

# Williams Montessori Summer Book Review Challenge!

*Hello, Rising 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders!*

Summer reading is absolutely crucial to keeping your mind active while school is out. However, with [hundreds of millions of books](#) to choose from and [millions more](#) being published each year, it can sometimes be a challenge to decide what to read! To help make your decision a little easier, we, your middle school humanities teachers, compile a summer reading list each year with a wide variety of engaging summer reading options for you to choose from.

On this year's list (found on the next page), you'll find stories that span a range of topics, from haunted houses, to fugitive clones; tales of survival, from the remote wilderness, to the halls of middle school; and characters who bravely confront injustice, from far-flung galaxies, to the distant past, to the America we know today.

We've done our best to pick books that we think you'll enjoy, but ultimately, you know what you like better than anyone. Our goal is to improve our list each year, but in order to do so, we need your help. That is why, this summer, you are going to take on the role of book reviewer for the Williams middle school humanities department!

## *How Does It Work?*

Each time you read a book from the summer reading list, you will use [this google form](#) to submit a review! You'll be able to tell us about things like your favorite scene, which character was the most interesting, and what you would change about the story to make it better. You'll also have the opportunity to rate the book (on a scale of ★ to ★★★★★) and explain why you would, or would not, recommend it to a friend.

Finally, you will tell us if we should keep the book on the list for next year, or toss it out. If it was the best book you ever read, we want to know! And if it was so bad that you wouldn't even recommend it to your worst enemy, we want to know that, too.

When we return to school, we will share which books were the biggest hits and which were the biggest flops! This will be a great way to get know each other and help us build community around shared interests, as well as provide a basis for discussing what kinds of texts you would be most excited to read in Humanities class over the course of the school year.

## *Requirements*

- 1) Please read and review **at least 2** books from the list, but we challenge you to read as many as you can!
- 2) All book reviews are due by the end of **the first week** of school.

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*Remember: the more books you read and review, the more influential your voice will be in shaping this experience for future students! So, choose your books and happy reading! Book reviewers, assemble!*



## Reading List

Summer 2020

- *The Hate U Give* (Angie Thomas)
  - After witnessing her friend's death at the hands of a police officer, Starr Carter's life is complicated when the police and a local drug lord try to intimidate her in an effort to learn what happened the night Kahlil died.
- *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Jacqueline Woodson)
  - Jacqueline Woodson tells the moving story of her childhood in mesmerizing free verse poems. Raised in South Carolina and New York, she always felt halfway home in each place. And she shares what it was like to grow up as an African American in the 1960s and 1970s, living with the remnants of Jim Crow and her growing awareness of the Civil Rights movement. *Winner of the National Book Award for Young People's Literature!*
- *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (Suzanne Collins)
  - A prequel to the *Hunger Games* series, set sixty-four years before Katniss volunteered as tribute! The tenth annual Hunger Games are about to kick off! In the Capitol, eighteen-year-old Coriolanus Snow has been assigned to mentor the tribute from District 12. Every choice Coriolanus makes could lead to favor or failure, triumph or ruin. Will he be able to outcharm, outwit, and outmaneuver his fellow students to mentor the winning tribute?
- *Does My Head Look Big In This?* (Randa Abdel-Fattah)
  - Year Eleven at an exclusive prep school would be tough enough, but it is further complicated for Amal when she decides to wear the hijab, the Muslim head scarf, full-time as a badge of her faith--without losing her identity or sense of style.
- *If I Ever Get Out of Here* (Eric Gansworth)
  - It's 1975. Lewis lives in abject poverty on the Tuscarora reservation in upstate New York. His favorite band, the Beatles, has broken up. He's the only Indian in the class for smart kids. And he's in middle school. Times are tough. When George, a military kid, arrives, the two bond over their mutual appreciation of music, however, Lewis struggles to avoid revealing the true nature of his life on the rez. An exploration of identity and friendship between middle school boys who live in different worlds.
- *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Mark Haddon)
  - Although gifted with a superbly logical brain, for fifteen-year-old Christopher everyday interactions have little meaning. He lives on patterns, rules, and a diagram kept in his pocket. Then one day, a neighbor's dog is killed and Christopher sets out to solve the murder in the style of his favourite (logical) detective, Sherlock Holmes. What follows is a funny, poignant and fascinating portrayal of a person whose curse and blessing are a mind that perceives the world entirely literally.
- *Hello, Universe* (Erin Entrada Kelly)
  - Virgil Salinas feels out of place in his crazy-about-sports family. Valencia Somerset, who is deaf, is smart, brave, and secretly lonely. Kaori Tanaka is a self-proclaimed psychic, whose little sister, Gen, is always following her around. And Chet Bullens wishes the weird kids would just stop being so

different so he can concentrate on basketball. The lives of these four misfits are intertwined when a bully's prank lands Virgil at the bottom of a well and Valencia, Kaori, and Gen band together in an epic quest to find and rescue him.

- *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (Betty Smith)
  - A moving coming-of-age story set in the 1900s, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* follows the lives of 11-year-old Francie Nolan, her younger brother Neely, and their parents, Irish immigrants who have settled in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn.
- *The House of the Scorpion* (Nancy Farmer)
  - In a future where humans despise clones and the wealthy harvest their organs to prolong their own lives, Matt enjoys special status as the young clone of El Patron, the 142-year-old leader of a corrupt drug empire nestled between Mexico and the United States. This award-winning novel explores vital and soul-searching questions about what it means to be human.
- *Jacob Have I Loved* (Kate Paterson)
  - Sara Louise Bradshaw is sick and tired of her beautiful twin Caroline. Ever since they were born, Caroline has been the pretty one, the talented one, the better sister. Even now, Caroline seems to take everything: Louise's friends, their parents' love, her dreams for the future. For once in her life, Louise wants to be the special one. But in order to do that, she must first figure out who she is . . . and find a way to make a place for herself outside her sister's shadow.
- *The Hobbit* (JRR Tolkien)
  - In this timeless classic, readers are introduced to the hobbit Bilbo Baggins, the wizard Gandalf, Gollum, and the spectacular world of Middle Earth as they follow the adventures of a reluctant hero, a powerful and dangerous ring, and the cruel dragon Smaug the Magnificent.
- *A Pocket Full of Seeds* (Marilyn Sachs)
  - Nicole Nieman has never really thought about being Jewish. Now, with the Nazis occupying France, it is the only thing on her mind. Then one awful day Nicole comes home from school to find her parents and her sister gone. The Nazis who have taken them are still looking for her. Where can Nicole hide? And will she ever see her family again?
- *The Call of the Wild* (Jack London)
  - Based on London's experiences as a gold prospector in the Canadian wilderness and his ideas about nature and the struggle for existence, *The Call of the Wild* is a tale about unbreakable spirit and the fight for survival in the frozen Alaskan Klondike.
- *Hatchet* (Gary Paulsen)
  - Brian is on his way to Canada to visit his estranged father when the pilot of his small prop plane suffers a heart attack. Brian is forced to crash-land the plane in a lake--and finds himself stranded in the remote Canadian wilderness with only his clothing and the hatchet his mother gave him as a present before his departure. A story of survival and of transformation.
- *Dune* (Frank Herbert)
  - Set amidst a sprawling feudal interstellar empire where planetary dynasties are controlled by noble houses, *Dune* tells the story of young Paul Atreides as he and his family accept control of the desert planet Arrakis, the only source of the 'spice' melange, the most important and valuable substance in the cosmos. Readers will explore the complex, multi-layered interactions of politics, religion, ecology, technology, and human emotion as the forces of the empire confront each other for control of Arrakis.
- *Esperanza Rising* (Pam Munoz Ryan)
  - Esperanza thought she'd always live with her family on their ranch in Mexico--she'd always have fancy dresses, a beautiful home, and servants. But a sudden tragedy forces Esperanza and Mama to flee to

California during the Great Depression, and to settle in a camp for Mexican farm workers. Esperanza isn't ready for the hard labor, financial struggles, or lack of acceptance she now faces. When their new life is threatened, Esperanza must find a way to rise above her difficult circumstances--Mama's life, and her own, depend on it.

- *Freak the Mighty* (Rodman Philbrick)
  - Two boys – a slow learner stuck in the body of a teenage giant and a tiny Einstein in leg braces – forge a unique friendship when they pair up to create one formidable human force. A wonderful story of triumph over imperfection, shame, and loss.
- *Catcher in the Rye* (J.D. Salinger)
  - There are many voices in this novel: children's voices, adult voices, underground voices-but sixteen year-old Holden Caulfield's voice is the most eloquent of all. Readers follow Holden as he leaves his prep school in Pennsylvania and goes underground in New York City for three days.
- *The King of Dragons* (Carol Fenner)
  - Eleven-year-old Ian and his father, a Vietnam veteran, have been homeless for several years. Now his father has found the perfect place for them, the vast, old, now unused city courthouse. Then Ian's father fails to return one night and must survive on his own, following all the precautions his father has taught him.
- *Of Mice and Men* (John Steinbeck)
  - Drifters in search of work, George and his simple-minded friend Lennie have nothing in the world except each other and a dream -- a dream that one day they will have some land of their own. Eventually they find work on a ranch in California's Salinas Valley, but their hopes are doomed as Lennie, struggling against extreme cruelty, misunderstanding and feelings of jealousy, becomes a victim of his own strength.
- *Shane* (Jack Schaefer)
  - A stranger rode out of the heart of the great glowing West, into the small Wyoming valley in the summer of 1889. It was Shane, who appeared on the horizon and became a friend and guardian to the Starrett family at a time when homesteaders and cattle rangers battled for territory and survival.
- *Curiosity* (Gary Blackwood)
  - Rufus, a twelve-year-old chess prodigy, is recruited by a shady showman named Maelzel to secretly operate a mechanical chess player that wows ticket-paying audience members and players, who do not realize that Rufus, the true chess master, is hidden inside the contraption. But Rufus's job working the automaton must be kept secret, and he fears he may never be able to escape his unscrupulous master. And what has happened to the previous operators of the machine, who seem to disappear as soon as Maelzel no longer needs them? Creeping suspense and plenty of mystery!
- *The House of Dies Drear* (Virginia Hamilton)
  - A family tries to unravel the secrets of their new home which was once a stop on the Underground Railroad. Ghosts are said to walk its rooms . . .