

May 2009

Dear Incoming Sixth Grade Students and Parents:

In keeping with Blake Middle School's required summer reading program, each rising 6th grader has been assigned TWO books to read during the summer. *Letters from Rifka* by Karen Hesse will be required reading for all sixth-graders; students' fifth grade teachers will be providing them with a copy of this novel. Their second book should be chosen from a list of five titles. Please refer to the reverse side of this letter for a complete list of titles and a brief description of each of the five "choice" novels.

While there are no formal assignments to complete over the summer, students will be discussing and writing about their books' events and themes during the first two weeks of English class. These tasks will be made easier if students read actively, taking time to either highlight or take notes on the following points of interest in their books:

- What is the book's setting? During what time period and geographical place does the action occur? How important is the setting to the book's plot and meaning?
- Who are the book's main characters? What are their personalities like? What do you like/dislike about each one? Would you make the same choices the characters do?
- What are the most memorable parts of the book? Are there any lessons, ideas, or events that you'll remember next week, next month, or next year?
- How do the book's characters and events relate to your own life and experiences? Do you share any experiences, attitudes, or outlooks on life with any of the characters? How do the characters grow and change throughout the novel?

We are very excited about these books and hope that you will enjoy reading *Letters from Rifka* and the other book you've chosen to read this summer. It is our belief that sharing this common summer reading experience will be valuable in opening the doors of discussion in the fall.

All the best,

Joe Seivold
Middle School Director

Elizabeth Hastings
Middle School Asst. Director

Gary Nash, Stacy Swearingen
6th Grade English Faculty

Choose one (1) book from the list below to read in addition to *Letters from Rifka*:

Please know that it is each family's responsibility to either purchase this second book or check it out from a local library.

Rules by Cynthia Lord tells the story of Catherine, a twelve-year old, who “just wants a normal life, which is nearly impossible when you have a brother with autism and a family that revolves around his disability.” This book explores the question “What is normal?” through the narrator’s friendships, relationships, and experiences. (Barnes and Noble Review, 2007)

Atherton, the House of Power by Patrick Carman tells the story of Edgar, a boy who likes to climb and explore the realms of Atherton. One day he finds a book that tells of Atherton’s beginnings and future destruction. This fantasy novel by Patrick Carman is “a riveting adventure set in an extraordinary satellite world created as a refuge from a dying Earth that begins to collapse and forever change the lives of its inhabitants. Edgar’s world quite literally begins to turn inside out.” (Barnes and Noble Review, 2007)

Elsewhere by Gabrielle Zevin follows the journey of Liz who must deal with the usual challenges of growing up while she, in fact, is growing younger. According to the School Library Journal, “[h]aving been killed by a hit and run driver, [Liz] now lives in Elsewhere with the grandmother who died before she was born. After death, the residents get younger until they become babies and are reborn onto Earth again. Initially mad at the driver and sad that she will not have a boyfriend and attend the prom, Liz misses her family and is sullen and depressed. Gradually, she begins to realize that life is not so bad in the hereafter.” This is a good choice for a more sophisticated reader. A parent may choose to read this selection with his or her student in order to discuss its secular perspective of the afterlife.

Flush by Carl Hiaasen is set in the Florida Keys this mystery novel has an environmental bent as it relays the tale of Noah and his friends who work to solve the problem of the local casino dumping raw sewage into their city’s harbor, which is endangering sea turtles. “Noah is a gem of a character: earnest, truth-seeking, amusing, and very real” (Children’s Literature, 2005)

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeline L’Engle. This classic science fiction/fantasy novel has been a favorite for generations. It tells the story of Meg Murry, who is searching with her friends for her father, whose secret government work is suspected in his disappearance. The group encounters strange beings and a series of misadventures.