

PCMS 2026 Summer Reading Suggested Book List and Assignment For Rising 7th and 8th Graders



The goal of summer reading is to develop lifelong reading habits, while limiting the effects of *the summer slide*—the tendency to lose some of the achievement gains students make during the school year—particularly in literacy skills.

Below is an illustrated and reviewed list of summer reading titles. **Students should pick a book from this list OR a book of their own choice.** Be sure to pick a book which aligns with grade-level appropriate content and text complexity.

Websites listed on the subsequent ratings page can help students and families find a book that is right for them. The novels on this list also help students to practice literacy skills embodied in the [2017 MA State Frameworks for English Language Arts](#).

Incoming 7th & 8th graders at PCMS are expected to answer at least one question from each of the six categories in the list labeled “Questions for Any Book,” for a total of SIX questions. **We recommended that you read your book with the questions in mind.** Many of the questions have two or three parts, so make sure to fully answer ALL of the questions with specific details and relevant information from the text. Enjoy and have a great summer!

Summer Reading - Multilingual Students

We want to ensure that all of you, especially our newcomer and multilingual students, feel included in our summer reading experience. This summer, please choose a book that you feel comfortable reading. You can:

1. Read any book in your home language that aligns with grade-level appropriate content and text complexity. If you choose this option, make sure the text is complex enough to answer the questions that follow.
2. Read the translated version of any book from the PCMS 2025 Summer Reading Choices for Grades 7 & 8 list.

Whether you are reading in your first language or a new one, the goal is to enjoy reading and expand your learning in a way that is comfortable and meaningful to you.

Questions for Any Book

Category 1: Characters (Choose one of these questions to answer about your book!)

1. Was there one character who was similar to you? How would the story have been different if you were the main character, and how?
2. Which character could you relate to best, and why?
3. Explain an experience of your own that was similar to someone in the book?
4. Compare a character, the story, or a main event to another book.
5. List and explain all the ways one of the characters changed in the book.
6. Explain what the main character learned in this book?
7. Choose two or three characters from the book and write what you think happens to them after the end. Be sure to include your reasoning.

Category 2: Plot and Conflict (Choose one of these questions to answer about your book!)

1. What was more important, the characters or the plot? Was this book more about what people were doing or what people were thinking? Explain your reasons.
2. Choose three events in the story and explain why these events stand out for you as memorable.
3. Was there foreshadowing and suspense? Or, did the author give things away at the beginning of the book? Was this effective? Explain how the use of suspense and/or foreshadowing affected your enjoyment of the book.
4. Explain how you would have resolved the conflict (problem) in the book?

Category 3: Point of View (Choose one of these questions to answer about your book!)

1. Did the author use multiple voices in telling the story? How did this affect the story and your appreciation of the book? Explain!
2. Whose voice was the story told in (from whose point of view is the story told)? Explain how you think it might have been different if another character was telling the story.
3. Did you feel like the narrator was being honest in telling the story? Did you feel manipulated? Include your reasoning.
4. Was the narrator involved in the story while it was happening, or were they looking back on the events from a distance? Why do you think the author structured it this way? Include your reasoning.

Category 4: Setting (Choose one of these questions to answer about your book!)

1. Did the setting (the time and place) of the story make a difference? Could it have taken place anywhere? Why do you think the author wrote the book with this setting? Include your reasoning.
2. Was the author's description of the landscape/community well done? Could you visualize the landscape, rooms, town, etc.? Record a descriptive passage and draw a picture based on the author's language.
3. Was the time period important to the story? Why or why not? Explain!
4. Explain how the author conveyed the era (time period). Include details.
5. Did the story involve a road trip? Explain how the journey advanced the plot of the story?

Category 5: Theme (Choose one of these questions to answer about your book!)

1. Explain a major theme in the book and how it was developed. Be sure to use details and include your reasoning.
2. Are the major themes of the book relevant in your life? Why or why not? Explain!
3. Did you think the story was funny, sad, touching, disturbing, and/or moving? Provide details and reasoning as to why or why not.
4. Was the story realistic? Did it matter to the story line? Provide details and reasoning as to why you think the author wrote it this way.

5. Think about the book's title. Provide details and your reasoning to explain why you think the author chose the words in this title.

Category 6: Your Thoughts! (Choose one of these questions to answer about your book!)

1. Compare this book to others you have read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you have read? Why or why not? Provide details and your reasoning.
2. What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book? What will be your most vivid memories of it a year from now? Provide details and your reasoning.
3. What "touched" you most about this book? Did you feel any emotions while you read this? Why or why not? Provide details and your reasoning.
4. If you could jump in at any point in this book, and become a part of the storyline, where would it be? Provide details and your reasoning.
5. Were you sorry the book ended? Why or why not? Provide details and your reasoning.
6. Sometimes authors have notes at the end of the book explaining why they wrote the story. Is there information explaining why the author wrote this story or where they got their idea? What do you think? Provide details and your reasoning.
7. What do you think the author was trying to accomplish with this novel? Why? Provide details and your reasoning.
8. Are any of the events in the book relevant to your own life? Why or why not? Provide details and your reasoning.

Ratings Advice—PLEASE READ

Book summaries provided by Amazon.com, Common-Sense Media, and Kirkus Reviews.

The following resources are also helpful when deciding if a book is appropriate for a child:

Common Sense Media reviews and guidelines:

<http://www.common sense media.org>

Compass Book Ratings

<http://www.compassbookratings.com>

Good Reads-Teen and Young Adult Book Reviews

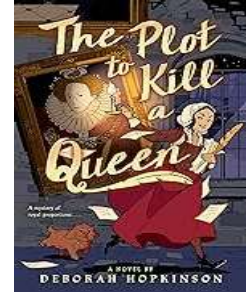
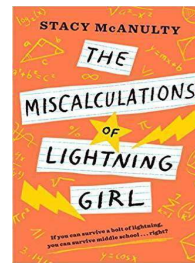
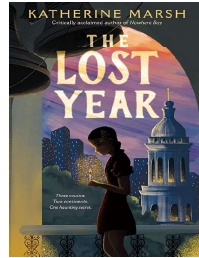
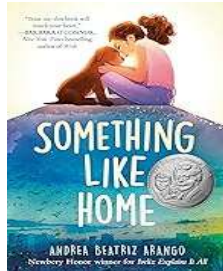
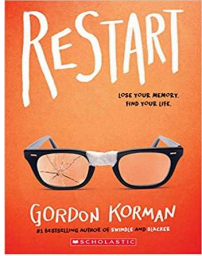
<https://www.goodreads.com>

Kirkus Reviews

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/>

PCMS 2024 Summer Reading Choices for Grades 7 & 8

Fiction



Restart – Gordon Korman

Chase's memory just went out the window. Chase doesn't remember falling off the roof. He doesn't remember hitting his head. He doesn't, in fact, remember *anything*. He wakes up in a hospital room and suddenly has to learn his whole life all over again . . . starting with his own name. He knows he's Chase. But who *is* Chase? When he gets back to school, he sees that different kids have very different reactions to his return. Some kids treat him like a hero. Some kids are clearly afraid of him. One girl in particular is so angry with him that she pours her frozen yogurt on his head the first chance she gets. Pretty soon, it's not only a question of who Chase is--it's a question of who he *was* . . . and who he's going to be.

From the #1 bestselling author of *Swindle* and *Slacker*, *Restart* is the spectacular story of a kid with a messy past who has to figure out what it means to get a clean start. Told in the alternating voices of Chase and some of his classmates, including both friends and victims.

Something Like Home-Andrea Beatriz Arango

This novel begins with 11-year-old Laura Rodriguez Colon being driven by her Social Services case worker to live with Titi Silvia, an aunt she doesn't know. Bit by bit readers learn that her parents were addicted to drugs and were sent to rehab after Laura called 911 when she found them unresponsive at home in their trailer. She loves her parents and feels guilty for making the call that caused them to be separated. Now she has to adjust to a new home, sixth grade at a new school, and make new friends, none of which she wants to do. She views this all as temporary. And after she finds a dog who needs a home, she gets an idea of how she can reunite with her parents.

The Lost Year-Katherine Marsh

From the author of *Nowhere Boy* - called "a resistance novel for our times" by *The New York Times* - comes a brilliant middle-grade survival story that traces a harrowing family secret back to the Holodomor, a terrible famine that devastated Soviet Ukraine in the 1930s.

Thirteen-year-old Matthew is miserable. His journalist dad is stuck overseas indefinitely, and his mom has moved in his one-hundred-year-old great-grandmother to ride out the pandemic, adding to his stress and isolation. But when Matthew finds a tattered black-and-white photo in his great-grandmother's belongings, he

discovers a clue to a hidden chapter of her past, one that will lead to a life-shattering family secret. Set in alternating timelines that connect the present-day to the 1930s and the US to the USSR, Katherine Marsh's latest novel sheds fresh light on the Holodomor – the horrific famine that killed millions of Ukrainians, and which the Soviet government covered up for decades.

An incredibly timely, page-turning story of family, survival, and sacrifice, inspired by Marsh's own family history, *The Lost Year* is perfect for fans of Ruta Sepetys' *Between Shades of Gray* and Alan Gratz's *Refugee*.

***The Miscalculations of Lightning Girl* – Stacy McAnulty**

A lightning strike gave her a superpower...but even a super genius can't solve the problem of middle school. This smart and funny novel is perfect for fans of *The Fourteenth Goldfish*, *Rain Reign*, and *Counting by Sevens*.

Lucy Callahan was struck by lightning. She doesn't remember it, but it changed her life forever. The zap gave her genius-level math skills, and ever since, Lucy has been homeschooled. Now, at 12 years old, she's technically ready for college. She just has to pass 1 more test--middle school!

Lucy's grandma insists: Go to middle school for 1 year. Make 1 friend. Join 1 activity. And read 1 book (that's not a math textbook!). Lucy's not sure what a girl who does calculus homework for fun can possibly learn in 7th grade. She has everything she needs at home, where nobody can make fun of her rigid routines or her superpowered brain. The equation of Lucy's life has already been solved. Unless there's been a miscalculation?

A celebration of friendship, Stacy McAnulty's smart and thoughtful middle-grade debut reminds us all to get out of our comfort zones and embrace what makes us different.

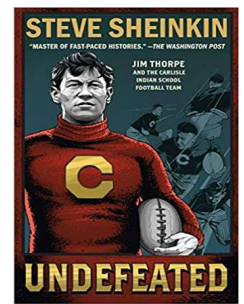
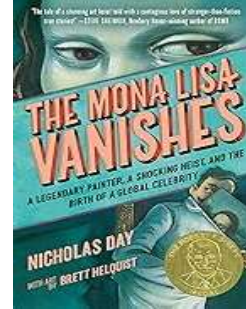
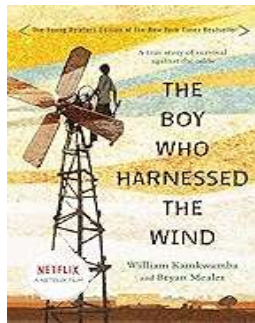
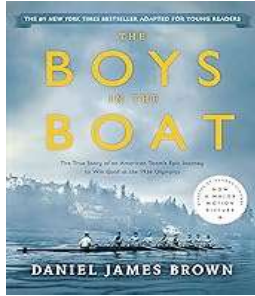
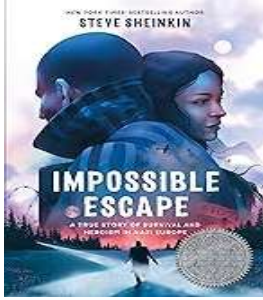
***The Plot to Kill a Queen*-Deborah Hopkinson**

Emilia Bassano is a girl who relishes the music of words. Although she plays the lute and writes poetry, Emilia nurtures a dream: to hear her words come alive on stage. Emilia wants to write soliloquies for heroes and kings and queens of old, fashion fierce villains to make audiences howl, and try her hand at comedy and romance. Most of all, she wants to create unforgettable women characters.

On one of her trips to the theater, an unfortunate series of events leaves her penniless, with no way of watching the show. That is until a boy by the name of Will Shakespeare helps her sneak in to see the play. They realize they're both aspiring playwrights and Emilia convinces Will to join her in her efforts to win a playwriting competition at the palace of Queen Elizabeth I.

However, when Emilia accidentally uncovers a plot to kill the queen, she is given the job of traveling to the castle where Mary Queen of Scots is being held captive, to discover who is responsible for the plan to murder Queen Elizabeth--and to thwart it! Can Emilia and her friends stop the plans of a disguised murderer on the loose?

Nonfiction



Impossible Escape-A True Story of Survival and Heroism in Nazi Europe-Steve Sheinkin

From three-time National Book Award finalist and Newbery Honor author Steve Sheinkin, a true story of two Jewish teenagers racing against time during the Holocaust—one in hiding in Hungary, and the other in Auschwitz, plotting escape.

It is 1944. A teenager named Rudolf (Rudi) Vrba has made up his mind. After barely surviving nearly two years in the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland, he knows he must escape. Even if death is more likely; Rudi has learned the terrible secret hidden behind the heavily guarded fences of concentration camps across Nazi-occupied Europe: the methodical mass killing of Jewish prisoners. As trains full of people arrive daily, Rudi knows that the murders won't stop until he reveals the truth to the world—and that each day that passes means more lives are lost.

This is the true story of one of the most famous whistleblowers in the world, and how his death-defying escape helped save over 100,000 lives.

The Boys in the Boat-Daniel James Brown

The #1 *New York Times* bestseller adapted for the next generation, new content including an author Q&A and never-before-seen photographs - Inspiration for the PBS American Experience Documentary 'The Boys of '36'

For readers of *Unbroken*, 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. With rowers who were the sons of loggers, shipyard workers, and farmers, the University of Washington's eight-oar crew was never expected to defeat the elite East Coast teams, yet they did, going on to shock the world by challenging the German boat rowing for Adolf Hitler.

At the center of the tale is Joe Rantz, a teenager without family or prospects, whose personal quest captures the spirit of his generation—the generation that would prove in the coming years that the Nazis could not prevail over American determination and optimism. This deeply emotional yet easily accessible young readers adaptation of the award-winning #1 *New York Times* bestseller features never-before-seen photographs, highly visual back matter, and an exclusive new introduction.

The Boy who Harnessed the Wind-Young Reader's Edition-William Kamkwamba & Bryan Mealer

This book tells the true story of a young teen in Malawi who, in the midst of a devastating famine, is forced to drop out of school because his family can't afford food, let alone tuition. Determined to keep learning, William Kamkwamba borrows science books from the village library, scrounges through junkyards for parts, and works nonstop on his dream to build a windmill that will power his family's home. He wants a free, reliable way to light the rooms of his house after dark, cook, and draw water from the well so his family can grow more food, live without smoke from cooking fires, and protect themselves from future famine.

The Mona Lisa Vanishes: A Legendary Painter, a Shocking Heist, and the Birth of a Global Celebrity-Nicholas Day

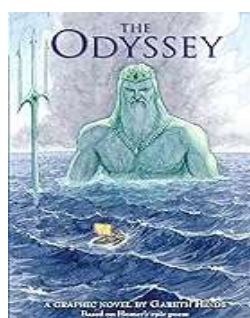
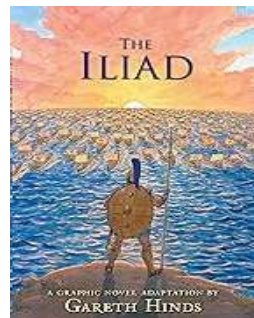
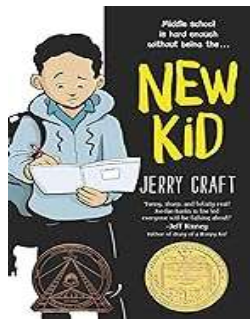
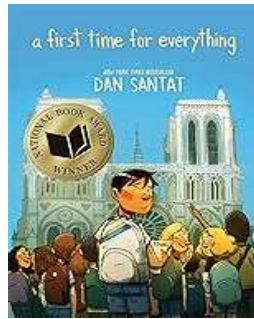
This is the story of the world's most famous painting. Chapters alternate between Renaissance Italy and 1911-1914 in France. The book tells a lot about Leonardo Da Vinci's life from birth to death, including how he came to paint the Mona Lisa. Details of Renaissance life are woven in, including architecture, art, family life, medicine, politics, and the church. The chapters in 1911-1914 France detail how the Mona Lisa was stolen and the aftermath, investigations, and theories about the theft. Many advances of that time period are explored, including the many innovations in policing and investigative work, journalism, and transportation and aviation. Throughout it all, the story stays focused on the central question. Why is the Mona Lisa so famous? And will the stolen painting ever be found?

Undefeated: Jim Thorpe and the Carlisle Indian School Football Team – Steve Sheinkin

Undefeated: Jim Thorpe and the Carlisle Indian School Football Team is an astonishing underdog sports story—and more. It's an unflinching look at the U.S. government's violent persecution of Native Americans and the school that was designed to erase Indian cultures. Expertly told by three-time National Book Award finalist Steve Sheinkin, it's the story of a group of young men who came together at that school, the overwhelming obstacles they faced both on and off the field, and their absolute refusal to accept defeat.

Jim Thorpe (super athlete, Olympic gold medalist) and Glenn Pop Warner (indomitable coach, football mastermind) - Before these men became legends, they met in 1907 at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, where they forged one of the winningest teams in American football history. Called "the team that invented football," they took on the best opponents of their day, defeating much more privileged schools such as Harvard and the Army in a series of breathtakingly close calls, genius plays, and bone-crushing hard

Graphic Novels



A First Time for Everything-Dan Santat

As this memoir opens, Dan Santat has just finished eighth grade and recalls being bullied at school. He has low expectations for high school, figuring that he will continue to be bullied. But his parents insist that he join a three-week trip to Europe, and soon he finds himself enjoying the sights in London, Paris, and Germany. With a new set of friends, he's more confident, and even thinks about finding himself a summer girlfriend. Is he ready for the heartbreak that separation will bring?

New Kid-Jerry Craft

Seventh grader Jordan Banks loves nothing more than drawing cartoons about his life. But instead of sending him to the art school of his dreams, his parents enroll him in a prestigious private school known for its academics, where Jordan is one of the few kids of color in his entire grade. Jordan soon finds himself torn between two worlds—and not really fitting into either one. Can Jordan learn to navigate his new school culture while keeping his neighborhood friends and staying true to himself?

Play Like a Girl-Misty Wilson & David Wilson

Middle school drama hits hard in this coming-of-age graphic memoir. Natural competitor Misty has faced off against the boys for years, always coming out on top, but now they're moving on without her into the land of full-contact football. Never one to back away from a challenge, Misty resolves to join the team and convinces her best friend, Bree, to join her. While Misty pours herself into practicing, obviously uninterested Bree—who was motivated more by getting to be around boys than doing sports—drifts toward popular queen bee Ava, creating an uneasy dynamic. A sincere, genuine, and uplifting book that affirms the importance of being true to yourself.

The Iliad-Gareth Hinds

“Sing to me, O Muse, of the rage of Achilles”: a rousing graphic rendition of Homer’s great epic.

It’s a blood-soaked poem of primeval war, one ostensibly fought over a certain daughter of Zeus who turned the wrong head—“Or possibly an apple, or a lot of gold, or control of trade routes”—that brought vast armies to the plains of Troy. In a fight personified by two heroes, Trojan Hector and Greek Achilles, there’s more than a little graphic violence here—but nothing other than what Homer himself described, as when Achilles’ spear finds Hector’s neck, followed by Achilles’ intemperate curse: “Your corpse goes to the dogs.” That’s not very sporting, and of course Achilles gets his comeuppance. The best graphic panels are the ones that show the war’s vastness, with a two-page spread of those famed thousand ships crossing the Hellespont, another panel showing the Greek army spilling out onto the plain, “like the great flock of migrating birds that take wing in the meadows by the stream of Caÿster—as numerous as the leaves of a forest.” An author’s note and page-by-page notes provide further context. An expertly crafted rendition and a welcome invitation to younger readers to immerse themselves in the ancient past.

The Odyssey-Gareth Hinds

With bold imagery and an ear tuned to the music of Homer’s epic poem, Gareth Hinds reinterprets the ancient classic as it’s never been told before.

"Gareth Hinds brings *The Odyssey* to life in a masterful blend of art and storytelling. Vivid and exciting, this graphic novel is a worthy new interpretation of Homer’s epic."—Rick Riordan, author of the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series

Fresh from his triumphs in the Trojan War, Odysseus, King of Ithaca, wants nothing more than to return home to his family. Instead, he offends the sea god, Poseidon, who dooms him to years of shipwreck and wandering. Battling man-eating monsters, violent storms, and the supernatural seductions of sirens and sorceresses, Odysseus will need all his strength and cunning—and a little help from Mount Olympus—to make his way home and seize his kingdom from the schemers who seek to wed his queen and usurp his throne. Award-winning graphic artist Gareth Hinds masterfully reinterprets a story of heroism, adventure, and high action that has been told and retold for more than 2,500 years—though never quite like this.

***When Stars Are Scattered* - Victoria Jamieson & Omar Mohamed**

Omar and his younger brother, Hassan, have spent most of their lives in Dadaab, a refugee camp in Kenya. Life is hard there: never enough food, achingly dull, and without access to the medical care Omar knows his nonverbal brother needs. So, when Omar has the opportunity to go to school, he knows it might be a chance to change their future . . . but it would also mean leaving his brother, the only family member he has left, every day.

Heartbreak, hope, and gentle humor exist together in this graphic novel about a childhood spent waiting, and a young man who is able to create a sense of family and home in the most difficult of settings. It's an intimate, important, unforgettable look at the day-to-day life of a refugee, as told to *New York Times* Bestselling author/artist Victoria Jamieson by Omar Mohamed, the Somali man who lived the story.