

Thomas W. Pyle Middle School

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Mr. Michael J. Zarchin, Principal

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Dear Incoming Eighth Grader:

We look forward to seeing you in our classes next year. In order to maintain and strengthen your basic language skills, we urge you to read and write as much as you can during your months away from school.

The ability to read is crucial to an individual's success in school and on the job. Reading is a life-long skill that a person needs to succeed not only as a student but also as a worker and a citizen. Perhaps even more importantly, reading opens the world to a person through periodicals, textbooks, and literature. By reading, individuals have the opportunity to learn about people, times, regions, and ideas that they may never actually encounter in life. Reading can also bring a lifetime of pleasure and mental acuity.

Research strongly suggests that reading, like most skills, improves with practice and decreases when we don't engage in it for even a short time. Therefore, consistent with our commitment to prepare all students for success during school and after graduation, we continue in MCPS to expect all students to read during the summer.

Your Assignment. To be prepared for the first writing assessment and the pre-assessments that start off the 8th grade English curriculum, we ask you to read **at least two novels**. All incoming 8th graders will read *A Solitary Blue* and a **second novel** of their choice, selected from the annotated list. The two novels have separate sets of directions. Take bulleted notes as you read. Remember that your work will create the first impression of you as a reader and writer to your 8th grade English teacher. You will use your notes for *A Solitary Blue* to help you to write an essay during the first unit, "Journeys."

You may borrow *A Solitary Blue* by Cynthia Voigt and the selected novel from the annotated list from Pyle, or visit the public library. Room 209, the book room, will be staffed by parent volunteers to sign out the novels during the last two weeks of school.

Enjoy reading! **In addition to the two novels, read at least two other books of your choice.** When you come to school have the titles and authors of the books you've enjoyed reading ready to share with others.

Sincerely yours,

Michael Zarchin
Principal

Celia Harper
English Resource Teacher

Melissa Griffith
Reading Specialist

Pyle Summer Reading for Incoming 8th Graders

Borrowing the novels: *A Solitary Blue* by Cynthia Voigt as well as a second novel from the annotated list may be borrowed from Room 209. During the last two weeks of school, Room 209 will be staffed by volunteers to sign out the novels.

A. A Solitary Blue – the required novel

Your Assignment: Take detailed bulleted notes about each question below. During the first marking period, you will use your notes to complete an assessment in class about *A Solitary Blue* that will be graded.

A Solitary Blue by Cynthia Voigt is a story in which the protagonist (main character) undergoes a literal and a symbolic journey. The story includes 10 years of Jeff's life, from the abandonment by his mother in 2nd grade, to his plans for college in 12th grade. "Journeys" is the focus of the first thematic unit that you will study in the 8th grade English curriculum.

Directions: While reading *A Solitary Blue*, take detailed bulleted notes to answer ALL of the following questions. Do NOT write paragraphs. You will learn more about the assignment when you come to class.

1. What are some of Jeff's **character traits**? Describe the events that support these traits.
2. How does Voigt develop Jeff's **character**? Take notes on each of the following:
 - a) Jeff's **physical appearance** – how it changes over the 10 years of the novel
 - b) Jeff's common **behaviors and activities** in different parts of his life
 - c) Jeff's **speech** – common expressions and why Jeff uses them
 - d) The way that **other characters** treat Jeff
 - e) What the **narrator** tells you about Jeff's feelings and reactions
3. Describe the **school experiences** that leave an impact on Jeff. Be able to describe the student population, classes, and Jeff's social life in each of the schools. Include his experiences in nature, both in South Carolina and on Maryland's Eastern Shore.
4. What **motivated** Jeff and his father to journey from Baltimore to the Eastern Shore?
5. During the course of the story, what did Jeff **learn** about himself? What did he **learn** about his mother? What did he **learn** about his father?

B. The selected novel

Directions: Choose one novel from the following annotated list. After reading this novel, select ONE of the following questions to answer. Your answer should be typed and at least one paragraph.

A. Select the main **character** from your novel and respond to either "a" or "b." Include details from the novel to support your response. a) How has the character **changed** from the beginning of the novel to the end? b) What has the character **learned** about himself/herself or about others through his/her experiences in the novel?

B. Identify a **challenge** you or someone you know has faced. Explain the way that you or someone you know has faced a **challenge** similar to a **challenge** facing a character in the novel. Or, explain the way that you would have responded to the **challenge** if you had been the character in the novel. Use details from the novel to describe events to explain your response.

Pyle's Annotated Reading List for 8th-Grade

The following books are available at Pyle and can be signed out **June 8 -12**. Parent volunteers or Pyle staff will assist you at various times, before, during, and after the school day in Rm. 209. Please listen to the school announcements for the specific time.

***18 Best Stories** by Edgar Allan Poe (1220L). Poe practically invented the modern detective story with his lurid tales of horror, death, phobias, and mystery. "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" are the most famous spine-tingling stories in this collection.

***Beauty** (970L) by Robin McKinley. An enjoyable retelling of the romance between Beauty and the Beast.

***The Cay** (860L) by Theodore Taylor. Phillip is excited when the Germans invade the small island of Curaçao. War has always been a game to him, and he's eager to glimpse it firsthand—until the freighter he and his mother are traveling to the United States on is torpedoed. When Phillip comes to, he is on a small raft in the middle of the sea. Besides Stew Cat, his only companion is an old West Indian, Timothy. By the time the castaways arrive on a small island, Phillip's head injury has made him blind and dependent on Timothy.

Crash (560L) by Jerry Spinelli. "Crash" Coogan has always been comfortable with his tough, aggressive behavior, until his relationship with an unusual Quaker boy and his grandfather's stroke make him reconsider.

***The Good Earth** (1530L) by Pearl S. Buck. This classic tale set in 1920's rural China tells the story of a humble peasant, Wang Lung, and his struggles with both poverty and prosperity. Topics covered include concubinage, foot-binding, and infanticide.

***Homecoming** (630L) by Cynthia Voigt. The first of Voigt's trilogy about three children alone in the world; the novel follows Dicey, James, and Maybeth from Connecticut to the Eastern Shore of Maryland. On their journey they duck authorities, sleep in cemeteries, and walk many miles.

Jurassic Park (710L) by Michael Crichton. Science fiction story set in present day or near future. After finding amber with preserved mosquitoes containing dinosaur blood, a scientist creates dinosaurs and builds an amusement park. The novel is very different from the movie!

***October Sky** (900) by Homer Hickam. The memoir of one of the “rocket boys” who became a NASA scientist and an award winning writer, this is the story of how a small group of West Virginia teenagers, inspired by the Russians launch of Sputnik in 1957, brought rocket science to their small mining town of Coalwood.

***Pride and Prejudice** (1190L) by Jane Austen. One of the greatest novels of romance and manners ever written in English. Set in 19th century England, the story focuses on the strong-willed Elizabeth and her proud beau, Mr. Darcy.

***Ruby Holler** (660L) by Sharon Creech. "Trouble twins" Dallas and Florida are orphans who have given up believing there is such a thing as a loving home. Tiller and Sairy are an eccentric older couple who live in the beautiful, mysterious Ruby Holler, but they're restless for one more big adventure. When they invite the twins to join them on their journeys, they first must all stay together in the Holler, and the magic of the place takes over. Two pairs of lives grow closer, and are changed forever.

Somewhere in the Darkness (640L) by Walter Dean Myers. Jimmy hasn't seen his father in nine years. But one day he comes back -- on the run from the law. Together, the two of them travel across the country -- where Jimmy's dad will find the man who can exonerate him of the crime for which he was convicted. Along the way, Jimmy discovers a lot about his father and himself -- and that while things can't always be fixed, sometimes they can be understood and forgiven.

Summer on Wheels (750L) by Gary Soto. Hector and his amigo Mando are looking for serious adventure as they set out on a bike trip from their neighborhood in East L.A., to the beach in Santa Monica.

***Treasure Island** (1070L) by Robert Louis Stevenson. Adventure story set in the 18th century. Teenage Jack Hawkins discovers a treasure map and joins an expedition to find buried treasure. Much strategy and action is needed to overcome the obstacles posed by Long John Silver and his band of pirates.

Walk Two Moons (770L) by Sharon Creech. This is the story of thirteen-year-old Salamanca Tree Hiddle, from Bybanks, Kentucky, who is traveling across the country to Idaho with her grandparents. Along the way, she tells them the story of "Phoebe Winterbottom, her disappearing mother, and the lunatic." She also tells you, the reader, another more serious story about her own mother and herself.

The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963 (1000L) by Christopher Paul Curtis. Narrated by ten-year-old Kenny, this touching novel relates the experiences of an African American family who travel to Birmingham, Alabama in 1963 to spend time with their grandmother. Grandma's church is bombed, and Kenny and his brother begin to learn some important life lessons.

****The indicated books can be borrowed from Room 209.***

Explanation of Lexile Scores:

Lexile scores are one way to match readers to books that they can read independently. When choosing a book, however, readers must also consider their interests. If the topic of the book is something that the reader knows a lot about, he or she can often enjoy a book at a higher lexile. If the topic of the book is new to the reader or is very complicated, it is better to choose a book at or below the reader's lexile level.

Students' individual lexile scores can be found on the Map-R report. Your English or reading teacher can provide this information and answer any questions that you have. More information is available at www.lexile.com.