

2026 OLA Middle School Rising 8th Grade Summer Reading List and Assignments

Inspiring and Educating: How Literature Teaches Catholic Virtues

“Reading great literature well has the power to cultivate virtue. Great literature increases knowledge of and desire for the good life by showing readers what virtue looks like and where vice leads. It is not just what one reads but how one reads that cultivates virtue. Reading good literature well requires one to practice numerous virtues, such as patience, diligence, and prudence. And learning to judge wisely a character in a book, in turn, forms the reader’s own character.” – Karen Swallow Prior, author

This summer, OLA Middle School students will complete a summer reading project, helping them recognize how literature impacts the way we learn about and develop our shared Catholic virtues.

Students will read two (2) books: **Peak by Roland Smith** and a choice from the lists provided. These novels can be accessed via physical books, ebooks, or audiobooks. Check with your local library!

Peak by Roland Smith should be read at the end of summer, closer to the beginning of the school year. Please answer the questions on a separate piece of lined paper. This will be used to complete an assignment in class during the first week of school.

For their “free-choice” from the lists, students must use the list of virtues they were given to identify which virtue was prominent throughout their novel. Cite text evidence (with the page number) to explain. Complete the attached assignment. **This is due on the first day of school and should be turned in to the MS ELA teacher.** The recommendation is to do this towards the beginning of the summer.

Use this **Glossary** to help you answer the questions from the assignment for the free-choice novel. Virtue definitions are taken from Education in Virtue materials.

Theme is the universal idea or message explored in a work of literature. Examples of themes include war, love, revenge, friendship, redemption, forgiveness, etc.
Characterization is the way an author introduces, describes, and develops a character in a work of fiction.
Imagery is the way an author “paints a picture” in the reader’s mind. Using descriptive language and triggering the senses allows the author to put the reader in the scene or mind of a character.
Personification is using human traits to describe non-human things. Authors use this literary device to help illustrate human behavior and emotions.

Summer Reading Assignment: *Peak* by Roland Smith

Directions

As you read *Peak*, answer the following questions in complete sentences. You may type your responses or write them neatly on separate paper. Use specific details from the novel to support your answers (cite text evidence).

Each section includes:

- **Basic Comprehension Questions** → Check your understanding of important events, characters, and conflicts.
 - **Digging Deeper Questions** → Encourage critical thinking and analysis.
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Part 1: The Assignment (The Assignment - A Couple of Stitches & the Slammer)

Basic Comprehension

1. Why is Peak arrested at the beginning of the novel?
2. What deal is offered to Peak instead of serving a longer punishment?
3. Describe Peak's relationship with his mother.
4. Why does Peak agree to travel with his father?
5. What are Peak's first impressions of his father after seeing him again?
6. What does the reader learn about Peak's love of climbing in this section?

Digging Deeper

1. Do you think Peak's punishment was fair? Why or why not?
2. How does the author begin developing the theme of risk and consequences in this section?

Part 2: Gear of the Dead (Circling the Drain - The Summit Hotel)

Basic Comprehension

1. What preparations are made before the Everest expedition begins?
2. Who are the Twins, and how do they help Peak?
3. What is unusual about Peak's father's behavior and personality?
4. Describe Peak's arrival in Nepal and the environment around him.
5. What clues suggest that Peak's father may have hidden motivations?
6. What challenges does Peak face while adjusting to the altitude and training?

Digging Deeper

1. Why do you think Peak wants his father's approval so badly?
2. What does this section reveal about ambition and fame?

Part 3: ABC (Bear and Bull) (First Night in Tibet - Camp Four)

Basic Comprehension

1. Who is Sun-Jo, and why is he important to the story?
2. Describe Zopa's role during the expedition.
3. What physical difficulties does Peak begin experiencing on the mountain?
4. Why is altitude so dangerous for climbers?
5. How do Peak and Sun-Jo begin to build trust with one another?
6. What does Peak learn about the realities of climbing Everest?

Digging Deeper

1. Compare Peak and Sun-Jo's motivations for climbing Everest.
2. How does the mountain itself become almost like a character in the story?

Part 4: Camp Four (Green Ice - Blink)

Basic Comprehension

1. What dangers increase as the climbers move higher up the mountain?
2. What important secrets are revealed in this section?
3. Why does Peak begin questioning his father's true intentions?
4. What is "summit fever," and how does it affect climbers?
5. Describe one difficult decision Peak must make.
6. How does teamwork become essential for survival on Everest?

Digging Deeper

1. How does the author show the difference between determination and selfish ambition?
2. Why do you think some people are willing to risk everything to reach the top of Everest?

Part 5: Shortcut (Denouement) (The Switch - Denouement)

Basic Comprehension

1. What major obstacle prevents Peak from completing the climb as originally planned?
2. Why is Sun-Jo's summit attempt so important?
3. Describe how Peak handles disappointment near the end of the expedition.
4. What sacrifices are made during the final climb?
5. How has Peak changed by the end of the novel?
6. What does Peak finally understand about success and leadership?

Digging Deeper

1. Do you think Peak made the right decision during the final climb? Explain your reasoning.
2. What message does the author send about courage, fame, and personal growth?

Final Reflection

Answer the following in 1-2 well-developed paragraphs (6-8 complete sentences):

1. What was the most important lesson Peak learned throughout the novel?
2. Would you recommend this book to future 8th graders? Why or why not?
3. Which character changed the most throughout the story? Explain your answer.

Middle School Summer Reading List

Free-Choice Novel Options

Genre Key

-  Realistic Fiction / Sports / Humor
-  Fantasy / Dystopian / Science Fiction
-  Historical Fiction
-  Mystery / Adventure / Suspense
-  Nonfiction / Biography
-  Poetry / Verse / Graphic Novel

Genre	Title & Author	Brief Synopsis
	Rebound — Kwame Alexander	A fast-moving novel in verse about basketball, family, and grief as young Chuck Bell spends the summer with his grandparents after his father's death.
	The Hunger Games — Suzanne Collins	Katniss volunteers to take her sister's place in a deadly televised competition where only one tribute can survive.
	Love That Dog — Sharon Creech	Through poetry assignments, Jack slowly discovers his voice while writing about his beloved dog and coping with loss.
	Million-Dollar Throw — Mike Lupica	Nate gets the chance to win a million dollars with one football throw while dealing with family struggles and helping his best friend.
	War Games — Alan Gatz	During the 1936 Berlin Olympics, a young gymnast uncovers a Nazi plot and must decide between winning medals or doing what is right.
	Rules — Cynthia Lord	Catherine learns about friendship, empathy, and acceptance while helping her younger brother navigate life with autism.
	Belly Up — Stuart Gibbs	Teddy investigates the suspicious death of a zoo's famous hippo in this funny and suspenseful mystery.
	El Deafo — Cece Bell	A funny and heartfelt graphic memoir about growing up with hearing loss and learning to embrace differences.

	Hiroshima — John Hersey	The true stories of six survivors of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and how their lives changed forever.
	Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish — Pablo Cartaya	Marcus travels to Puerto Rico to reconnect with his roots, search for his father, and better understand himself.
	Sir Gawain and the Green Knight — Burton Raffel	A brave knight accepts a dangerous challenge that tests his courage, honesty, and honor.
	When We Flew Away — Alice Hoffman	A moving story imagining Anne Frank's life before her famous diary and before her family went into hiding.
	The Last Cuentista — Donna Barba Higuera	After Earth is destroyed, Petra becomes the only person who remembers humanity's stories and history.
	Unplugged — Gordon Korman	A tech-obsessed teen is sent to a no-technology camp where he uncovers a bizarre mystery.
	Ella Enchanted — Gail Carson Levine	Ella is cursed with obedience and sets out on an adventure to break the spell controlling her life.
	The Nine Moons of Han Yu and Luli — Karina Yan Glaser	Two girls from different centuries face dangerous journeys while connected by family, courage, and culture.
	Watership Down — Richard Adams	A group of rabbits leaves their home behind and journeys through danger to find safety and freedom.
	The Graveyard Book — Neil Gaiman	A boy raised by ghosts in a graveyard must eventually face the man who killed his family.
	Fallout — Steve Sheinkin	A gripping look at the Cold War, spies, nuclear weapons, and the race for global power.
	Code Talker — Joseph Bruchac	Based on true events, Navajo Marines use their language to create an unbreakable military code during WWII.
	Hidden Figures — Margot Lee Shetterly	The inspiring true story of the Black women mathematicians who helped launch America into space.
	All Thirteen — Christina Soontornvat	The dramatic true story of the Thai soccer team trapped in a flooded cave and the global rescue effort.

	1919: The Year that Changed America — Martin W. Sandler	An exploration of the major events and social changes that shaped America after World War I.
	The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind — William Kamkwamba	A teenager in Malawi uses creativity and science to build a windmill and help save his village from famine.
	Hidden Powers — Jeanne Atkins	A biography-in-verse about scientist Lise Meitner and her groundbreaking work during WWII.
	Amelia Lost — Candace Fleming	The exciting story of Amelia Earhart's life and the mystery surrounding her final flight.
	The Watch That Ends the Night — Allan Wolf	The sinking of the Titanic is retold through poems from the perspectives of passengers, crew members, and more.
	The Bletchley Riddle — Ruta Sepetys and Steve Sheinkin	During WWII, two siblings work at Bletchley Park cracking codes while searching for their missing mother.
	The Labors of Hercules Beal — Gary D. Schmidt	A grieving boy must complete modern versions of Hercules's twelve labors for a school assignment.
	Other Words for Home — Jasmine Warga	Told in verse, Jude leaves war-torn Syria and starts a new life in America while discovering her own courage.
	Island of Spies — Sheila Turnage	During WWII on the North Carolina coast, a group of kids uncovers a dangerous spy ring connected to German submarines.
	Greenglass House — Kate Milford	During a snowy winter at his family's mysterious inn, Milo uncovers smuggling secrets, hidden identities, and clues tied to a dangerous mystery.

2026–2027 St. Jerome Battle of the Books List

Genre Key

-  Realistic Fiction / Literary Fiction
-  Fantasy / Science Fiction / Mythology
-  Historical Fiction / Classic
-  Mystery / Adventure
-  Nonfiction / Biography
-  Poetry / Epistolary / Special Format

Genre	Title & Author	Brief Synopsis
	Little Women — Louisa May Alcott	Follow the March sisters as they grow up during the Civil War, learning about family, sacrifice, love, and finding their own paths in life.
	Alice's Adventures in Wonderland — Lewis Carroll	Alice tumbles into a strange world filled with talking animals, riddles, and unforgettable characters like the Mad Hatter and Queen of Hearts.
	Pinocchio — Carlo Collodi	A wooden puppet comes to life and learns difficult lessons about honesty, choices, and becoming a real boy.
	The Man Who Founded California — Archbishop M. N. L. Couve de Murville	A biography of Saint Junípero Serra and his missionary work establishing California's historic missions.
	Ella Minnow Pea — Mark Dunn	In a town where letters of the alphabet are banned one by one, Ella and her family fight to protect language and freedom of expression.
	Galahad and the Grail — Malcolm Guite	Sir Galahad and the Knights of the Round Table set out on a legendary quest to find the Holy Grail and heal the land.
	Carry On, Mr. Bowditch — Jean Lee Latham	Based on a true story, this novel follows Nathaniel Bowditch, a determined boy who becomes a brilliant navigator and mathematician.

	Wonder — R. J. Palacio	Auggie Pullman enters middle school for the first time and teaches those around him about kindness, courage, and acceptance.
	Holes — Louis Sachar	Stanley Yelnats is sent to a strange camp where boys dig holes every day, uncovering secrets tied to family history and hidden treasure.
	Champions of the Rosary — Laurie J. Schmitt	Set around the miracle of Our Lady of Good Help and the Peshtigo Fire, this story explores faith, courage, and the power of prayer.
	The Bronze Bow — Elizabeth George Speare	A young Jewish rebel living during Roman rule struggles between revenge and the message of love taught by Jesus.
	A Wish in the Dark — Christina Soontornvat	In a city controlled by fear and darkness, a runaway boy and the daughter of a powerful official uncover dangerous truths about justice and power.
	The Hobbit — J. R. R. Tolkien	Bilbo Baggins joins dwarves and a wizard on an epic adventure involving dragons, treasure, and a mysterious magic ring.
	Broken Strings — Eric Walters and Kathy Kacer	A girl discovers her grandfather's hidden Holocaust past through an old violin and a school production of <i>Fiddler on the Roof</i> .
	The Incurable Children of Ashton Place: The Mysterious Howling — Maryrose Wood	A young governess attempts to civilize three children raised by wolves while uncovering strange secrets surrounding Ashton Place.

List of Virtues

Justice (Fairness)- Enables one to give to each, beginning with God, what is due to him. Will; Empathy; Relational Skills; Social Awareness; Gift of the Holy Spirit: Piety

- 1) Affability- Being easy to approach and easy to talk to—friendly.
- 2) Courtesy- Treating other people with respect, recognizing that all are made in God's image and likeness.
- 3) Generosity- Giving of oneself in a willing and cheerful manner for the good of others.
- 4) Gratitude- Thankful disposition of mind and heart.
- 5) Kindness- Expressing genuine concern about the well-being of others; anticipating their needs.
- 6) Loyalty- Accepting the bonds implicit in relationships and defending the virtues upheld by Church, family, and country.
- 7) Obedience- Assenting to rightful authority without hesitation or resistance.
- 8) Patriotism- Paying due honor and respect to one's country, with a willingness to serve.

- 9) Prayerfulness- Being still, listening, and being willing to talk to God as a friend.
- 10) Respect- Speaking and acting according to one's own and others' rights, status, and circumstances.
- 11) Responsibility- Fulfilling one's just duties; accepting the consequences of one's words and actions, intentional and unintentional.
- 12) Sincerity- Trustfulness in words and actions; honesty and enthusiasm towards others.
- 13) Trustworthiness- Acting in a way that inspires confidence and trust; being reliable.

Prudence (Sound Judgment)- Enables one to reason and to act rightly in any given situation— "right reason in action." Intellect; Insight; Self Awareness; Responsible Decision Making; Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Understanding, Counsel, and Knowledge

- 1) Circumspection- Careful consideration of circumstances and consequences.
- 2) Docility- Willingness to be taught.

- 3) Foresight- Consideration of the consequences of one's actions;
thinking ahead.

Fortitude (Courage)- Enables one to endure difficulties and pain for the sake of what is good. Emotions of Struggle; Resilience; Self-Management; Responsible Decision Making; Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Wisdom and Fortitude

- 1) Industriousness- Diligence, especially in work that leads to natural and supernatural maturity.
- 2) Magnanimity- Seeking with confidence to do great things in God; literally "having a large soul."
- 3) Magnificence- Doing great things for God.
- 4) Patience- Bearing present difficulties calmly.
- 5) Perseverance- Taking the steps necessary to carry out objectives in spite of difficulties.

Temperance (Self-Control)- Enables one to be moderate in the pleasure and use of created goods. Emotions of Desire; Balance; Self-Management; Gift of the Holy Spirit: Fear of the Lord

- 1) Honesty- Sincerity, openness, and truthfulness in one's words and actions.
- 2) Humility- Awareness that all one's gifts come from God and appreciation for the gift of others.

- 3) Meekness- Serenity of spirit while focusing on the needs of others.
- 4) Moderation- Attention to balance in one's life.
- 5) Modesty- Purity of heart in action, especially in regard to dress and speech.
- 6) Orderliness- keeping oneself physically clean and neat and one's belongings in good order.
- 7) Self-Control- Joyful mastery over one's passions and desires.

**2026 OLA Middle School Rising 8th Grade
Summer Reading List and Assignments**

Complete the following for your “free-choice” book. This is due on the first day of school. Please write neatly and in complete sentences with correct spelling and grammar.

Title: _____

Author: _____

This novel portrayed the virtue of _____

Using evidence from the text, explain how this book presents this virtue. Please write the page number you’re referencing.

Choose one literary device (theme, characterization, imagery, personification) and describe how the author uses it to illustrate the virtue for the reader.

