

Summer Reading

Summer presents a wonderful opportunity to get engaged in a good book (or two), learning about new places and ideas or stepping into the shoes of a fictional character. To encourage the joys of reading, all ACMS students are required to read two books this summer before returning to school in August: our “all-school” book and another book chosen from a list of options.

Most all of the books listed below are available on loan throughout the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System or for purchase at local bookstores and online. Students can also use an audio copy of a book as they read. Bound to Be Read Books on Flat Shoals Road in East Atlanta will be stocking these books and will donate 10% of all ACMS summer reading book sales back to the school. Bound To Be Read Books also has a standing policy of giving all teachers a 20% discount on ALL book purchases with their school ID to support educators and appreciate their role in promoting literacy.

After reading the all-school book and his/her choice book, each student should complete the following assignment for each book:

Write or type a letter to your advisor that gives a brief overview of the book (one to two paragraphs), explains any messages or themes you noticed in the book and their importance (another one to two paragraphs), and gives your opinion of the book (another one to two paragraphs). Advisors will collect these letters during the first day of school to read. These letters will be graded, so please be sure to bring them with you to school!

All-School Book – *Rules* by Cynthia Lord

All students, teachers, and (we hope) parents/guardians will read the school’s school-wide text and will take part in activities related to the book when we return to school. In *Rules*, an award-winning novel by Cynthia Lord, “twelve-year-old Catherine has conflicting feelings about her younger brother, David, who is autistic. While she loves him, she is also embarrassed by his behavior and feels neglected by their parents. In an effort to keep life on an even keel, Catherine creates rules for him (It’s okay to hug Mom but not the clerk at the video store). Each chapter title is also a rule, and lots more are interspersed throughout the book. When Kristi moves in next door, Catherine hopes that the girl will become a friend, but is anxious about her reaction to David. Then Catherine meets and befriends Jason, a nonverbal paraplegic who uses a book of pictures to communicate, she begins to understand that normal is difficult, and perhaps unnecessary, to define. Rules of behavior are less important than acceptance of others. Catherine is an endearing narrator who tells her story with both humor and heartbreak. Her love for her brother is as real as are her frustrations with him. Lord has candidly captured the delicate dynamics in a family that revolves around a child’s disability. Set in coastal Maine, this sensitive story is about being different, feeling different, and finding acceptance. A lovely, warm read, and a great discussion starter.” (from the School Library Journal review).

Choice Book

In addition to reading the all-school book, each student should also pick one book from the list below to read before returning to school in August. During the first week of school, students will participate in discussions and activities with other students who have read the same book, so it will be helpful to review the book before school starts. Students should read at least one of the books from the list below, but they are certainly encouraged to read more!

***Coraline* by Neil Gaiman** (easy reading level)

Coraline lives with her preoccupied parents in part of a huge old house--a house so huge that other people live in it, too... round, old former actresses Miss Spink and Miss Forcible and their aging Highland terriers and the mustachioed old man under the roof, Coraline contents herself for weeks with exploring the vast garden and grounds. But with a little rain she becomes bored--so bored that she begins to count everything blue (153), the windows (21), and the doors (14). And it is the 14th door that--sometimes blocked with a wall of bricks--opens up for Coraline into an entirely alternate universe.

What's on the other side of the door? A distorted-mirror world, containing presumably everything Coraline has ever dreamed of... people who pronounce her name correctly (not "Caroline"), delicious meals (not like her father's overblown "recipes"), an unusually pink and green bedroom (not like her dull one), and plenty of horrible (very un-boring) marvels, like a man made out of live rats. The creepiest part, however, is her mirrored parents, her "other mother" and her "other father"--people who look just like her own parents, but with big, shiny, black button eyes, paper-white skin... and a keen desire to keep her on their side of the door. To make creepy creepier, Coraline has been illustrated masterfully in scritchey, terrifying ink drawings by British mixed-media artist and Sandman cover illustrator Dave McKean. This delightful, funny, haunting, scary as heck, fairy-tale novel is about as fine as they come. (from the School Library Journal review)

***The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie** (moderate reading level) – *please note: this novel contains some mature themes and language*

Exploring Indian identity, both self and tribal, Alexie's first young adult novel is a semiautobiographical chronicle of Arnold Spirit, aka Junior, a Spokane Indian from Wellpinit, WA. The bright 14-year-old was born with water on the brain, is regularly the target of bullies, and loves to draw. He says, "I think the world is a series of broken dams and floods, and my cartoons are tiny little lifeboats." He expects disaster when he transfers from the reservation school to the rich, white school in Reardan, but soon finds himself making friends with both geeky and popular students and starting on the basketball team. Meeting his old classmates on the court, Junior grapples with questions about what constitutes one's community, identity, and tribe. The daily struggles of reservation life and the tragic deaths of the protagonist's grandmother, dog, and older sister would be all but unbearable without the humor and resilience of spirit with which Junior faces the world. The many characters, on and off the rez, with whom he has dealings are portrayed with compassion and verve, particularly the adults in his extended family. Forney's simple pencil cartoons fit perfectly within the story and reflect the burgeoning artist within Junior. Reluctant readers can even skim the pictures and construct their own story based exclusively on Forney's illustrations. The teen's determination to both improve himself and overcome poverty, despite the handicaps of birth, circumstances, and race, delivers a positive message in a low-key manner. Alexie's tale of self-discovery is a first purchase for all libraries. (from the School Library Journal review)

***Criss Cross* by Lynne Rae Perkins** (moderate reading level)

The author of the popular *All Alone in the Universe* returns with another character study involving those moments that occur in everyone's life--moments when a decision is made that sends a person along one path instead of another. Debbie, who wishes that something would happen so she'll be a different person, and Hector, who feels he is unfinished, narrate most of the novel. Both are 14 years old. Hector is a fabulous character with a wry humor and an appealing sense of self-awareness. A secondary story involving Debbie's locket that goes missing in the beginning of the tale and is passed around by a number of

characters emphasizes the theme of the book. The descriptive, measured writing includes poems, prose, haiku, and question-and-answer formats. There is a great deal of humor in this gentle story about a group of childhood friends facing the crossroads of life and how they wish to live it. Young teens will certainly relate to the self-consciousnesses and uncertainty of all of the characters, each of whom is straining toward clarity and awareness. The book is profusely illustrated with Perkins's amusing drawings and some photographs. (from the School Library Journal review)

***The Last Book in the Universe* by Rodman Philbrick (easy reading level)**

Following the Big Shake, which destroyed most of civilization, a small group of individuals (the "proofs") retreated to Eden, learned how to improve themselves genetically, and sealed their environment off from the sprawling ruins inhabited by the remaining normals. Plagued by genetic defects, a toxic environment, and illnesses, normals like Spaz live in the Urb at the mercy of latch-bosses and their gangs. Spaz knows that his survival depends on Billy Bizmo and the Bully Bangers, so when they send him to rob an old man, he obeys. Ryter willingly surrenders his few possessions except for the pages of the book he is writing—the first time Spaz has seen anything like this. And when the boy sets out to find Bean, his dying foster sister, Ryter insists on accompanying him. Along the way, they are joined by Lanaya, a proof, and Little Face, an orphan. Finding Bean is hard enough; helping her appears to be impossible, until Lanaya takes the motley group back to Eden and confronts the rulers with the truth about the outside world. This is science fiction, not a fairy tale, and everyone does not live happily ever after... (from the School Library Journal review)

***The Wednesday Wars* by Gary Schmidt (moderate reading level)**

On Wednesday afternoons, while his Catholic and Jewish schoolmates attend religious instruction, Holling Hoodhood, the only Presbyterian in his seventh grade, is alone in the classroom with his teacher, Mrs. Baker, who Holling is convinced hates his guts. He feels more certain after Mrs. Baker assigns Shakespeare's plays for Holling to discuss during their shared afternoons. Each month in Holling's tumultuous seventh-grade year is a chapter in this quietly powerful coming-of-age novel set in suburban Long Island during the late '60s. The slow start may deter some readers, and Mrs. Baker is too good to be true: she arranges a meeting between Holling and the New York Yankees, brokers a deal to save a student's father's architectural firm, and, after revealing her past as an Olympic runner, coaches Holling to the varsity cross-country team. However, Schmidt, whose *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy* (2005) was named both a Printz and a Newbery Honor Book, makes the implausible believable and the everyday momentous. Seamlessly, he knits together the story's themes: the cultural uproar of the '60s, the internal uproar of early adolescence, and the timeless wisdom of Shakespeare's words. Holling's unwavering, distinctive voice offers a gentle, hopeful, moving story of a boy who, with the right help, learns to stretch beyond the limitations of his family, his violent times, and his fear, as he leaps into his future with his eyes and his heart wide open. (from the Booklist review)

***Secrets of a Civil War Submarine: Solving the Mysteries of the H.L. Hunley* by Sally Walker (moderate reading level)**

Walker brings a little-known story of the Civil War to life in this fascinating book. When the Union blockade of all ports in the South stopped supplies from reaching the Confederate Army, Horace L. Hunley decided to create a submarine that would be able to sneak up on enemy ships and blow them up. After many years of trial and error, the H. L. Hunley actually succeeded in sinking the USS Housatonic in February of 1864. But the submarine never returned to port, and her crew perished in the Charleston Harbor. This is a finely crafted account of the Hunley from its inception to the modern archaeological quest to exhume her from the water. It is divided into chronological chapters complete with pictures, maps, and primary sources. Half of the book discusses the construction and design of the submarine, in addition to its practice runs and its first and only mission. The second half consists of the process of locating and excavating the Hunley, as well as piecing together the puzzle of exactly what happened on that fateful night in 1864. The archaeological process is well documented in both words and pictures, and the conclusions are interesting and even surprising. (from the School Library Journal review)

***The End of the Beginning* by Avi (easy reading level)**

A charming modern fable. Avon the snail's voracious reading convinces him that having an adventure is the key to a happy life so he sets out on a journey with his new friend, Edward the ant. In a series of very short

chapters, the two travel—at a snail's pace—the length of a branch, meeting another snail, a caterpillar, a worm, a cricket, a salamander, and a mouse (whom Edward and Avon are sure is a dragon in disguise). Many insights unfold: "here" and "there" are not much different; while getting lost is easy, it's finding one's self that's hard; whether rushing or going slowly, one still arrives; and it is important to look at the world with one's heart and not just with one's eyes. The book is full of plays on "beginning" and "end." Until Avon and Edward help the worm, he is unsure which is his front and which is his back, and is doomed to a life without end. When they reach the end of the branch, are they actually at the end of the sky and the beginning of the branch? Avon and Edward turn around and head back, coming to a house that looks magically like Avon's own. The friends decide to live together in this magic castle. And so, true to the book's title, the beginning of their friendship ends. Whimsical pen-and-ink sketches add much to this wise little book. It's perfect for reading and discussing. (from the School Library Journal review)

***The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho (moderate reading level)**

Like the one-time bestseller *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, *The Alchemist* presents a simple fable, based on simple truths and places it in a highly unique situation. And though we may sniff a bestselling formula, it is certainly not a new one: even the ancient tribal storytellers knew that this is the most successful method of entertaining an audience while slipping in a lesson or two. Brazilian storyteller Paulo Coelho introduces Santiago, an Andalusian shepherd boy who one night dreams of a distant treasure in the Egyptian pyramids. And so he's off: leaving Spain to literally follow his dream.

Along the way he meets many spiritual messengers, who come in unassuming forms such as a camel driver and a well-read Englishman. In one of the Englishman's books, Santiago first learns about the alchemists--men who believed that if a metal were heated for many years, it would free itself of all its individual properties, and what was left would be the "Soul of the World." Of course he does eventually meet an alchemist, and the ensuing student-teacher relationship clarifies much of the boy's misguided agenda, while also emboldening him to stay true to his dreams. "My heart is afraid that it will have to suffer," the boy confides to the alchemist one night as they look up at a moonless night.

"Tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than the suffering itself," the alchemist replies. "And that no heart has ever suffered when it goes in search of its dreams, because every second of the search is a second's encounter with God and with eternity." (from Amazon.com review)