

2009-2010 Granville Middle School Eighth Grade Summer Reading List

Students entering grade 8 are required to read *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho. In addition to this, one of the following selections under "Free Verse Novels" must also be selected and read in its entirety by the first week of school. All students should take notes over the books (i.e. setting, conflicts, plot, theme, character lists) and, if possible, have a copy of *The Alchemist* for the first week of school as it will be used as a common text for the year.

The Alchemist – Paulo Coelho **From Publishers Weekly**

This inspirational fable by Brazilian author and translator Coelho has been a runaway bestseller throughout Latin America and seems poised to achieve the same prominence here. The charming tale of Santiago, a shepherd boy, who dreams of seeing the world, is compelling in its own right, but gains resonance through the many lessons Santiago learns during his adventures. He journeys from Spain to Morocco in search of worldly success, and eventually to Egypt, where a fateful encounter with an alchemist brings him at last to self-understanding and spiritual enlightenment. The story has the comic charm, dramatic tension and psychological intensity of a fairy tale, but it's full of specific wisdom as well, about becoming self-empowered, overcoming depression, and believing in dreams.

Free Verse Novels (Please choose one of the following in addition to *The Alchemist*)

World's Afire – Paul B. Janeczko

Booklist review

Based on a real circus fire in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1944 that killed 167 in a few minutes and injured more than 500, Janeczko's spare poetic novel describes the events in the voices of 29 eyewitnesses: children and adults in the audience, circus folk, and townspeople. First, there's the excitement before the show, then the horror of the sudden wild flames and screaming panic, and finally the "shuffling and sobbing" of families in grief. Many voices sound too much the same; but the words are plain, with short lines that are very easy to read, and the stories they tell are unforgettable. A child escapes, but watches her mother and brother "swept away by the rush." A young trainer saves the elephants ("the herd lined up / tail-to trunk / just like they'd been taught"). A firefighter explains that the canvas tent was waterproofed with paraffin and gasoline ("one huge candle / just waiting for a light"). Janeczko never sensationalizes the horror, but the combination of a thrilling circus and true catastrophe will grab middle-schoolers.

Bronx Masquerade – Nikki Grimes

***Kirkus*, starred review**

This is almost like a play for 18 voices, as Grimes...moves her narration among a group of high school students in the Bronx. The English teacher, Mr. Ward, accepts a set of poems from Wesley, his response to a month of reading poetry from the Harlem Renaissance. Soon there's an open-mike poetry reading, sponsored by Mr. Ward, every month, and then later, every week. The chapters in the students' voices alternate with the poem read by that student, defiant, shy, terrified. All of them, black, Latino, white, male, and female, talk about the unease and alienation endemic to their ages, and they do it in fresh and appealing voices...Beyond those capsules are rich and complex teens, and their tentative reaching out to each other increases as though the poems they also find more of themselves."

Witness – Karen Hesse

Kliatt book review

In the style of Spoon River Anthology, Hesse presents the story of a small town in Vermont during the 1920s that is nearly taken over by the Ku Klux Klan. The voices of 11 characters dramatize Hesse's free-verse poems, lending reality and resonance to the five quick acts. As the story unfolds some of the town's residents are sympathetic to the Klan. Others are victimized--such as twelve-year-

old Leanora Sutter, who is African American, and six-year-old Esther Hirsch, whose father is a Jewish shoe seller. Still others are resolute and appalled at the hatred and racism.

Sweetgrass Basket – Marlene Carvell
From School Library Journal

In alternating free verse, two Mohawk sisters tell of their lives at the Carlisle Indian School near the turn of the 20th century. Carvell uses the experiences of her husband's family, and research from the Cumberland County Historical Society, to relate the stories of Mattie and Sarah. After their mother's death, their father sadly dispatches them to the boarding school, where the siblings cling to their language and a few precious items as the rest of their culture is stripped away from them. They long for family, for friendship, and for home, but their attempts to obtain any of these things result in a tragic and true-to-life ending. The inner-thought narratives allow readers to connect with the characters. Though the voices are nearly identical, making it difficult sometimes to tell the girls apart, and the voice of African-American Mr. Davis is awkwardly and inconsistently colloquial, Carvell has put together a compelling, authentic, and sensitive portrayal of a part of our history that is still not made accurately available to young readers. All libraries will want this title on their shelves.—*Nina Lindsay, Oakland Public Library, CA*

All the Broken Pieces– Ann Burg
Booklist Review

Airlifted from Vietnam at the end of the war and adopted by a loving American family, Matt Pin, 12, is haunted by what he left behind, even as he bonds with his new little brother and becomes a star pitcher on the school baseball team. In rapid, simple free verse, the first-person narrative gradually reveals his secrets: his memories of mines, flames, screams, helicopters, bombs, and guns, as well as what the war did to his little brother (“He followed me / everywhere, / he follows me still”). But this stirring debut novel is about much more than therapy and survivor guilt. When his parents take Matt to a veterans’ meeting, he hears the soldiers’ stories of injury and rejection and begins to understand why the school bully calls him “frogface” (“My brother died / Because of you”).

Stop Pretending – Sonya Sones
Harper Collins Review

It really happens just like that, in the blink of an eye. An older sister has a mental breakdown and has to be hospitalized. A younger sister is left behind to cope with a family torn apart by grief, and friends who turn their backs on her. But worst of all is the loss of her sister, her confidante, her best friend. In the eloquent tradition of *The Bell Jar* and *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* comes this haunting book, inspired by the true story of the author's life. It is an intense and brutally honest story, told in a succession of powerful poems that take us into the cyclone of the narrator's emotions: grief, anger, guilt, resentment, horror, and, ultimately, acceptance.

Make Lemonade – Virginia Euwer Wolff
The ALAN Review

Trying to raise money for college and a better life, fourteen-year-old LaVaughn babysits for Jolly, a single mother, in her squalid apartment. Seventeen and almost illiterate, Jolly has two children and works nights in a factory. LaVaughn, drawn into Jolly's problems, begins babysitting for free and seeing her grades suffer. She ultimately coaxes an unwilling Jolly into a Moms Up Program, where Jolly begins to turn her life around. Wolff's lyrical style appears like poetry on the page, the lines of text broken into natural phrases. Told from LaVaughn's point of view, the narrative captures the poignant relationship between LaVaughn and Jolly's dirty but charming children, creating a sensitive and caring heroine.

ENRICHED CLASSES:

All students should read *The Alchemist* along with **two** of the following free verse novels:

Bronx Masquerade
All the Broken Pieces
Make Lemonade

Stop Pretending
Sweetgrass Basket