

Summer 2017

Dear New Seventh Graders and Parents,

As a geography and literature teacher, I am always looking for good books to recommend to students. In the course of every school year, I come across various book lists in professional journals, newspaper supplements, and information passed on to me by the librarians at Green Acres. One article that impressed me, “Exploring Character Traits through International Heroes,” was published in the February/March 2003 volume of *BookLinks* magazine (pp. 58-62). In the article, authors Mei-Yu Lu and Manjari Singh suggest that reading about heroes and heroines in a variety of cultures helps students to develop a sense of societal expectations and norms in different parts of the world. They can also begin to discern character traits that appear to be universally appreciated, and thereby continue to develop positive character traits in themselves. I believe that students can also garner knowledge of geography from reading literature based in distinctive settings.

Lu and Singh’s article included a suggested reading list, from which I have gleaned titles that seem appropriate to the reading levels and interests of middle school students. I have also added several other titles based on student recommendations and titles that I spot at various multi-cultural book festivals. Notice that the list is arranged by geographical region. Please select at least **one** summer reading choice from this list. Other books can be from this list, or you may read whatever other books you prefer. Altogether, you are expected to read **at least five** books this summer.

As you read, keep a list of the books you complete on a piece of paper. Include the author’s name, the book title, and the date you finished reading the book. When you return to school in the fall, you will have an opportunity to share your reading, so be sure to bring your list with you on the first day back to school in the fall.

Have a wonderful summer and enjoy your reading.

Sincerely,

*Tina Chan*

7<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts Teacher

## AFRICA

Equiano, Olaudah. Adapted by Ann Cameron. *The Kidnapped Prince*. 2000. 160p. (Young Adult)

In Benin, in 1755, 11-year-old Olaudah Equiano is kidnapped, forced into a sack, and carried off into slavery. In a series of journeys that take him halfway around the world, he eventually triumphs over injustice. This memoir was written by Equiano after he earned his freedom.

Kurz, Jane. *The Storytellers’ Beads*. 1998. 160p. (Gr. 6-9)

Set during the political strife and famine of the 1980s, this story follows two Ethiopian teenagers—one a blind Jewish girl and the other a Christian girl—who make a

dangerous and difficult journey from their villages to a refugee camp in Sudan. Together, the girls help each other overcome daunting physical challenges and slowly put aside their prejudices about each other.

McKissack, Patricia. *Nzingha: Warrior Queen of Matamba*. 2000. 144p. (Age 12 and up)

In this historical fiction book, 13-year-old Nzingha, a 16<sup>th</sup> century West African princess in what is now Angola, loves to hunt and hopes to lead her kingdom one day against the invasion of Portuguese slave traders.

Quintana, Anton. *The Baboon King*. 1999. 192p. (Gr. 7-up)

Born to a woman from the farming tribe of the Kikuyu and a father who is a Masai herdsman, Morengaru find he is not accepted by either tribe. As he struggles to come to terms with the values and beliefs of both of his parents' groups, an unexpected event leads to Morengaru's banishment from tribal life, and he is forced to live among a troop of baboons.

## **ANTARCTICA**

Armstrong, Jennifer. *Ship Wreck at the Bottom of the World*. 1998. 134 pp. (Gr. 6-up)

About 100 years ago Ernest Shackleton and 27 men attempted to become the first team of explorers to cross Antarctica. Things go wrong, forcing them to find ways to survive in the world's most inhospitable environment.

Lansing, Alfred, *Endurance*. 1959. 280 pp. (Gr. 7-up)

This is a longer account of the story described above for more advanced readers.

McKernan, Victoria, *Shackleton's Stowaway*. 2005. 312 pp. (Gr. 7-up)

This is also an account of Shackleton's men stranded in Antarctica, but the story revolves around an eighteen-year-old stowaway named Perce Blackborow.

## **AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, and OCEANIA**

Bodeen, S.A. *The Raft*. 2012. 231p. (Gr. 6-9)

When her plane crashes, Robie's years of living with her researcher parents on Midway Island provide her with important knowledge that enables her to survive.

Fienberg, Anna. *Borrowed Light*. 1999. 288p. (Gr. 8-up)

Callisto May, a 16-year-old Australian girl who is alienated from her family, struggles to make difficult decisions about her unplanned pregnancy. She feels a deep connection between herself and the moon (which does not generate its own light but reflects the light of the sun). While confronting her personal challenges, Callisto learns that she can generate her own light and find her own voice.

Flood, Nancy Bo. *Warriors in the Crossfire*. 2010. 138p. (Gr. 5-8)

Based on historical events, this story takes place during the final months of World War II on the island of Saipan. Joseph and his half-Japanese cousin, Kento, take responsibility for the survival of their families during the invasion of troops.

Kelin, Daniel. 2003. 272p. *Marshall Islands Legends and Stories*. (All ages)

The culture of indigenous Pacific island people lies at the heart of this collection.

## **CENTRAL AMERICA, SOUTH AMERICA, and the CARIBBEAN**

Alvarez, Julian. *Before We Were Free*. 2004. 192p. (Young adult)

In the early 1960s in the Dominican Republic, 12-year-old Anita learns that her family is involved in the underground movement to end the bloody rule of a dictator.

Joseph, Lynn. *The Color of My Words*. 2000. 144p. (Gr. 4-8)

Twelve-year-old Ana Rosa lives in a small seaside village in the Dominican Republic and longs to be a writer, but she knows that only the nation's leader, the president, can write and publish books. Encouraged by her family and neighbors, Ana Rosa keeps writing and uses her skill to help her community resist the government when it decides to build a tourist hotel on their land.

Osa, Nancy. *Cuba 15*. 2005. 304p. (Young Adult)

A half Cuban/half Polish American girl must decide what parts of her heritage to embrace when she visits her extended family in Cuba and prepares for her upcoming "quince," the celebration of a Hispanic girl's fifteenth birthday.

Ryan, Pam Munoz. *Esperanza Rising*. 2002. 272p. (Age 8-12)

Esperanza thought she would always live with her family on their ranch in Mexico—she'd always have fancy dresses, a beautiful home, and servants. But a sudden tragedy strikes and Esperanza flees to a Mexican farm labor camp in California.

## **EUROPE**

Paterson, Katherine. *The Day of the Pelican*. 2009. 145p. (Gr. 5-8)

Eleven-year-old Meli is a member of the minority Albanian population living in Servian-controlled Kosovo in 1998 when her life is disrupted by the political upheaval there.

Pyron, Bobbie. *The Dogs of Winter*. 2012. 303p. (Gr. 5-8)

Based on true events, this story is about an orphaned boy in Russia who survives as a member of a pack of dogs and is then re-acclimated into human society.

Sepetys, Ruth. *Between Shades of Gray*. 2011. 341 p. (Gr. 7-adult)

In Lithuania in June 1941, fifteen-year-old Lina is preparing for art school when a knock on the door changes her life forever. She and her family are taken away by the Soviet secret police and ultimately struggle to survive in work camps in Siberia.

Vos, Ida. *The Key is Lost*. 2000. 227p. (Gr. 5-8)

The entire Zilverstijn family must go into hiding from the Germans and young Eva must take on a strange new French name and identity. Set in the Netherlands during WWII, this is an adventure story based on historical events.

## **The MIDDLE EAST**

Carmi, Daniella. *Samir and Yonatan*. 2000. 192p. (Gr. 6-10)

Samir, a Palestinian boy, has a prolonged stay in an Israeli hospital after surgery. There, he makes friends with an Israeli boy, Yonatan, and has an otherworldly experience when he goes on a computer journey with Yonatan to Mars. Slowly, through his friendship with Yonatan, Samir comes to terms with his younger brother's death, which took place in the crossfire of the Palestinian-Jewish conflict.

Ellis, Deborah. *The Breadwinner*. 2001. 176p. (Gr. 4-8)

Under the Taliban's strict restrictions on women's behavior in Afghanistan, 11-year-old Parvana is forced to disguise herself as a boy in order to provide for the family after her father's arrest. In her struggle to support her family and others in need, Parvana courts constant physical danger and severe punishment if her identity is revealed. Also see the sequel, *Parvana's Journey* (2002).

Ellis, Deborah. *Kids of Kabul*. 2012. 141p. (gr. 5-8)

As a follow-up to *The Breadwinner* and *Parvana's Journey*, the author interviewed real children and teens who have survived their struggles in the continuing war-torn conditions of modern Afghanistan.

Marsden, Elsa. *Santa Claus in Baghdad and other Stories about Teens in the Arab World*. 2008. 200p. (Age 12 and above)

These engaging tales dispel stereotypes about young people's lives in the Arab Middle East.

Nye, Naomi Shihab. *Habibi*. 1997. 272p. (Gr. 5-9)

When 14-year-old Liyana Abboud, her younger brother, and her parents move from St. Louis to a new home between Jerusalem and the Palestinian village where her father was born, they face many changes and must deal with the tensions between Jews and Palestinian.

Schami, Rafik. *A Hand Full of Stars*. 1990. 208p. (Gr. 8-up)

Through his journal, a teenager living in Damascus, Syria, shares his thoughts about school, family, friends, and his love for the girl next door. As the military dictatorship imposes increasing restrictions on people, the boy's commitment to act upon his beliefs and voice opposition to the militia forces him to lead a complex and dangerous double life.

## **SOUTH ASIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA and EAST ASIA**

Budhas, Marina. *Ask Me No Questions*. 2007. 176p. (Young adult)

Fourteen-year-old Nadira, her sister, and parents leave Bangladesh for New York City. Their visas expire and then they must contend with the events of Sept. 11, 2001.

Jiang, Ji-li. *Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution*. 1997. 304p. (Gr. 5-10)

Ji-li Jiang, an outstanding student and leader at her school, grew up with implicit faith in the ideals articulated by Chairman Mao. With the advent of the Chinese Cultural Revolution in 1966, the path of her life changed forever. This memoir shows how Ji-li's courage, determination, and love for her family helped her deal with political turmoil and persecution. (For another memoir of growing up in Communist China, see Lu Chi Fa and Becky White's *Double Luck: Memoirs of a Chinese Orphan*. 2001.)

Hoobler, Dorothy and Thomas. *The Demon in the Teahouse*. 2005. 192p. (Age 12 and above)

The beautiful, mysterious women of Japan are being killed one by one. The famous samurai, Judge Ooka, knows he will need help to solve the crime, so he turns to his newly adopted son, 14-year-old Seikei, who is determined to prove his worth as a samurai.

Krishnawami, Uma. *Naming Maya*. 2004. 192p. (Age 9-12)

When Maya accompanies her mother to India to sell her grandfather's house, she uncovers family history relating to her parents' divorce and learns more about herself.

Morpurgo, Michael. *Shadow*. 2010. 181p. ((Gr. 5-8)

Written by the same author as *War Horse*, this tale is about two 14-year-old boys, one Afghan and one English, who find friendship with each other and with two exceptional dogs.

Perkins, Mitali. *Bamboo People*. 2010. 264p. (Gr. 6-8)

Set against the political and military backdrop of modern-day Burma, Chiko, whose father is imprisoned by the government of Burma, faces the challenges and hardships of being a young soldier.

Sheth, Kashmira. *Blue Jasmine*. 2006. 192p. (Age 9-12)

India and Iowa City, Iowa, are the backdrop for this coming-of-age novel. Twelve-year-old Seema learns she can build a bridge between her two homes.

Whelan, Gloria. *Homeless Bird*. 2000. 224p. (Gr. 5-10)

Widowed at 13, Koly lives in an Indian village with her depressed father-in-law and spiteful mother-in-law until she is abandoned in a city where she knows no one. Using her talent in embroidery to earn a living, Koly not only becomes financially independent and gains the respect of others but also, over time, finds happiness again.

## **NORTH AMERICA**

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. 110 p. 1984. (Gr. 6-9)

A young girl, Esperanza Cordero, grows up in a Latino section of Chicago.

Edwardson, Debby Dahl. *My Name is Not Easy*. 224p. 2011. ((Gr. 6-8)

Set in the far north of Alaska in the 1960s, this is the story of Inupiaq (Eskimo) children who are sent to a Catholic boarding school.

Kadohata, Cynthia. *Kira-Kira*. 272 p. 2004. (Gr. 6-10)

This Newbery Award book, set in a 1950s small town in the state of Georgia, tells the tale of a Japanese American girl whose family experiences both great love and great loss.

Kudlinski, Kathleen. *My Lady Pocahontas*. 273 p. 2006. (Gr. 6-10)

The story of Pocahontas is told from the Native American viewpoint.

Salisbury, Graham. *Island Boyz*. 2002. 272 p. (Gr. 6-10)

This collection of short stories, set in Hawaii, offers a rich view of particular cultures while exploring the universal themes of peer pressure, social cruelty, and matters of conscience.

Schmidt, Gary D. *Lizzie Bright and the Buckminster Boys*. 2004. 224 p. (Gr. 6-9)

Turner Buckminster, the son of Phippsburg, Maine's Congregational Church pastor, loves baseball and befriends an African American girl who lives on a neighboring island. This historical novel is both tragic and funny.

Soto, Gary. *Taking Sides*. 1991. 137 p. (Gr. 5-7)

A Hispanic basketball player experiences divided loyalties when he moves from a poor neighborhood in San Francisco to a more affluent one.

