousy basketball player and a C student to the star athlete he always dreamed he could be. Even though he isn't sure if he actually made a deal with the

devil, he can't help but enjoy the benefits that come with his newfound abilities. But is achieving his dreams worth what he may have given up?

In this coming of age sports novel, Joe learns the power of belief and that the only goals worth attaining are the ones that you earn--on your own.

Piecing Me Together by Renée Watson

Jade believes she must get out of her poor neighborhood if she's ever going to succeed. Her mother tells her to take advantage of every opportunity that comes her way. And Jade has: every day she rides the bus to the private school where she feels like an outsider, but where she has plenty of opportunities. But some opportunities she doesn't really welcome, like an invitation to join a mentorship program for "at-risk" girls. Just because her mentor is Black and graduated from the same high school doesn't mean she understands where Jade is coming from. She's tired of being singled out as someone who needs help, someone people want to fix. Jade wants to speak, to create, to express her joys and sorrows, her pain and her hope. Maybe there are some things she could show other women about understanding the world and finding ways to be real, to make a difference.

Scythe by Neal Shusterman

A world with no hunger, no disease, no war, no misery: humanity has conquered them all...even death. Now Scythes are the only ones who can end life, and they are commanded to do so in order to keep the size of the population under control.

Citra and Rowan are chosen to apprentice to a scythe—a role that neither wants. These teens must master the “art” of taking life, knowing that failure could mean losing their own. The more they train, the more Citra and Rowan learn that a perfect world comes with a heavy price.

The Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis

The first book in Deborah Ellis’s riveting Breadwinner series is an award-winning novel about loyalty, survival, families and friendship under extraordinary circumstances during the Taliban’s rule in Afghanistan in the late 1990s.

Eleven-year-old Parvana lives with her family in one room of a bombed-out apartment building in Kabul, Afghanistan’s capital city. Parvana’s father — a history teacher until his school was bombed and his health destroyed — works from a blanket on the ground in the marketplace, reading letters for people who cannot read or write. One day, he is arrested for the crime of having a foreign education, and the family is left without someone who can earn money or even shop for food.

As conditions for the family grow desperate, only one solution emerges. Forbidden to earn money as a girl, Parvana must transform herself into a boy, and become the breadwinner.

The Crossover by Kwame Alexander

"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 dreadlocked, 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 middle grade novel of family and brotherhood from Kwame Alexander. Josh and Jordan must come to grips with growing up on and off the court to realize breaking the rules comes at a terrible price, as their story's heart-stopping climax proves a game-changer for the entire family.

Tuck Everlasting by Natalie Babbitt

What if you could live forever? In this timeless story young Winnie Foster learns of a hidden spring in a nearby wood and meets the Tuck family, whose members reveal their astonishing discovery of the spring's life-changing power. Now Winnie must decide what to do with her newfound knowledge—and the Tucks must decide what to do with her. But it's not just the curious girl who is interested in their remarkable tale. A suspicious stranger is also searching for the Tucks, and he will stop at nothing until he finds them and uncovers their secret.

*All summary blurbs taken from Amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com