

LACES 6th-10th Grade Recommended Summer Reading List

Please note: These are not assigned texts, but suggestions for students who are looking for something to read over the summer.

If you are seeking to help improve or build your child's reading skills, try the activities below. Please note, they are not assignments and do not have to be turned in.

- ★ have your child journal about their favorite character or part of the reading
 - ★ if they like draw or paint, create a scene based on a description from the reading
 - ★ [Annotate](#) the text using sticky notes
 - ★ Discuss [literary devices and terms](#) with them as you read
 - ★ Read together and start a family book club! Discuss theme, main ideas, characters and other important details!
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Rising 6th Grade

Inside Out and Back Again by Thanh Hà Lai

Genre: Historical fiction / Verse

Summary: A Vietnamese girl resettles in Alabama after the fall of Saigon, navigating language barriers, racism, and culture shock.

Content Notes: Mild bullying and cultural alienation; no profanity.

Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson

Genre: Memoir-in-verse

Summary: A lyrical coming-of-age memoir of a Black girl growing up in the 1960s-70s American South and North.

Content Notes: Discusses racism and segregation; no profanity.

The First Rule of Punk by Celia C. Pérez

Genre: Realistic fiction

Summary: Malú loves punk rock and struggles to fit in at a new school while embracing her Mexican-American identity.

Content Notes: Some attitude, mild defiance of authority; no profanity or mature themes.

Ghost by Jason Reynolds

Genre: Realistic fiction / Sports

Summary: A boy joins a track team to outrun trauma and mistakes, while learning discipline and trust.

Content Notes: References to domestic violence, gun violence (past event), and bullying; no profanity.

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Where the Mountain Meets the Moon by Grace Lin

Genre: Fantasy / Folklore

Summary: A girl embarks on a mythic quest to change her family's fate, meeting magical creatures and gods.

Content Notes: No mature content or profanity. Highly appropriate for all ages.

A Long Walk to Water by Linda Sue Park

Genre: Historical fiction

Summary: Based on real events, this novel follows two Sudanese children enduring war and water scarcity.

Content Notes: War-related trauma, death, and survival themes; no profanity.

El Deafo by Cece Bell

Genre: Graphic memoir

Summary: A deaf girl uses humor, imagination, and hearing aids to navigate school and friendships.

Content Notes: One use of mild language ("hell"), teasing, and isolation, otherwise clean and accessible.

The Season of Styx Malone by Kekla Magoon

Genre: Realistic fiction Summary: Two brothers follow a charismatic older boy into increasingly bold (but harmless) adventures.

Content Notes: Includes lying and disobedience to parents; no profanity or graphic content.

A Wish in the Dark by Christina Soontornvat

Genre: Fantasy / Allegorical fiction

Summary: In a world where light equals power, Pong seeks justice and freedom after escaping a prison for children.

Content Notes: Justice vs. oppression themes; no profanity or mature content.

Harbor Me by Jacqueline Woodson

Genre: Realistic fiction

Summary: Six students share personal stories in a safe space, including family incarceration and immigration fears.

Content Notes: Sensitive topics (incarceration, racism, deportation, grief); handled with age-appropriate care. No profanity.

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Rising 7th grade

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor

Genre: Historical Fiction

Format: Prose Novel

A Black family in 1930s Mississippi faces racism and land disputes while teaching strength and justice.

The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien

Genre: Fantasy / Adventure

Format: Prose Novel

Bilbo Baggins leaves his quiet home for a treasure quest filled with dragons, riddles, and self-discovery.

Anne of Green Gables by L.M. Montgomery

Genre: Classic Coming-of-Age

Format: Prose Novel

Orphan Anne Shirley brings chaos and charm to Avonlea in this rich, humorous portrait of youth and imagination

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle

Genre: Science Fantasy / Adventure

Format: Prose Novel

Meg Murry travels through time and space to battle evil and find her missing father.

The Witch of Blackbird Pond by Elizabeth George Speare

Genre: Historical Fiction

Format: Prose Novel

Kit, a free-spirited girl in Puritan Connecticut, is accused of witchcraft. Themes include bravery and belonging.

Long Way Down by Jason Reynolds

Genre: Contemporary / Realistic Fiction

Format: Verse Novel

In a tense 60-second elevator ride, Will faces ghosts from his past while contemplating revenge. *Note: Contains minimal profanity.*

Genesis Begins Again by Alicia D. Williams

Genre: Contemporary Realistic Fiction

Format: Prose Novel

Genesis wrestles with colorism and self-esteem while discovering her value as a person and performer.

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Content Note: Occasional Profanity, the language reflects Genesis's reality at home and school. The novel addresses alcoholism, emotional abuse, and internalized racism.

Other Words for Home by Jasmine Warga

Genre: Immigration Story / Realistic Fiction

Format: Verse Novel

After fleeing Syria, Jude adjusts to life in America and discovers courage, faith, and her voice.

When You Trap a Tiger by Tae Keller

Genre: Magical Realism / Family Drama

Format: Prose Novel

A tiger from Korean folklore helps Lily uncover family secrets and deal with grief and bravery.

They Called Us Enemy by George Takei

Genre: Memoir / Historical Nonfiction

Format: Graphic Novel

Actor George Takei shares his childhood in a Japanese internment camp and the lasting effects of prejudice.

Mexican WhiteBoy by Matt de la Peña

Genre: Contemporary Realistic Fiction

Format: Prose Novel

Danny, a biracial teen, struggles with identity, belonging, and hidden family trauma during one transformative summer.

Content Note: Moderate Profanity, Includes stronger language and some racial slurs used in character dialogue to explore identity and discrimination. Also touches on complex themes like incarceration, violence, and cultural alienation.

Rising 8th grade

Eleanor & Park by Rainbow Rowell

Summary: Set in the 1980s, this is a tender coming-of-age romance between two misfit teens—Eleanor, a red-haired girl from a troubled home, and Park, a half-Korean boy who doesn't quite fit in either. As their friendship deepens, they navigate first love, family dysfunction, and the cruelty of peers. Content Warnings:

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Profanity: Moderate, including some f-bombs. Themes: Bullying, domestic abuse, poverty, racism, and sexual harassment.

He Said, She Said by Kwame Alexander

Summary: Told in alternating voices, this YA novel follows jock Omar “T-Diddy” Smalls and ambitious college-bound Claudia Clarke. When they’re forced to work together on a social justice project, sparks fly—both romantic and ideological. The story explores politics, privilege, and activism through witty dialogue and sharp verse.

Content Warnings: Profanity: Mild to moderate; some slang and casual swearing. Themes: Racism, classism, activism, peer pressure, and romance.

I Love You So Mochi by Sarah Kuhn

Summary: Kimi Nakamura, a Japanese-American teen, travels to Kyoto to reconnect with her estranged grandparents—and herself. As she explores her heritage, love of fashion, and a potential romance with a med student named Akira, Kimi learns to balance cultural expectations with personal dreams. Content Warnings: Profanity: Minimal to none. Themes: Identity, generational conflict, cultural heritage, and self-expression.

One of Us Is Lying by Karen M. McManus

Summary: Five students walk into detention. Only four walk out alive. As the investigation unfolds, each of the four suspects has a motive—and secrets to hide. This twisty thriller blends mystery with a Breakfast Club-like character ensemble.

Content Warnings: Profanity: Moderate, including some strong language and crude slang. Themes: Death, teen substance use, bullying, mental health, sexual orientation, and social media abuse.

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

Summary: Elizabeth Bennet navigates society, family pressure, and her evolving feelings toward the proud Mr. Darcy in this classic romantic satire. The novel critiques class distinctions and gender roles in 19th-century England with wit and irony.

Content Warnings: Profanity: None. Themes: Marriage, social class, gender, and reputation.

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Scythe by Neal Shusterman

Summary: In a futuristic world where death has been conquered, “scythes” are tasked with population control. When Citra and Rowan are chosen as scythe apprentices, they must confront moral dilemmas, corruption, and what it means to be truly human.

Content Warnings: Profanity: Mild to moderate. Themes, Death, morality, systemic violence, dystopia, and power.

Animal Farm by George Orwell

Summary: A political allegory featuring farm animals who overthrow their human oppressor only to create a new tyranny under the pigs. It satirizes the rise of Soviet communism and explores themes of power, propaganda, and corruption.

Content Warnings: Profanity: None. Themes: Totalitarianism, betrayal, political manipulation, and violence.

The Inheritance Games by Jennifer Lynn Barnes

Summary: Avery Grambs unexpectedly inherits a billionaire’s fortune—but must move into his mansion and solve a series of puzzles with his suspicious (and very attractive) grandsons. A blend of mystery, romance, and high-stakes family drama.

Content Warnings: Profanity: Mild to moderate. Themes: Greed, manipulation, secrets, family tension, and class disparity.

Rising 9th grade

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck

Summary: During the Great Depression, two displaced workers, George and Lennie, seek stability while confronting harsh realities of poverty, disability, and powerlessness.

Profanity: Frequent, including racial slurs and offensive terms.

The Odyssey

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Summary: This epic poem follows Odysseus as he battles monsters, gods, and temptation to return home from the Trojan War. A foundational tale of adventure, heroism, and endurance.

Profanity: None in most translations.

Themes/Warnings: Violence, revenge, mythology, and gender roles.

Night by Elie Wiesel

Summary: A memoir of Wiesel's experiences as a teenager during the Holocaust, detailing the horrors of Auschwitz and the emotional toll of survival.

Profanity: None.

Themes/Warnings: Genocide, graphic violence, death, and trauma.

Great Expectations by Charles Dickens

Summary: Pip, an orphan, navigates social mobility, wealth, and unrequited love in Victorian England. A coming-of-age tale rich with satire and social commentary.

Themes/Warnings: Class, identity, disappointment, and ambition.

A Very Large Expanse of Sea by Tahereh Mafi

Summary: Set a year after 9/11, this novel follows Shirin, a Muslim teen who wears a hijab and deals with constant prejudice. As she forms a connection with a white classmate, she wrestles with vulnerability and fear.

Profanity: Moderate.

Themes/Warnings: Islamophobia, racism, bullying, and romance.

Don't Call Me a Hurricane by Ellen Hagan

Summary: Eliza, an eco-conscious Puerto Rican-Irish poet, contends with rising seas, climate grief, and local development threatening her New Jersey town. A novel in verse.

Profanity: Mild.

Themes/Warnings: Environmental activism, anxiety, identity, and climate change.

We Are Not From Here by Jenny Torres Sanchez

Summary: Three Guatemalan teens flee violence and poverty, risking everything to migrate north. A harrowing, poetic story inspired by real journeys across the U.S.-Mexico border.

Profanity: Minimal Themes/Warnings: Violence, trauma, immigration, and survival.

Farewell to Manzanar by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston

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Summary: This memoir recounts Jeanne Wakatsuki's experiences as a Japanese American child imprisoned with her family at the Manzanar internment camp during World War II. It explores themes of identity, resilience, and civil rights as Jeanne grows up amid racial prejudice and family upheaval.

Profanity: Very minimal.

Themes/Warnings: Racism, war, displacement, loss of civil liberties, and cultural identity.

Rising 10th grade

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The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams *

Summary: After Earth is destroyed to make way for a galactic freeway, Arthur Dent embarks on an absurd, interstellar adventure with an alien researcher, a depressed robot, and other eccentric characters. A satirical sci-fi romp filled with wit, irony, and cosmic nonsense.

Profanity: Mild.

Themes: Absurdity of life, bureaucracy, existentialism, destruction of Earth, and satirical takes on science and society.

The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger **

Summary: Disillusioned teenager Holden Caulfield narrates a few days of his life after being expelled from prep school, wandering New York City while wrestling with grief, alienation, and the fear of growing up. A coming-of-age classic with sharp introspection and emotional depth.

Content Warnings:

Profanity: Frequent.

Themes: Depression, grief, isolation, mental health, and adolescent angst.

Mexican Gothic by Silvia Moreno-Garcia **

Summary: In 1950s Mexico, socialite Noemí Taboada travels to a remote estate to check on her cousin and uncovers chilling secrets, a decaying mansion, and a terrifying family legacy. A gothic horror novel with lush atmosphere and feminist undertones.

Content Warnings:

Profanity: Mild.

Themes: Gaslighting, body horror, sexual coercion, racism, colonialism, and psychological manipulation.

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I'm Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter by Erika L. Sánchez **

Summary: After the sudden death of her seemingly perfect sister, teenager Julia Peña grapples with grief, identity, and family expectations in a Mexican-American household. A powerful exploration of mental health, cultural pressure, and self-discovery.

Content Warnings:

Profanity: Moderate.

Themes: Depression, suicide, grief, cultural conflict, family dysfunction, and mental illness.

Sweet, Young and Worried by Blythe Baird (Poetry) *

Summary: A raw, vulnerable poetry collection exploring mental health, identity, queerness, womanhood, and healing. Blythe Baird's voice is both fierce and tender, balancing trauma with empowerment.

Content Warnings:

Profanity: Moderate.

Themes: Mental illness, eating disorders, self-harm, trauma, queerness, recovery, and resilience.

Sigh, Gone: A Misfit's Memoir of Great Books, Punk Rock, and the Fight to Fit In by Phuc Tran (Memoir) *

Summary: Phuc Tran recounts his coming-of-age as a Vietnamese immigrant in small-town America, weaving in punk music, classic literature, and his search for belonging. A witty, heartfelt, and brutally honest memoir.

Content Warnings:

Profanity: Frequent.

Themes: Racism, assimilation, identity, adolescent angst, family tension, and emotional abuse.

We the Animals by Justin Torres *

Summary: A lyrical, semi-autobiographical novel following three biracial brothers growing up in a turbulent working-class family. Told in fragments, the story explores childhood, violence, queerness, and the complexities of love and survival.

Content Warnings:

Profanity: Moderate.

Themes: Domestic violence, child abuse, sexual identity, poverty, trauma, and neglect.