

6th grade—Required Summer Reading Assignment

Students must read *Where the Red Fern Grows* and at least four other books from the list of suggested summer readings. **Students will write an essay on the books that they read, addressing the following questions. These essays are due on the first day of school.**

Questions to guide the development of your essay:

- What are your impressions of the main characters?
- What is the primary conflict in the story?
- Do you agree or disagree with how the conflict was resolved?
- What did find challenging about the book?
- How did you feel about reading this book?
- What surprised you about the book?
- Would you recommend this book to others? Why or why not?
- Can you relate to the main characters?

The Suggested Summer Readings begin on the next page.

BOOK TITLE	AUTHOR	SYNOPSIS
Required Reading		
Where the Red Fern Grows	Wilson Rawls	Author Wilson Rawls spent his boyhood much like the character of this book, Billy Colman, roaming the Ozarks of northeastern Oklahoma with his blue tick hound. In <i>Where the Red Fern Grows</i> , Billy and his precious coonhound pups romp relentlessly through the Ozarks, trying to "tree" the elusive raccoon. In time, the inseparable trio wins the coveted gold cup in the annual coon-hunt contest, captures the wily ghost coon, and bravely fights with a mountain lion. When the victory over the mountain lion turns to tragedy, Billy grieves, but learns the beautiful old Native American legend of the sacred red fern that grows over the graves of his dogs.
Fiction Novels		
We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball	Kadir Nelson	The story of Negro League baseball is the story of gifted athletes and determined owners; of racial discrimination and international sportsmanship; of fortunes won and lost; of triumphs and defeats on and off the field. It is a perfect mirror for the social and political history of black America in the first half of the twentieth century. But most of all, the story of the Negro Leagues is about hundreds of unsung heroes who overcame segregation, hatred, terrible conditions, and low pay to do the one thing they loved more than anything else in the world: play ball. Using an "Everyman" player as his narrator, Kadir Nelson tells the story of Negro League baseball from its beginnings in the 1920s through its decline after Jackie Robinson crossed over to the majors in 1947. The voice is so authentic, you will feel as if you are sitting on dusty bleachers listening intently to the memories of a man who has known the great ballplayers of that time and shared their experiences. But what makes this book so outstanding are the dozens of full-page and double-page oil paintings--breathtaking in their perspectives, rich in emotion, and created with understanding and affection for these lost heroes of our national game.
Fire Girl	Tony Abbott	Describing his encounters with Jessica Feeney, seventh-grader Tom Bender reflects, "On the outside it doesn't look like very much happened. A burned girl was in my class for a while. Once I brought her some homework. Then she was gone." The remainder of <i>Fire girl</i> considers the way outside appearances fail to portray the real story. Tom is overweight and unnoticed. Jessica Feeney, however, is impossible to ignore; a tragic fire has left horrible burns all over her body. The students at St. Catherine's avoid her, and they spread wild gossip about her. Tom's friend Jeff refuses to hold her hand during prayers. Yet Tom finds that from certain angles, Jessica almost looks like a regular girl, and by supporting her, however tentatively, he sacrifices everything he thought he wanted. In this poignant story, readers will recognize the insecurities of junior high and discover that even by doing small acts of kindness people stand to gain more than they lose.

Wonder	Rachel Vail	When feisty 12-year-old Jessica enters junior high school, she realizes that life is not always easy. Her former best friend, Sheila, and five other girls have created a clique and will not even acknowledge her existence. With an iron will, Jessica forces herself to act nonchalantly even when the group leader ridicules her, saying that her new dress looks like a Wonder Bread explosion. The nickname "Wonder" sticks and Jessica's worst nightmares coming true--eating lunch alone, no friends, and exclusion from the boy-girl parties. And then, Conor O'Malley sails full force into her life, making her reassess the things in life worth fighting for. Jessica's first-person account reveals a three-dimensional character with whom readers will laugh and empathize. Her wit and sarcasm shine through her rambling confessions; even at her worst, one realizes that Jessica is a true survivor. Skillful writing replete with humor portrays the minor characters as strong foils to Jessica; someone as bold and confident as popular Tracy has her weak moments and does not always have the solution. The underlying message rings loud and clear--only when one realizes that everyday is a new challenge that has to be faced with laughter, backbone, and determination that he or she can persevere. Readers who have grown up with Paula Danziger's and Ellen Conford's heroines will revel in the rollicking escapades of Jessica.
Vive La Paris	Esmé Raji Codell	Paris McCray is a fifth-grade African American girl trying to right the world's wrongs. Wearing her rose-colored glasses, Paris deals with the Holocaust, bullying, God, and growing up.
Nonfiction		
Born Free (Autobiography)	Joy Adamson	First published in 1960 and closely followed by a hit movie of the same name, Joy Adamson's now classic memoir Born Free continues to introduce countless young people to the wildlife of Africa. Adamson recounts her adventures as the surrogate mother of an orphaned lion cub named Elsa (with parenting duties shared by her husband George and by a delightfully imperturbable rock hyrax named Pati), whom she raised as a welcome member of her human and animal family while painstakingly teaching Elsa the skills she would need to survive in the wild. Her teaching, against all odds, was effective: three years later, the Adamsons took Elsa to a place near that of her birth and set her loose, hoping that she would find her "real pride" among other lions of the Kenya grasslands--as she soon did.
Boy: Tales of Childhood (Autobiography)	Roald Dahl	Review - "Teenage Dahl fans will be enthralled by his autobiographical stories, which...have the drama and macabre humor of his fiction...as bright and bizarre, as daring and delightful as any made-up adventure he ever described."
The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child (Autobiography)	Francisco Jimenez	Jimenez has created a moving autobiography that some critics have compared to John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath. The story, originally published in English as The Circuit, begins in Mexico when the author is very young and his parents inform him that they are going on a very long trip to "El Norte." What follows is a series of stories of the family's unending migration from one farm to another as they search for the next harvesting job. Each story is told from the point of view of the author as a young child. The simple and direct narrative stays true to this perspective, never falling into moralistic or clichéd patterns. The backbreaking work and the soul-crushing effect of the endless packing and moving are portrayed through a child's dismay at having to leave a school where he has just gotten

		comfortable or, worse, having to miss several months of a school year in order to work. Panchito's desire to help his family by working in the fields often clashes with his academic yearning. In this case, as in the case of many Mexican migrant farm workers, the American dream never comes to fruition. Lifting the story up from the mundane, Jimenez deftly portrays the strong bonds of love that hold this family together.
Ten Queens: Portraits of Women of Power	Milton Meltzer	In an enticing mix of history and biography, Meltzer (American Revolutionaries) reveals many events and personal characteristics that contributed to 10 women rulers' rise to power. Covering a 2000-year time span, the book's subjects unfold chronologically and include well-known queens such as Cleopatra and Elizabeth I, as well as the lesser-known Boudicca (who led a revolt against the Romans circa A.D. 60) and Zenobia (who sought to establish her own united kingdom of the East in A.D. 269). Deftly placing each queen in historical context, Meltzer conveys the complexity of power and those who seek it. And, while maintaining a brisk pace, the text nevertheless raises political and ethical questions. Andersen's (Seven Brave Women) painterly scenes of the Tower of London, Notre Dame and Russia's Hermitage Palace, among others, will delight art-loving adults, but her portraiture is the real standout. From Boudicca's fiery hair to Eleanor of Aquitaine's self-possession, from Christina of Sweden's haughty profile to Maria Theresa's gentle visage, these sensitively drawn portraits indicate both the humanity of these women and their extraordinary determination. Andersen's dramatic pictures, interspersed with maps and supplemental material set off in tinted boxes, highlight the risks these women faced to solidify their power and defeat their enemies.
A Mind with Wings: The Story of Henry David Thoreau	Gerald Hausman	Henry the "Odd Stick" comes to life in this anecdotal novel about the innovator, writer, and transcendental philosopher from mid-nineteenth-century Massachusetts. Thoreau was a passionate advocate of nature, and inspired the concept of "civil disobedience."
In Real Life: Six Women Photographers	Leslie Sills	Sills's eye-opening introduction to a half-dozen strong, often pioneering women photographers focuses on how their lives, experiences and imaginations influenced their work. At the beginning of the century, Imogen Cunningham (1883-1976) staged deliberate and stylized compositions that proved photographs could not only record real life but also "be an artist's creation." (O'Keeffe fans can't help but notice the similarity between Cunningham's photograph Magnolia Blossom, 1925 and the painter's close-ups of flowers; the two artists were contemporaries.) Dorothea Lange's (1895-1965) photographs, on the other hand, were deemed "documentary." Her work chronicling Dust Bowl casualties and the plight of sharecroppers during the Depression precipitated government relief in the form of food and improved living facilities. Lola Alvarez Bravo (1907-1993) wanted her work to lovingly "stand for a Mexico that once existed," as she photographed a post-revolution Mexico. She acknowledges a debt to her painter friends, such as Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo and Jos Clemente Orozco (who taught her about light, composition, etc.). For the three modern photographers included, Sills offers much less biographical information and therefore readers may feel more distanced from them. Still, she makes a strong case for the contributions of Carrie Mae Weems, perhaps best known for a series of photos that takes a critical look at the way U.S. culture views African Americans in "American Icons" (1988-1989); and of Elsa Dorfman,

		whose friendship with the Beat poets inspired her to record "everyday life." In perhaps the most accessible example for young readers, Sills makes the connection between Cindy Sherman's childhood love for playacting and dress-up, and her famous staged self-portraits, each of which hint at a mysterious story. Supported throughout by well-chosen selections of each woman's work, this attractive volume may inspire a new generation to take up the camera.
Onward: A Photobiography of African-American Polar Explorer Matthew Henson	Dolores Johnson	Primary-source photographs illustrate the life story of Matthew Henson. The book meticulously documents his leadership role in the Polar expeditions of Robert Peary, including reaching the North Pole in 1909.
Are We Alone?: Scientists Search for Life in Space	Gloria Skurzynski	The age-old question in this title is answered here in a scientific and satisfying manner. Reports of UFOs, alien crashes, and crop circles are not ignored, but a healthy skepticism is encouraged. The chapters that follow describe the efforts modern scientists are making to find, identify, and communicate with life on other planets. Studies and experiments being conducted to discover exactly what conditions are absolutely necessary for life to arise are also presented as part of the overall investigation. Considerable attention is given to existing and planned means of detecting life and intelligent beings. The interconnectedness of the many scientific disciplines discussed is made clear. The well-presented text and beautifully designed format make the book interesting as well as entertaining. A full-page, full-bleed color photograph or illustration faces each new chapter beginning. A generous number of additional color photographs and illustrations appear throughout. Sidebars profile scientists working with SETI's Phoenix Project as well as other scientific and educational agencies. Their own words invariably express the lifelong passion they feel for their work, and their specific endeavors are described in the main text. Enticing works on aliens, UFOs, and alien abductions abound. There are also some excellent books with a narrower focus such as Ellen Jackson's Looking for Life in the Universe (Houghton, 2002), which concentrates on Jill Tarter, head of the Phoenix Project. No other title on this topic weaves together the work of so many disciplines so seamlessly.
Over the Mountains (An Aerial View of Geology)	Michael Collier	This book shows fabulous photographs, taken from the air, of real-world landscapes such as Denali, the San Andreas Fault, and Shenandoah. Photographs are explained via colorful diagrams and/or well-written descriptions. The photography leaves the reader with a desire to inquire more about the magnificent vistas illustrated.
50 Simple Steps to Save the Earth from Global Warming	Green Patriot Working Group	According to a March 2007 MSNBC poll, 86% of Americans believe global warming is a critical or important threat, and according to an April 2007 ABC News/The Washington Post/Stanford University poll, 80% of Americans say they are willing to make changes in their lives to help the environment, even if it means personal inconvenience. This book provides facts and suggestions for reducing your carbon footprint.
Poetry/Short Stories		
Swimming Upstream: Middle School Poems	Kristine O'Connell George	Middle school, with all its trials, tribulations, and triumphs, is portrayed humorously and poignantly through the eyes of one girl. Some of the more mundane topics include a locker that won't open, being late to homeroom,

		carrying around a large piece of wood as a hall pass, and deciding where to sit in the lunchroom. The book also delves into significant issues, from making new friends and a first crush to teasing, gossip, and a bully who may not be so tough after all. The selections are short, mostly filling less than a page, and get to the heart of the matter quickly. The emotions range from confusion, loneliness, and fear to being nervous and tongue-tied. Amid all the angst and trauma are light moments of "chaperones/ (someone else's parents!)/bobbing offbeat" at the school dance or a troublesome musical instrument, "after much practice/flute still suffers severe case/of laryngitis."
How to Eat a Poem: A Smorgasbord of Tasty and Delicious Poems for Young Readers	American Poetry & Literacy Project & Ted Kooser	Seventy lighthearted poems, selected for both popularity and literary quality, cover a wide range of subjects: books, words, imagination, the beauty of the natural world, travel, adventure, play, and, of course, love and friendship. Features an incredible array of poets, from Lewis Carroll and Ernest Lawrence Thayer to Shel Silverstein and Ogden Nash.
The Classics		
The Swiss Family Robinson	Johann D. Wyss	Swept off course by a raging storm, a Swiss pastor, his wife, and four young sons are shipwrecked on an uncharted tropical island. Thus begins the classic story of survival and adventure that has fired the imaginations of readers since it first appeared in 1812.
Treasure Island	Robert Louis Stevenson	When Jim Hawkins, an impressionable young cabin boy, discovers a treasure map, he finds himself thrust into an adventure beyond compare. The notorious Long John Silver joins him and two of his friends on a ship. Can Hawkins trust this mysterious pirate?
Black Beauty	Anna Sewell	Black Beauty tells the story of the horse's own long and varied life, from a well-born colt in a pleasant meadow to an elegant carriage horse for a gentleman to a painfully overworked cab horse. Throughout, Sewell rails--in a gentle, 19th-century way--against animal maltreatment. Young readers will follow Black Beauty's fortunes, good and bad, with gentle masters as well as cruel.
Anne of Green Gables	Lucy Maud Montgomery	The nostalgic charm of Avonlea comes alive in Montgomery's heart-warming tale set on the quaint island of Prince William about an aging brother and sister, Mathew and Marilla Cuthbert, and their decision to adopt a young boy to help with chores around their farm. However, as the result of a misunderstanding the boy turns out to be a feisty, independent, and wildly imaginative redheaded girl named Anne. Three lives are changed so dramatically that none can imagine life without the others.
Hatchet	Gary Paulsen	When the pilot of a small, two-person plane has a heart attack and dies, Brian has to crash land in the forest of a Canadian wilderness. He has little time to realize how alone he is, because he is so busy just trying to survive. And learning to survive, to plan on food not just for a day but until and if he is rescued, only begins when he stops pitying himself and understands that no one can help him. He is on his own, without his divorced father, whom he was to visit, or his mother, whom Brian saw kissing another man before the divorce. This is a heart-stopping story: it seems that at every moment Brian is forced to face a life-and-death decision, and every page makes readers wonder at the density of descriptive detail Paulsen has expertly woven together.
Hurricane Katrina: Aftermath of	Barb Palser	An unusually handsome design and a brisk, information-packed narrative make this new volume from the Snapshots in History series an outstanding

Disaster (Snapshots in History)		acquisition for libraries. Starting with references to residents piling into New Orleans' Superdome, the book traces the individual, city, and national responses to the storm and subsequent relief efforts. Sidebars address relevant issues, such as racism and the high lead content in the soil, while the main text chronologically narrates the storm's onset, the devastation it left behind, and the cleanup efforts that ensued. As useful for research as it is for general-interest reading.
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