

2026 OLA Middle School Rising 6th 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: ***Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen** and a choice from the lists provided. These novels can be accessed via physical books, ebooks, or audiobooks. Check with your local library!

Hatchet by Gary Paulsen 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.

HATCHET BY GARY PAULSEN: READING QUESTIONS

Complete the following questions after reading each set of chapters. The first section of questions (Basic Comprehension Questions) is to demonstrate that you have read and understood the text. The second section (Digging Deeper Questions) demonstrates your ability to either analyze what you have read or make a connection between your reading and yourself/your world. Your response for the Digging Deeper section should be a bit more detailed and include evidence and support from the text in the form of examples or quotations. The basic comprehension questions should also include one example for support.

Chapter 1 – 3

Basic Comprehension Questions

1. When the novel begins, where is Brian going? For what reason?
2. What gift does Brian receive from his mother? After reading all three chapters, why do you think this will be useful later?
3. What occurs when Brian attempts to radio for help?
4. Describe the plan that Brian makes to land the plane.
5. Where does the plane crash?

Digging Deeper Questions

6. How is foreshadowing used for the pilot's heart attack? Give examples.
7. What would you have done if you were in a small plane and the pilot had a heart attack?

Chapter 4 - 6

Basic Comprehension Questions

1. Explain what you learn about 'the Secret' from these chapters.
2. Describe the disconnect that Brian has between reality and imagination in chapter 4.
3. What is the first problem that Brian must face in the morning?
4. How does Brian quench his thirst? What happens as a result?
5. What impact does the memory of Brian's English teacher have on him? Explain.
6. What does Brian do for shelter, food, and fire?

Digging Deeper Questions

7. Do you think Brian seems like a regular thirteen-year-old? Why or why not?
8. Why do you think Paulsen uses Brian's memories as flashbacks?

Chapter 7 – 9

Basic Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Brian wake up the first night?
2. What does the reader learn about “the Secret” from these chapters?
3. Describe the encounter that Brian has while he is picking raspberries. What does he learn from this experience?
4. Why was it a mistake for Brian to kick out when he heard a sound in the shelter?
5. Explain how the hatchet is used in these chapters to start a fire. What memory does he use to finally get the fire to stay burning?

Digging Deeper Questions

6. Brian determines that “the most important rule of survival, which was that feeling sorry for yourself didn’t work” (82). What do you think Brian meant by this? Do you think there are times when crying does “work”?

Chapter 10 - 12

Basic Comprehension

1. Explain the importance of the fire to Brian as described in these chapters.
2. What memory of his Uncle Carter does Brian use in these chapters? What decision does he make as a result?
3. What does Brian plan to do when searchers fly overhead?
4. What advances does Brian make with regards to finding food in these chapters?
5. What occurs to make Brian feel so hopeless about his survival and rescue?

Digging Deeper

6. Explain how Brian has changed both physically and mentally from the beginning of the novel until now. Give examples for support.
7. If you were in Brian’s situation, do you think you would remain hopeful? Why or why not?

Chapter 13 – 15

Basic Comprehension:

1. When Brian sees the wolf, how many days has it been since the plane crashed?
2. What does Brian do with the hatchet? Why?
3. What does Brian do to improve his shelter and protect his food?
4. What does Brian solve the problem of the fish spoiling?
5. How does Brian keep track of time? Give an example.

Digging A Little Deeper:

6. What are some of the mistakes that Brian makes during these chapters? Why are mistakes in the wilderness more problematic than mistakes made in modern civilization?

Chapter 16 – 18**Basic Comprehension**

1. What 'First Days' does Brian have? Explain what they refer to.
2. Describe the incident with the moose.
3. How does Brian lose everything? How is his reaction different from his reaction to other crises earlier in the novel?
4. Describe the process that Brian must go through to get back to the airplane. Why does he decide to do this?
5. What happens to Brian's hatchet?
6. What does Brian see when he finally gets into the plane?

Digging A Little Deeper

7. Discuss the importance of Brian's hatchet throughout the novel. Why do you think the novel is called Hatchet?

Chapter 19 – Epilogue**Basic Comprehension**

1. What items does Brian get from the survival pack?
2. How does Brian react to the rifle? Why?
3. Why doesn't Brian get more excited when he finds the transmitter?
4. How does Brian get rescued? How does he react to his rescue?
5. How long was Brian alone in the woods?

Digging Deeper

6. How has Brian changed in the Epilogue?
7. What do you think would have happened if Brian hadn't been rescued when he was? Explain
8. What can the reader learn from Brian's experiences in the wilderness?

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 6th 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.

