

Dear Rising Eighth Graders,

It's time to think about summer reading. This summer we are going on a trip "Around the World in 60 days"!

This year the incoming 8th grade students are required to read **one specific book** (*Facing the Lion: Growing Up Maasai On the African Savanna* by Joseph Lemasolai Lekuton) **and two from the list below.**

- The required book that you all will read is *Facing the Lion: Growing Up Maasai On the African Savanna* by Joseph Lemasolai Lekuton.
 - This memoir of a young Maasai boy tells the story of Lekuton who grows up as part of a nomadic tribe in Kenya. The story sheds light on the Maasai culture and life on the savanna. Lekuton comes from a family of nomadic cow-herders, and Kenyan law required each family to send one child to school. Lekuton was the chosen child, and school opened up his world. He works to preserve his Maasai heritage while taking advantage of the opportunities that education brings his way.
 - Please read *Facing the Lion: Growing Up Maasai On the African Savanna* by Joseph Lemasolai Lekuton toward the end of the summer.
 - When school begins in August, **be prepared to discuss this book in class.**

- Please choose **two** more books from the options listed below and read them. Background information has been provided on which to base your choices.
 - **You must write a half a page review for each book.** Be sure to have a good topic sentence about whether you recommend the book or not, at least three details from the story to back up your opinion and a concluding sentence. **The review are due on Friday, August 21, 2026.**

Enjoy your reading. Read as much as you can, and I will see you in August. If you have any problems or questions, please email me at bkiernan@unityschool.com.

Have a safe and fun summer,

Mrs. Kiernan

Unity School Summer Reading Program- 2026 Students Entering Grade 8

Dear Parents and Students,

The following books are recommended for summer reading. Titles are chosen for their applicability to the curriculum, their recognition in journals, and in some cases, because of awards they have received. Students are encouraged to read as many books on the list as they choose; however, they must read the required title as well as two other books of their choice before the start of the school year. Students may NOT choose a book they have already read, either in class or for another book report. Enjoy reading and have a wonderful summer!

Please note these are suggested books based on published lists for middle school students and have not been reviewed for content. Parents need to use their own discretion when students are choosing books.

Africa

Chanda's Secret by Allan Stratton (Annick Press, 2004) **(Young Adult Content)**

Sixteen-year-old Chanda, living in the small fictional race-segregated city of Bonang in sub-Saharan Africa, must confront the tragic consequences and stigma associated with her family's encounter with HIV/AIDS. (1980-90s).

Asia

The Year of Impossible Goodbyes by Sook Nyul Choi (Dell Press: New York, 1991)

This book is about a young teen, Sookan, and her younger brother and extended family who together bravely face harsh treatment by the occupying Japanese military in North Korea during WWII. When the war ends in 1945, Communist Russian troops offer liberation from Japanese rule, but little relief from daily hardship, leaving escape to South Korea the only hope as a family.

The Stone Goddess by Mingfong Ho (Republished: Demco Media, 2005).

As a young teen from a middle class urban family in Phnom Penh, groomed to be a Classical Cambodian dancer, Nakiri is forced into the rural villages and rice fields of Cambodia to work as a peasant laborer when dictator Pol Pot takes power in the 1970s. Nakiri's journey takes her from a slave labor rice camp to a Thai refugee camp, and finally to America as an immigrant after she loses her father and sister to the "killing fields" of Pol Pot.

Chinese Cinderella: The True Story of an Unwanted Daughter by Adeline Yen Mah.

Chinese Cinderella is the perfect title for Adeline Yen Mah's memoir of her childhood growing up in China during the 1940s as she endures life ruled by a cruel stepmother.

Asia/Middle East

The Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis (Canada: Groundwood Books, 2000).

Set in the early years of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, this book is about what a twelve-year-old girl, Parvana, must do when the Taliban takes her western educated father. Since girls are not allowed in public, she disguises herself as a boy to become the "breadwinner" and support her mother, two sisters, and baby brother.

Parvana's Journey (sequel to *The Breadwinner*) by Deborah Ellis (Canada: Groundwood Books, 2003).

After her father's death, 13-year-old Parvana, disguised as a boy, wanders alone through later 20th century war-torn Afghanistan, looking for her mother and siblings who had disappeared in the tumult of the Taliban takeover. Early in her journey, Parvana comes across three other children seeking refuge at a Pakistani refugee camp. A bittersweet ending offers hope for Parvana and her family. This sequel to *The Breadwinner* easily stands alone but I would recommend you read *The Breadwinner* first if you have not already done so.

Elephant Run by Roland Smith.

In 1941, Nick is sent to live with his father on a plantation in Burma to escape the war in London. Soon after, the Japanese invasion of Burma begins, and his father is imprisoned. Nick and his new friend Mya are used as slaves. They decide to escape into the jungle with the help of a dangerous elephant, Hannibal.

Europe

Between Shades of Gray by Ruth Sepetys (Philomel Books: New York, 2011)

In 1941, fifteen-year-old Lina's life is changed forever when Soviet secret police barge violently into her home, deporting her, her mother, and her younger brother to Siberia.

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak (Alfred Knopf: New York, 2006)

A foster teen living outside of Munich during WWII, Liesel Meminger, faces Death--the narrator of the story--and is saved by books, which she steals, falls in love with and shares with neighbors and a Jewish man hidden in her basement in Nazi Germany.

The Apothecary by Maile Meloy.

Janie Scott's family has just moved from Los Angeles to London where she meets Benjamin Burrows, the son of a mysterious apothecary. When Ben's father is kidnapped, Janie and Ben must use the apothecary's magical book, *The Pharmacopoeia*, to find him and save the world.

South America

The Dreamer by Pam Munoz Ryan.

This fictional biography is the story of a shy Chilean boy who grows up feeling and seeing poetry all around him. The story illustrates how the poetry of Pablo Neruda was shaped by his domineering father as well as the beauty of nature.

Latin America

Before We Were Free by Julia Alvarez (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2002)

Living in the Dominican Republic in 1960, twelve-year-old Anita de la Torre must defend her freedom in the face of her Tío Toni being "disappeared" and her remaining family being terrorized because of their suspected opposition to dictator De Trujillo's government.

In the Time of the Butterflies by Julia Alvarez (Algonquin Books: North Carolina, 1994)

Based on the true story of the murder of three young sisters who led opposition to Dictator Trujillo's government in the Dominican Republic in 1960, the novel moves from the point of view of each of the murdered sisters as young girls, woven together by the voice of one surviving sister, Dede.

North America

Esperanza Rising by Pam Munoz Ryan (Scholastic Inc.: New York, 2000).

Esperanza Ortega is a wealthy Mexican girl who, with her family, must suddenly leave post-revolutionary Mexico behind and flee to the United States.

She and her mother end up as migrant farm workers in California and struggle to adapt and survive in the United States during the Depression Era of the 1930s.

Shooting Kabul by N.H. Senzai (Simon and Schuster: New York, 2010).

Escaping from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan in the summer of 2001, young teen Fadi and his family immigrate to the San Francisco Bay Area, where Fadi schemes to return to the Pakistani refugee camp where he accidentally lost grip of his little sister Miriam's hand, resulting in her accidentally being left behind.

Under The Mesquite by Guadalupe Garcia McCall.

When her mom is diagnosed with cancer, Lupita struggles to maintain her life as a Mexican-American high school student and budding actress, while also caring for her younger siblings. Written in verse, this is an unforgettable story

about family bonds, the healing power of words, and the strength it takes to face overwhelming loss.

Inside Out and Back Again by Lai, Thanhla .

Ha and her family flee Vietnam and resettle in Alabama. There she struggles with grammar, customs, dress (she wears a flannel nightgown to school, for example), and also cruel rejection from mean classmates. Based on the author's experiences as a child refugee, this National Book Award and 2012 Newbery Honor winner is both humorous and heartbreaking.