

**Summer Reading List – 2010**  
**Language Arts – Ms. Densford**

**Rising 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Students:** Please choose **TWO** of the following novels to read before the start of the 2010-2011 school year. An evaluative test and project will be assigned based upon this reading at the beginning of the school year. (*All summaries are from Amazon.com. Please Google the book title to find out more information.*)

The symbol \*\* indicates sensitive material in the novel.

1. ***A Brief History of Time***, by Stephen Hawking

Stephen Hawking, one of the most brilliant theoretical physicists in history, wrote the modern classic *A Brief History of Time* to help nonscientists understand the questions being asked by scientists today: Where did the universe come from? How and why did it begin? Will it come to an end, and if so, how? Hawking attempts to reveal these questions (and where we're looking for answers) using a minimum of technical jargon. Among the topics gracefully covered are gravity, black holes, the Big Bang, the nature of time, and physicists' search for a grand unifying theory. This is *deep* science; these concepts are so vast (or so tiny) as to cause vertigo while reading, and one can't help but marvel at Hawking's ability to synthesize this difficult subject for people not used to thinking about things like alternate dimensions. The journey is certainly worth taking, for, as Hawking says, the reward of understanding the universe may be a glimpse of "the mind of God."

2. **\*\**Speak***, by Laurie Halse Anderson

Since the beginning of the school year, high school freshman Melinda has found that it's been getting harder and harder for her to speak out loud: "My throat is always sore, my lips raw.... Every time I try to talk to my parents or a teacher, I sputter or freeze.... It's like I have some kind of spastic laryngitis." What could have caused Melinda to suddenly fall mute? Could it be due to the fact that no one at school is speaking to her because she called the cops and got everyone busted at the seniors' big end-of-summer party? Or maybe it's because her parents' only form of communication is Post-It notes written on their way out the door to their nine-to-whenever jobs. While Melinda is bothered by these things, deep down she knows the real reason why she's been struck mute...

Laurie Halse Anderson's first novel is a stunning and sympathetic tribute to the teenage outcast. The triumphant ending, in which Melinda finds her voice, is cause for cheering (while many readers might also shed a tear or two). After reading *Speak*, it will be hard for any teen to look at the class scapegoat again without a measure of compassion and understanding for that person--who may be screaming beneath the silence.

3. ***The Joy Luck Club***, by Amy Tan

Four mothers, four daughters, four families whose histories shift with the four winds depending on who's "saying" the stories. In 1949 four Chinese women, recent immigrants to San Francisco, begin meeting to eat dim sum, play mahjong, and talk. United in shared unspeakable loss and hope, they call themselves the Joy Luck Club. Rather than sink into tragedy, they choose to gather to raise their spirits and money. "To despair was to wish back for something already lost. Or to prolong what was already unbearable." Forty years later the stories and history continue.

With wit and sensitivity, Amy Tan examines the sometimes painful, often tender, and always deep connection between mothers and daughters. As each woman reveals her

secrets, trying to unravel the truth about her life, the strings become more tangled, more entwined. Mothers boast or despair over daughters, and daughters roll their eyes even as they feel the inextricable tightening of their matriarchal ties. Tan is an astute storyteller, enticing readers to immerse themselves into these lives of complexity and mystery.

4. ***Monster***, by Walter Dean Myers

"Monster" is what the prosecutor called 16-year-old Steve Harmon for his supposed role in the fatal shooting of a convenience-store owner. But was Steve really the lookout who gave the "all clear" to the murderer, or was he just in the wrong place at the wrong time? In this innovative novel by Walter Dean Myers, the reader becomes both juror and witness during the trial of Steve's life. To calm his nerves as he sits in the courtroom, aspiring filmmaker Steve chronicles the proceedings in movie script format. Interspersed throughout his screenplay are journal writings that provide insight into Steve's life before the murder and his feelings about being held in prison during the trial. "They take away your shoelaces and your belt so you can't kill yourself no matter how bad it is. I guess making you live is part of the punishment."

Myers, known for the inner-city classic *Motown and Didi* (first published in 1984), proves with *Monster* that he has kept up with both the struggles and the lingo of today's teens. Steve is an adolescent caught up in the violent circumstances of an adult world--a situation most teens can relate to on some level. Readers will no doubt be attracted to the novel's handwriting-style typeface, emphasis on dialogue, and fast-paced courtroom action. By weaving together Steve's journal entries and his script, Myers has given the first-person voice a new twist and added yet another worthy volume to his already admirable body of work. (Ages 12 and older)

5. ***The Outsiders***, by S. E. Hinton

According to Ponyboy, there are two kinds of people in the world: greasers and socs. A soc (short for "social") has money, can get away with just about anything, and has an attitude longer than a limousine. A greaser, on the other hand, always lives on the outside and needs to watch his back. Ponyboy is a greaser, and he's always been proud of it, even willing to rumble against a gang of socs for the sake of his fellow greasers--until one terrible night when his friend Johnny kills a soc. The murder gets under Ponyboy's skin, causing his bifurcated world to crumble and teaching him that pain feels the same whether a soc or a greaser. This classic, written by S. E. Hinton when she was 16 years old, is as profound today as it was when it was first published in 1967.

6. ***Free the Children***, by Craig Kielburger

Twelve-year-old Craig Kielburger, upset by a newspaper article about the forced slavery and subsequent murder of a child in Pakistan, began in 1995 to research worldwide injustice against children. Armed with the disturbing facts, he convinced friends at his Canadian grade school to form a group to advocate for children's rights. With world-changing zeal, Free the Children gathered information, wrote world leaders, and led conferences on the issue with other youth. Kielburger himself was given the opportunity to accompany a human rights worker through cities in South Asia.

The young man witnessed shocking abuse from which most middle-class Western children have been carefully shielded: he met an 8-year-old girl whose job was to recycle bloody

syringes without gloves or other protection, children in a factory working with extremely hazardous materials to provide fireworks for a Hindu religious celebration, and children sold for sex on urban streets. On returning to his home in Canada, Kielburger bore witness to what he had seen and asked a simple, devastating question: "If child labour is not acceptable for white, middle-class North American kids, then why is it acceptable for a girl in Thailand or a boy in Brazil?"

Free the Children is now a powerful organization in support of the world's youth, and this book is sure to be a call to further action--certainly for all young people, and perhaps for many adults who have previously felt hopeless about the possibility of ending abusive child labor and poverty. "We simply do not believe that world leaders can create a nuclear bomb and send a man to the moon but cannot feed and protect the world's children," says the author. "We simply do not believe it."

#### 7. *Witness*, by Karen Hesse

It is 1924, and a small Vermont town finds itself under siege--by the Ku Klux Klan. Using free verse, Newbery Medal-winning author Karen Hesse (*Out of the Dust*) allows 11 unique and memorable voices to relate the story of the Klan's steady infiltration into the conscience of a small, Prohibition-era community. The Klan's "all-American" philosophy is at first embraced by several of the town's influential men, including Constable Parcelle Johnson and retailer Harvey Pettibone. But Harvey's sensible wife, Viola, and independent restaurant owner Iris Weaver suspect from the beginning that the Klan's arrival heralds trouble. As the only African Americans in town, 12-year old Leonora Sutter and her father try to escape Klan scrutiny, while 6-year-old, city-born Esther Hirsch remains blissfully unaware of the Klan's prejudice against Jews as she enjoys the Vermont countryside. And Sara Chickering, the lady farmer who has opened her home to Esther and her father, is torn between her own hidden biases and her growing love for Esther.

All, however, are galvanized towards action when a shadowy figure shoots at Esther and her father right through Sara's front door. Who would commit such an evil act? And is it too late to remove the poison that has insidiously leaked into their once tight-knit community? Part mystery, part social commentary, Hesse's historically accurate chronicle is a riveting catalyst for discussion that thoughtfully explores race and identity from every possible point of view. The free verse format and distinct characterizations also make *Witness* a perfect choice for library or classroom reader's theater productions. (Ages 12 and older)