

Favorite Books for Summer Reading

Wondering what to read during those lazy, crazy days of summer? Here are some favorite books from the past few years recommended by California school library media teachers who subscribe to CALIBK12. the California School Library Association listserv. Check them out! Keep the list with you so you'll have it handy when you are hungry for another story. Books are listed in no special order, other than alphabetical by author's last name.

This list was compiled and formatted by Jackie Siminitus and George Pilling.



Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson. *"Very popular among students, especially girls. At high school. I have several copies in the library, but almost never on the shelf. Its reputation travels quickly by word of mouth. The story is about a girl who enters high school with a secret: she has been raped at a summer party by a popular upper classman. Other students know she is the one who called the cops and got the party busted, but they don't know why she did it. She finds herself beginning high school as an outcast who cannot speak."* Grades 9-12. – Sonja Bedford, Maria Carrillo HS

Halleluhah! The Welcome Table by Maya Angelou. *"The stories are great, and the recipes are even better. It's fun."* Grades 9-12. – Jackie Ghio, Santa Cruz HS, Santa Cruz

Peter and the Star Catchers by Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson. *"It's a fantasy adventure meant to be a prequel to Peter Pan. This collaboration between two adult authors is told with a lot of humor and panache (what else would you expect from the creator of 'Talk Like a Pirate Day')." Grades 4-6. – Barbara Flores, Havens-Piedmont, Piedmont*

Crusader and Tangerine by Edward Bloor. Both books are based in Florida and address suburban issues like racism and virtual violence. Grades 6-12. – Heather McBride, Harding Elementary, Santa Barbara

Al Capone Does My Shirts by Gennifer Choldenko. *"A Newbery award honor book. FYI: It does contain a part where the boy is concerned that his sister was raped, but for most kids it is not spelled out and they probably won't get that part."* Grades 5-9. – Donnine Davis

Gregor the Overlander by Suzanne Collins. *"Gregor is an adventurous and caring boy who rescues his sister and his father in this series of adventures under NY city."* Grades 5-8. – George Pilling, Visalia
"This is really, truly a book for kids. There's no adult agenda, no sophisticated overtones. The little sister was one of the most endearing characters I've encountered in a long time. I loved the protective relationship of Gregor toward that little toddler. A similar relationship is found in Farmer's The Sea of Trolls, but the little sister isn't nearly as loveable." – Nadine Pinkerton, Davis



Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo. *"It is touching, the dog doesn't die, and it runs the gamut from sad to funny throughout the book. I love the way that Opal, the main character, speaks to her dog as if he were human. It is a wonderful way to reveal her personal point of view. Kids want to talk about why Opal's mother ran away. It is recommended for the mature reader."* Grades 6-12. -- Pam Carrie, Chapman Hills

The Tale of Despereaux by Kate DiCamillo. *"It might be a bit cliché, but I feel it is one of the best books for this age group, if not the best. I believe it will be a classic among classics. If you haven't read it, put it on top of your 'must read list.' Even if you don't serve this age group, you will likely enjoy the book. After you have read it, find Kate Di Camillo's acceptance speech for the Newbery Medal award. There you will find how her own life is reflected in the themes of the book"* Grades 4-6. – Kevin M. Fahey, Mount Tamalpais School, Mill Valley



House of the Scorpion by Nancy Farmer. All books by this author are great reads. *"Sci-fi. Fast-paced read - takes place in Southern California and Mexico in the future that is now called Opium. The main character is a clone of El Patron the powerful, aging tyrant of Opium. We watch Matteo grow up as a favored 'chil' of El Patron and victimized by his hateful biological children. Grades 8-12". – Karen Gonzales, Kennedy-Granada Hills. "Kids who are not too intimidated by the length to read it all love it."* Grades 6-12. – Tony Doyle, Livingston

Sea of Trolls by Nancy Farmer. *"Wonderful fantasy quest with ties to Norse mythology."* Grades 6-12. - Marcia Abbott, Correia-San Diego

Inkheart by Conelia Funke. *"It's all about books and every chapter begins with a quote from a piece of children's literature. I've had student read the book and then return to the library telling me they intend to read every book mentioned. It was a much better read, in my opinion than her THIEF LORD and would work for middle through high school readers."* Grades 7-12. – Joanne Ligamari, Rio Linda HS District, Sacramento

Looking for Alaska by John Green. “The story is set in a boarding school in Alabama. Miles is the narrator who struggles to tell this story honestly, and reminds the reader of Phineas in ‘A Separate Peace.’ The group of friends the reader becomes very familiar with are smart, articulate and rebellious. All the boys are in love with Alaska, beautiful, bright and very complex. She laughs and jokes, but drinks and smokes too much and falls into very depressed moods. The author’s style is realistic. These teenagers drink, smoke and have sex. But the main characters also engage in the big philosophical questions of life regarding death, grief, and suffering.” Mature students, Grades 9-12. – Sonja Bedford, Maria Carillo HS, Santa Rosa



The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon. “This a story told from the point of view of a high-functioning autistic teenage boy, living in an interior world unlike most. The author’s empathy and quiriness find a home in this character who compels the reader to care. Also, it’s full of interesting little mathematical codes and puzzles connected to the central mystery.” HS-Adult. – Susie Goodin, Berkeley
“A mathematically-gifted, autistic 15-year-old investigates the death of a neighbor’s dog and uncovers startling information about his family.” Grades 10-12. – Patricia Penrose, Nogales HS, La Puente

Healer’s Keep (part of a series) by Victoria Hanley. Fantasy. Four young people come together to fight the powers of darkness. “The Scer and Sword comes before; The Light of the Oracle is the third.” Grades 6-9. – Terry Lai, San Francisco

Ida B...and Her Plans to Maximize Fun, Avoid Disaster, and (Possibly) Save the World by Katherine Hannigan. Good “read-aloud” story. Rural setting. A young, home-schooled girl is turned upside down when her mother develops cancer and must undergo cancer treatments. Parts of her beloved farm must be sold, trees cut down, and she must adjust to public school. Grades 4-6. – Amber Claflin and Tami Tharp, Etiwanda

Eventide by Kent Haruf. “For those who enjoyed ‘Plainsong,’ this sort-of sequel will give you the cozy feeling you no doubt experienced during that pleasurable read. ‘Eventide’ focuses on the McPheron brothers as well as some new characters. No need to read ‘Plainsong’ first, but it is recommended as it is such a wonderful book.” Grades 9-12. – Shaun Lloyd, Redondo

Mosey: The Remarkable Friendship of a Boy and his Elephant by Ralph D. Helfer. “This is a great story because it builds on students’ empathy and curiosity regarding animals, friendship and different cultures. It is also a great story of boy who refuses to give up his friend the elephant Mosey. He steals away on a ship to be with Mosey. After a dramatic shipwreck they almost die but survive and remain together. This is a great adventure story and a great triumphing over hardship story. It is also a good reluctant reader book.” Grades 3-8. – Sarah Passonneau, Tustin

Born Confused by Tanuja Desai Hidier. “Seventeen-year-old Dimple, whose family is from India, discovers that she is not Indian enough for the Indians and not American enough for the Americans, as she sees her hypnotically beautiful, manipulative best friend taking possession of both her heritage and the boy she likes. Insightful and well written.” Grades 9-12. – Joe Avery, El Dorado



Shutting Out the Sky by Deborah Hopkinson. “All about turn of the 20th century New York tenement life.” Grades 6-12. -- Megan Fuller, Aptos

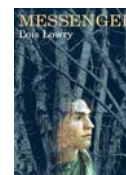
The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini. “This is the best literature that I have read in a long time. I heartily recommend this book to teachers, International Baccalaureate students (for the multicultural perspective), and all students in grades 9 through 12. It is an excellent novel about...friendship, betrayal, and the price of loyalty.” Grades 9-12. -- Debra Budding, Modesto
“A wonderful look at another culture.” – Ellen Bell, Pleasanton.

Star of Kazan by Eva Ibbotson. Abandoned as a baby, Annika is raised by common folk for 11 years until one day a beautiful aristocrat arrives, claims to be her mother, and takes her away to a crumbling castle in Germany. “Historical fiction setting but contemporary feel.” Grades 4-8. – Kathy Shepler, Aurora-Oakland



Ordinary Wolves by Seth Kantner . “The novel is based upon the author’s experiences while growing up in the wilds of Alaska. This is truly an authentic view of growing up in the bush of Alaska. The writing is polished and real. It is obvious that the author spent a considerable time getting everything just right. I recommend it for your own reading as well as a book to be added to your library collection.” Grades 9-12. – Bob Laramée, retired by still reading and recommending!

Messenger by Lois Lowry. "Basically part 3 of *The Giver*, though an also stand alone. Characters from both *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue* are in this book, and you find out Lowry's version of what happened to Jonas and Gabriel. A compelling read with an unexpected ending and, like the *Giver*, deals with social aspects of civilization and society." Grades 6-12. – Amy Sue Noonan, Marshall MS, Long Beach



The Earth, My Butt & Other Big Round Things by Carol Mackler. "Made me laugh, made me cry." Grades 9-12. – Sarah Bosler

Here Today by Anne Martin. "Young Ellie comes to understand that her beautiful mother is living an unrealistic dream. At any cost her mother Doris wants to become a star. This story is set in the 1960s and the references to historical events such as J.F.K.'s assassination form the backdrop to this moving coming of age story." Grades 4-8. – Sarah Passonneau, Tustin

Voyage of the Arctic Tern by Hugh Montgomery. "Do yourself a favor and pick it up. I have been reading selections from it to classes for poetry month and by the time I get to the end of "Bruno's Tale," classes are dead silent, leaning forward in their chairs, eyes wide and then... spontaneous applause!" Grades 6-12. – Megan Fuller, Aptos

Remember: The Journey to School Integration by Toni Morrison, 2004. "Powerful pictures of segregation, with captions by Morrison. Hard hitting and uplifting." Grades 5-12. – Jane Edwards, Sevin Hills MS, Nevada City

Sisterland by Linda Newbery. Based in Britain, Germany, and the Middle East. "A holocaust story with a twist." Grades 8-12. – Megan Fuller, Aptos



A Leap of Faith by Queen Noor of Jordan. "It is wonderful to hear about the Middle East in a way that paints people and events in a first person point of view from a western voice that is so positive." Grades 9-12. – Mary P. Burch, Lompoc HS, Lompoc

Eragon by Christopher Paolini. "Another fantasy with a sequel coming out in the fall. I found it hard to put down." Grades 6-12. – Anne Field, Atwater

Grant and Twain: the story of a friendship that changed America by Mark Perry. "This is the first piece of nonfiction I've read just for pleasure in many years. Perry brought history alive for me for the first time. I laughed...I cried." Grades 6-12. – Blair Carroll, Canoga Park

Away Laughing on a Fast Camel by Louise Rennison. Adolescent Georgia is back again. Read all in the popular teen series. "I love her whole series." Grades 8-12. – Kathy McLaughlin, Taft

Burn Journals by Brent Runyon. One day, eighth grader Brent Runyon came home from school and set himself on fire. This memoir takes readers through a year of what happened that day, before, and after. "Intense; depressing. Like high school." Grades 9-12. – Ann Green, Cloverdale High School

God Went to Beauty School by Cynthia Rylant. "(Author) has written a series of poems about God ranging from the mundane (buying a sofa from Pottery Barn but having problems giving a delivery address) to more serious. I found this book funny, sad, warm and absolutely brilliant. I recommend it to everyone, regardless of your beliefs." Grades 9-12. – Ellie Goldstein-Erickson, Berkeley



Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood by Benjamin Alire Saenz. "This book has love, hate, smoking, drinking, sex, drugs, rock-and-roll, homosexuality, bilingual profanity, blasphemy, political action, the Viet Nam war, violence, death, and -- the most honest and beautifully written description of teen-aged angst as seen through the smoke-colored glasses of barrio life that I have ever read. The characters and dialogue are so real that they literally jump off the page, and through it all the strength of a loving family and the importance of reading books prevail. I have taught these kids. I know them -- all of them, and the book should be required reading for any educator who teaches in a community like Hollywood (a barrio in Las Cruces, NM.) Prepare for it to be challenged from many corners, even though it was nominated for the 2004 LA Times Book Prize for Young Adult Fiction. Oh, yeah... and the main character's nickname is "Librarian." Grades 9-12. – Sandy Schuckett, Los Angeles

Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boy by Gary D. Schmidt. Historical fiction based in Maine. "A marvelous book." Grades 6-9. – Linda Jewett, Sacramento

The Story of the Seagull and the Cat Who Taught Her to Fly by Luis Sepulveda. *“It is a charming story about a baby seagull who is deposited on a rooftop by her mom, who dies from an oil spill, and how a cat and other city animals raise the seagull.”* Grades 4-8. – Lori Lim, Matsumoto Elementary, San Jose.

The Radioactive Boy Scout: The true story of a boy and his backyard nuclear reactor by Ken Silverstein. *“Have been telling everyone about this book. It's so unbelievable and yet it really happened.”* Grades 8-12. – Heather Hartman-Jansen

The Boys of San Joaquin by D. James Smith. Good “read-aloud” book based in a small California town in 1951. *“Exciting new California author.”* Grades 4-8. -- Jo Ellen Priest Misakian, Fresno Pacific University.

The Amulet of Samarkand (The Bartimaeus Trilogy, Book 1) and The Golem's Eye (Bartimaeus Trilogy, Book 2) by Jonathan Stroud. Fantasy based in Britain. Fast action, mystery and humor. Grades 5-9. – Garth Rogers, San Mateo

So B It by Nancy Weeks. *“12-year-old Heidi's journey to solve a family mystery of who her mentally retarded mother really was...”* Grades 6-9. – Vicky Reed, San Diego

Each Little Bird That Sings by Deborah Wiles. *“This is a sweet book in the same flavor of Winn Dixie. It deals with life and death and coming to terms with loss. It says 3-5 grades but I have it in my middle school.”* Grades 3-8. – Deb Dooley, Ustach MS, Modesto

The Revealers by Doug Wilhelm. *“It is about three middle school students using their district network to publish true stories of bullying on their campus. I'd like our faculty to read the book together. The discussions about our bullying problems and our technology would be very interesting.”* Grades 6-8. – Sandy Rowland, Paso Robles



New Found Land by Allan Wolf. *“The story of Lewis and Clark's voyage west is told through poetry and breath-taking prose from 13 points of view! These include Lewis (the explorer), Clark (the gentleman), Thomas Jefferson (the President), York (Clark's slave), Hall (the drinker), Drouillard (the half-breed), Sacagawea (American Indian girl), Lewis' Newfoundland dog Seaman, and others. What a fresh and innovative look at history!”* Grades 9-12. – Darla Brown, Compton

“A rousing adventure and page-turner of the Lewis & Clark trek to the Pacific and back, told from the viewpoint of fourteen different voices through letters, dialogue, verse, and narrative.” Grades 5-12. -- Martha Rowland, Sacramento



Old School by Tobias Wolf. *“A slim volume, with spare writing, full of well-developed characters and issues of individual growth, maturation, and honesty. Very engaging for students in tenth grade and up. Adult in tone and language, but with such an absorbing story and so few pages, that it is a great recommendation for those kids ready for the next big step in reading.”* HS-Adult. – Nancy Litvak, Santa Cruz

Smashed: Story of a Drunken Girlhood by Koren Zailckas. *“Unflinching look at one girl's binge drinking in HS and college. Does not make it seem fun or cool--unlike _Go Ask Alice_ with drugs, which only made me want to try more drugs. Not preachy, with some sociological/psychological insights thrown in.”* Grades 8-12. – Ann Green, Cloverdale High School

See also: Good Travel Reads for Families at http://www.rif.org/parents/articles/books_travel.msp

This collection of librarian-recommended reading is arranged by where stories take place. Before you head off on your next vacation, remember to pack a book. Whether you're headed for the beach or a national landmark, your family can read books related to your itinerary. Here are some great books -- organized by setting -- that your family can read before your trip, while traveling, or even once you arrive. Enjoy!