

May 2009

Dear Seventh Grade Students and Parents:

As part of Blake's required summer reading program, all seventh graders will be reading TWO books. All incoming 7th graders will read *Define Normal* by Julie Ann Peters. They will be provided with a copy of the novel from their 6th grade English teacher. While there are no formal assignments to complete for this novel, students will be discussing and writing about its 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 points of interest and significance in the book.

Each student is also to read a second novel from the list provided on the reverse of this letter. A copy of the novel can be attained from a local library or bookstore. After reading this novel, the student is to **do two of the following three** activities to begin to explore some of the basic elements of literature.

- 1) Character-Imagine you are a reporter for a literary magazine. Choose one of your favorite characters from the book and write an interview of at least three questions **and** answers. Come up with questions that you think will give a good idea about the character's most interesting traits and try to respond in a voice that is realistic for that character.
- 2) Setting- Where and when do the main events of your book take place? How do place and time period play a role in the plot of the story? Choose someplace specific in the book and provide a quote that gives a good sense of this setting.
- 3) Theme-What was an important message or idea the author was trying to get across by writing this book? If you asked the author what point he/she was trying to make, what might he/she say? Do you agree with the author's message? Why or why not?

Each of your responses will be approximately half a page in length. Please type up your answers to **two** of these activities and bring the completed assignment to your 7th grade English teacher on the first day of class. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact one of the 7th grade English teachers.

Have a great summer!

Joe Seivold

Robert Zelle, Eric Hansen, Elizabeth Hastings

Middle School Director

7th Grade English Faculty

Choose one of the following novels as your second summer reading selection.

Selected reviews from Amazon.com

Parents Wanted by George Harrar

From Publishers Weekly

Harrar (First Tiger) creates a balance of tenderness, humor and dramatic tension in this convincing portrayal of an ADD foster child adjusting to a new family. After being rejected by his birth parents, then several foster families, 12-year-old Andy is anxious to be adopted by a "normal" couple and the Sizeracys appear to fit the bill. However, his good intentions are often overshadowed by disruptive behavior. Confusing the conflicting values of his birth parents and his new guardians, Andy frequently gets himself into trouble. His antics escalating from vandalizing mailboxes to stealing to making false accusations of child molestation nearly threaten his chance for a permanent placement with the Sizeracys. A couple of subplots (Andy's brief encounter with his biological father, a crotchety neighbor's abrupt change of heart towards Andy) get short shrift, but overall this novel offers a persuasive portrait of the inner workings of Andy's mind. The author captures the hero's emotional turmoil and desperate need for acceptance. Readers will sympathize with both Andy and his adoptive parents as they seek and eventually find mutual trust and love.

Kira-kira by Cynthia Kadohata

In Cynthia Kadohata's lively, lovely, funny and sad novel -- winner of the 2005 Newbery Medal -- the Japanese-American Takeshima family moves from Iowa to Georgia in the 1950s when Katie, the narrator, is just in kindergarten. Though her parents endure grueling conditions and impossible hours in the non-unionized poultry plant and hatchery where they work, they somehow manage to create a loving, stable home for their three children: Lynn, Katie, and Sammy. Katie's trust in, and admiration for, her older sister Lynn never falters, even when her sisterly advice doesn't seem to make sense. Lynn teaches her about everything from how the sky, the ocean, and people's eyes are special to the injustice of racial prejudice. The two girls dream of buying a house for the family someday and even save \$100 in candy money: "Our other favorite book was *Silas Marner*. We were quite capitalistic and liked the idea of Silas keeping all that gold underneath the floorboards." When Lynn develops lymphoma, it's heartbreaking, but through the course of her worsening illness, Katie does her best to remember Lynn's "kira-kira" (glittery, shining) outlook on life. Small moments shine the brightest in this poignant story; told beautifully and lyrically in Katie's fresh, honest voice. (Ages 11 to 14) --Karin Snelson.

Good Night, Mr. Tom by Michelle Magorian

London is poised on the brink of World War II. Timid, scrawny Willie Beech -- the abused child of a single mother -- is evacuated to the English countryside. At first, he is terrified of everything, of the country sounds and sights, even of Mr. Tom, the gruff, kindly old man who has taken him in. But gradually Willie forgets the hate and despair of his past. He learns to love a world he never knew existed, a world of friendship and affection in which harsh words and daily beatings have no place. Then a telegram comes. Willie must return to his mother in London. When weeks pass by with no word from Willie, Mr. Tom sets out for London to look for the young boy he has come to love as a son.

A Step From Heaven by An Na

From Publishers Weekly

Oh's appropriately girlish voice and measured reading bring to life Young Ju, quiet heroine of debut novelist Na's dark tale of a family of Korean immigrants, which just won the ALA's Printz Award for teenage literature. At age four, Young Ju is not happy to be leaving her Korean home and loving Halmoni (grandmother) to move with her parents to Mi Gook (America), believed to be the land of great promise. Through Young Ju's experiences, listeners hear the family unravel as difficulties mount for them in the States. Young Ju's parents struggle with several low-paying jobs, handicapped by their language barrier. Young Ju's alcoholic and bitter father abuses his wife and children and forbids Young Ju to socialize with American friends. And when her father crosses a frightening line in his cruelty, Young Ju bravely takes action that sets her mother, younger brother and herself on the path to yet another new life in America. Oh's characterization, which realistically captures this powerful contemporary story and gives authentic crispness to Korean words and phrases, will keep listeners in its grip. Ages 12-up.