

Summer Reading List – 2010
Language Arts – Ms. Densford

Rising 8th 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.*)

1. *Falling Leaves*, by Adeline Yen Mah

Snow White's stepmother looks like a pussycat compared to the monster under which Adeline Yen Mah suffered. The author's memoir of life in mainland China and--after the 1949 revolution--Hong Kong is a gruesome chronicle of nonstop emotional abuse from her wealthy father and his beautiful, cruel second wife. Chinese proverbs scattered throughout the text pithily convey the traditional world view that prompted Adeline's subservience. Had she not escaped to America, where she experienced a fulfilling medical career and a happy marriage, her story would be unbearable; instead, it's grimly fascinating: *Falling Leaves* is an Asian [*Mommie Dearest*](#).

2. *And Then There Were None*, by Agatha Christie

Considered the best mystery novel ever written by many readers, *And Then There Were None* is the story of 10 strangers, each lured to Indian Island by a mysterious host. Once his guests have arrived, the host accuses each person of murder. Unable to leave the island, the guests begin to share their darkest secrets--until they begin to die.

3. *Fever 1793*, by Laurie Halse Anderson

On the heels of her acclaimed contemporary teen novel [*Speak*](#), Laurie Halse Anderson surprises her fans with a riveting and well-researched historical fiction. *Fever 1793* is based on an actual epidemic of yellow fever in Philadelphia that wiped out 5,000 people--or 10 percent of the city's population--in three months. At the close of the 18th century, Philadelphia was the bustling capital of the United States, with Washington and Jefferson in residence. During the hot mosquito-infested summer of 1793, the dreaded yellow fever spread like wildfire, killing people overnight. Like specters from the Middle Ages, gravediggers drew carts through the streets crying "Bring out your dead!" The rich fled to the country, abandoning the city to looters, forsaken corpses, and frightened survivors.

In the foreground of this story is 16-year-old Mattie Cook, whose mother and grandfather own a popular coffee house on High Street. Mattie's comfortable and interesting life is shattered by the epidemic, as her mother is felled and the girl and her grandfather must flee for their lives. Later, after much hardship and terror, they return to the deserted town to find their former cook, a freed slave, working with the African Free Society, an actual group who undertook to visit and assist the sick and saved many lives. As first frost arrives and the epidemic ends, Mattie's sufferings have changed her from a willful child to a strong, capable young woman able to manage her family's business on her own. (Ages 12 and older) --*Patty Campbell*

4. *Milkweed*, by Jerry Spinelli

Newbery Medal-winning author Jerry Spinelli (*Maniac McGee*, *Stargirl*) paints a vivid picture of the streets of the Nazi-occupied Warsaw during World War II, as seen through the eyes of a curious, kind, heartbreakingly naïve orphan with many names. His name is Stopthief when people shout "Stop! Thief!" as he flees with stolen bread. Or it's Jew, "filthy son of Abraham," depending on who's talking to him. Or, maybe he's a Gypsy, because his eyes are black, his skin is dark, and he wears a mysterious yellow stone around his neck. His new friend and protector Uri forces him to take the name Misha Pilsudski and to memorize a made-up story about his Gypsy background so that no one will mistake him for a Jew and kill him. Misha, a very young boy, is slow to understand what's happening around him. When he sees people running, he thinks it's a race. Nazis (Jackboots, as the children call them) marching through the streets appear to him as a delightful parade of magnificent boots. He wants to be a Jackboot! (Uri smacks him for saying this.) He compares bombs to sauerkraut kettles, machine guns to praying mantises, and tanks to "colossal gray long-snouted beetles." The story of Misha and his band of orphans trying to survive on their own would have a deliciously Dickensian quality, if it weren't for the devastation around them--people hurrying to dig trenches to stop Nazi tanks, shops exploding in flames, the wailing of sirens, buzzing airplanes, bombs, and human torture. Spinelli has written a powerfully moving story of survival--readers will love Misha the dreamer and his wonderfully poetic observations of the world around him, his instinct to befriend a Jewish girl and her family, his impulse to steal food for a local orphanage and his friends in the ghetto, and his ability to delight in small things even surrounded by the horror of the Holocaust. A remarkable achievement. (Ages 11 and older) --*Karin Snelson*

5. *Fallen Angels*, by Walter Dean Meyers

A coming of age tale for young adults set in the trenches of the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, **Fallen Angels** is the story of Perry, a Harlem teenager who volunteers for the service when his dream of attending college falls through. Sent to the front lines, Perry and his platoon come face-to-face with the Vietcong and the real horror of warfare. But violence and death aren't the only hardships. As Perry struggles to find virtue in himself and his comrades, he questions why black troops are given the most dangerous assignments, and why the U.S. is there at all. *Fallen Angels* won the 1989 Coretta Scott King Award.

6. *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, by Ray Bradbury

A masterpiece of modern Gothic literature, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* is the memorable story of two boys, James Nightshade and William Halloway, and the evil that grips their small Midwestern town with the arrival of a "dark carnival" one Autumn midnight. How these two innocents, both age 13, save the souls of the town (as well as their own), makes for compelling reading on timeless themes. What would *you* do if your secret wishes could be granted by the mysterious ringmaster Mr. Dark? Bradbury excels in revealing the dark side that exists in us all, teaching us ultimately to celebrate the shadows rather than fear them. In many ways, this is a companion piece to his joyful, nostalgia-drenched *Dandelion Wine*, in which Bradbury presented us with one perfect summer as seen through the eyes of a 12-year-old. In *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, he deftly explores the fearsome delights of one perfectly terrifying, unforgettable autumn. --*Stanley Wiater*

7. *On the Devil's Court*, by Carl Deuker

Deuker's first YA novel is an absorbing reworking of the Faustian legend, with plenty of relevance for modern readers. Joe Faust, 17, who has always lived in the shadow of his scientist father, suffers a slump when everything in his life goes wrong. He doesn't fit in at his new school, flubs the basketball team tryouts and, perhaps worst of all, finds that his words have been distorted in a tabloid article smearing his father. While practicing alone on an abandoned basketball court, Joe agrees to sell his soul to the devil in exchange for a perfect season. Or does he? Joe doesn't really believe in the devil, but when he suddenly gets to join the team, which then goes on to its first undefeated season with him as the star player, he isn't so sure. And when he easily earns straight "A's" (he'd always struggled to get even a "C+"), Joe is convinced that some outside force is aiding him. Deuker skillfully blends gritty basketball action with well-rounded characters to create a vivid contemporary morality tale. Ages 12-up.

8. *Into Thin Air*, by Jon Krakauer

A bank of clouds was assembling on the not-so-distant horizon, but journalist-mountaineer Jon Krakauer, standing on the summit of Mt. Everest, saw nothing that "suggested that a murderous storm was bearing down." He was wrong. The storm, which claimed five lives and left countless more--including Krakauer's--in guilt-ridden disarray, would also provide the impetus for *Into Thin Air*, Krakauer's epic account of the May 1996 disaster. With more than 250 black-and-white photographs taken by various expedition members and an enlightening new postscript by the author, the *Illustrated Edition* shows readers what this tragic climb looked like and potentially provides closure for Krakauer and his detractors.

"I have no doubt that Boukreev's intentions were good on summit day," writes Krakauer in a postscript dated August 1998. "What disturbs me, though, was Boukreev's refusal to acknowledge the possibility that he made even a single poor decision. Never did he indicate that perhaps it wasn't the best choice to climb without gas or go down ahead of his clients." As usual, Krakauer supports his points with dogged research and a good dose of humility. But rather than continue the heated discourse that has raged since *Into Thin Air's* denouncement of guide Boukreev, Krakauer's tone is conciliatory; he points most of his criticism at G. Weston De Walt, who coauthored [The Climb](#), Boukreev's version of events. And in a touching conclusion, Krakauer recounts his last conversation with the late Boukreev, in which the two weathered climbers agreed to disagree about certain points. Krakauer had great hopes to patch things up with Boukreev, but the Russian later died in an avalanche on another Himalayan peak, Annapurna I. Krakauer further buries the ice axe by donating his share of royalties from sales of *The Illustrated Edition* to the Everest '96 Memorial Fund, which aids various environmental and humanitarian charities. --Rob McDonald