

What Are You Reading This Summer? A Community Reading List

This summer, we are inviting our school community to join us in some summer reading. This invitation builds upon two important and ongoing initiatives in school - creating a school that is safe and inclusive, and inspiring a love of reading in all students. As parents and community members, we have an essential role in modeling the behaviors we want to see in our children. If we want an inclusive community, we need to examine our own beliefs, and work to address any biases we discover. And if we want our children to read, they need to see us reading! We hope you will join us and strengthen our efforts in these important initiatives.

Since our beginning as a school, we have held a vision of a welcoming school, where all students can be “visible and valuable”. This is hard work, and it involves everything we do, from the selection of curriculum and texts that students read, to training and reflection for all staff, to Crew activities, to our discipline procedures.

This past year, we spent time as a staff examining our own personal biases. We dedicated several days to training and reflection, both on our own and with the guidance of experts from the Anti-Defamation League. We also surveyed our students to learn what kinds of bias they were seeing and hearing in our school, and we designed Crew lessons to respond to these issues. We practiced how to respond when bias occurs, and we worked with student leaders to help them develop skills to respond.

Despite our work, students have experienced bias in our school. They have seen and heard anti-semitism, racism, and bias related to disabilities and gender. This is not ok, and our work must continue. We are inviting you to join us as we learn, reflect, and act to create a school where all students feel safe and valuable.

Our summer reading list includes books that explore the kinds of bias students told us they see and hear the most: racism, anti-semitism, ableism (bias based on ability), and gender-based bias. We invite you to choose one (or more!) of these books to read over the summer. In the fall, we will get together in groups to talk about each of the books, what we learned and how we felt as we read the book, and how our learning applies to our school community. We'll then share our findings with the other book groups.

With any list, there is a risk that something important is left out, or that books that resonate with me as a reader will not resonate with others. This list is not intended to address all types of bias. It's a starting point. And by reading any of these books, hopefully we gain empathy and the ability to understand from another's perspective.

In addition to these books, I recommend another resource I've shared previously. The Anti-Defamation League publishes a column, [TableTalk](#), addresses current events. Recent topics have included Stonewall and LGBTQ, racial slurs and bias, an essay by Kyle Korver (Utah Jazz basketball) about white privilege, and the US women's soccer team and institutionalized gender bias. I've used this resource to keep up with topics that are current and relevant to students, and as a source for conversation starters in my own family.

So, here's to summer reading!

Between the World and Me, by Ta-Nehisi Coates

A spare, beautiful and challenging book, this memoir is written as a series of letters from Coates to his teenage son. Coates explores the historical idea of race and how it has shaped American history, both throughout time and in his own life. His love of his son, and his deep knowledge and personal experience of the subject of race and its role in the social structure of our country, make this a powerful and yet approachable read for high school level readers and adults.

Antisemitism: Here and Now, by Deborah Lipstadt

Written in the form of letters between a professor (Lipstadt), a colleague, and a student, this book takes a deep dive into the history of antisemitism and its dangerous rise today. By choosing the format of conversations in which the narrators struggle to understand and respond to the resurgence of antisemitism, Lipstadt lays out multiple types of antisemitism, from the virulent and violent hate evident in Charlottesville, to a more "everyday" antisemitism that is so widespread, helping us all learn to recognize and call out antisemitism in all its forms. This book is appropriate for high school level readers and adults.

The Reason I Jump: The Inner Voice of a Thirteen-Year-Old Boy with Autism, by Naoki Higashida.

If you can only choose one book to read this summer - this is the one. Written by a middle-school boy with autism, this book offers an intimate, honest, funny, and incredibly empathetic view into the author's heart and mind. That this book was painstakingly spelled out, letter by letter, by a 13-year old child who was essentially

unable to communicate verbally, provides a lesson to us all about what it truly means to be human. This book is appropriate for readers of nearly all levels. If you like to read to your kids, or with your kids, this book is perfect for a family book study. While the book specifically explores autism, readers will walk away with a deeper desire to understand and appreciate “others”, who differ from them in some way.

Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out, by Susan Kuklin

In this book, author and photographer Kuklin lets teens tell their stories in their own words. Through thoughtful and candid interviews and beautiful portraits, we have the opportunity to watch six young people discover who they are, navigating friendships, family relationships, and their own personal paths of discovery. As this book represents the voices of teens, it is approachable for high school level readers, and probably for many of our middle school readers, as well as for adult readers.

