

Respect Starts Here Summer Reading 2016 (Year 2)

This year's summer reading selections will support the Respect Starts Here curriculum for 2016-17. The characters in the books are facing discrimination and bias, compounded by the issues affecting all teens' relationships with families, friends and significant others. The protagonists learn, through trial and error, failure and persistence, and the lessons taught by caring adults, how to take overcome the obstacles that threaten to derail them by taking action – individually and/or collectively. That focus on understanding how society's stereotypes and expectations affect our responses, and moving past that to a sense of empowerment to effect change will be a major theme in Respect Starts Here, year two.

(titles are for students *rising* into these grades in 2016-17)

6th grade: *The Other Half of My Heart*, Sundee Frazier (this is a repeat title from 2015-16 for entering 6th graders)

*Kirkus:

/ Starred Review */* Funny and deeply affecting, this novel by the Steptoe Award winner for Brendan Buckley's *Universe and Everything in It* (2007) revisits the still largely unexplored world of multiracial heritage. Twin daughters of a black mom and white dad, Minerva and Keira King, 11, fly from Washington State to North Carolina to stay with oppressive Grandmother Johnson and compete in the Miss Black Pearl Preteen pageant. The narrator, shy Minni, who appears white, is reluctant; outgoing Keira, who appears black, is thrilled. Back home, Minni has unknowingly benefited from white privilege, while Keira's appearance has subjected her to bias. In North Carolina, Keira fits in, and Minni stands out. Although she's favored by their grandmother, Minni's white appearance leads others to question her right to identify as black. As their experience of race threatens to divide the sisters, Minni struggles to heal the rift. Frazier highlights the contradictions, absurdities, humor and pain that accompany life as a mixed-race tween. Never didactic, this is the richest portrait of multiracial identity and family since Virginia Hamilton's 1976 novel *Arilla Sun Down*. An outstanding achievement. (Fiction. 9-12) (Kirkus Reviews, May 15, 2010)

7th grade: *Revolution*, Deborah Wiles

*School Library Journal:

/ Starred Review */* Gr 5 – 8 — In Wiles's second installment of the trilogy, readers are offered two alternate viewpoints from very different worlds within the same Greenwood, Mississippi town during the tumultuous Freedom Summer of 1964. Sunny, a 12-year-old white girl, is worried about reports of "invaders" descending upon the sleepy Southern enclave and causing trouble. Meanwhile, Raymond, a black boy from Baptist Town (known among the white citizens as "Colored Town"), is becoming increasingly aware of all the places (especially the public pool and Leflore's theater) he is barred from attending due to Jim Crow laws. As Sunny's worldview is suddenly expanded as she begins to learn more about the sinister underbelly of her seemingly perfect town, her story intersects with Raymond's. Among the cadre of brave young volunteers working to register black Mississippians to vote—a mix of white and black members of various civil rights associations—is Jo Ellen, the older sister from *Countdown* (Scholastic, 2010). As in the first book, song lyrics, biblical verses, photographs, speeches, essays, and other ephemera immerse readers in one of the most important—and dangerous—moments during the Civil Rights Movement. While Sunny's experiences receive a slightly deeper focus than Raymond's, readers are offered a window into each community and will see both characters change and grow over the course of the summer. Inclusion of primary source materials, including the text of a real and vile pamphlet created by KKK members, does not shy away from the reality and hurtful language used by bigots during this time period. For those looking to extend the story with a full-sensory experience, the author has compiled YouTube clips of each song referenced in the book on a Pinterest board ([link](#)). With elements of family drama and coming-of-age themes that mirror the larger sociopolitical backdrop, *Revolution* is a book that lingers long after the last page.—Kiera Parrott, School Library Journal --Kiera Parrott (Reviewed May 1, 2014) (School Library Journal, vol 60, issue 5, p119)

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Dallas, TX

Diana O'Connor, MLS – Rangel Teacher Librarian

8th grade: *Blackbird Fly*, Erin Entrada Kelly

*Kirkus:

/* Starred Review */ Apple Yengko has one possession from the Philippines—a Beatles cassette tape with her father's name written on it. She knows every song by heart. After her father's death when she was very young, Apple and her mother moved to the United States. There is not much diversity in Apple's small Louisiana town. Her classmates call her Chinese though she is Filipina and bully her with taunts of "dog-eater." Apple's self-esteem plummets when she learns she is on the Dog Log, the boys' list of the ugliest girls, and her friends abandon her. She hates her name, her mother's accent, the shape of her eyes, everything that makes her different. She takes refuge in music, becoming determined to get her own guitar, despite her mother's protests. Slowly, Apple develops new, healthy friendships. She comes to see through the cruelty of her classmates and to discover the unique characteristics that make her special. Each character in Kelly's debut novel—the mean kids, the misfits, the adults and Apple herself—is portrayed with remarkable authenticity. The awkwardness and intense feelings inherent to middle school are palpable. Children's literature has been waiting for Apple Yengko—a strong, Asian-American girl whose ethnic identity simultaneously complicates and enriches her life. (Fiction. 9-14)(Kirkus Reviews, January 1, 2015)

9th grade: *I Will Always Write Back: How One Letter Changed Two Lives*, Caitlin Alifrenka & Martin Ganda

*Publishers Weekly:

/* Starred Review */ In 1997, a 12-year old girl from Hatfield, Pa., and a 14-year-old boy from Mutare, Zimbabwe, began a pen-pal relationship. In alternating chapters, Alifrenka and Ganda recount how their mutual curiosity led to an increasingly honest, generous correspondence. Martin loves receiving Caitlin's photo, but when she requests one in return, "My heart went from sprinting to a standstill." He sends her the only photo his family owns. Hearing BBC accounts of Zimbabwe's political and economic turmoil alarms Caitlin, but a letter written on a popsicle wrapper shocks her: "I gasped. My friend was writing me on trash." She begins to send him her babysitting money—which Martin's family uses to buy food and to pay school fees and rent—and Caitlin's family eventually decides to sponsor Martin's education. Sensitively and candidly demonstrating how small actions can result in enormous change, this memoir of two families' transformation through the commitment and affection of long-distance friends will humble and inspire. Ages 12–up. Agent: (for Alifrenka and Ganda) Sarah Burnes, Gernert Company; (for Welch) Brettne Bloom, Kneerim, Williams & Bloom. (Apr.) --Staff (Reviewed March 16, 2015) (Publishers Weekly, vol 262, issue 11, p)

10th grade: *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces*, Isabel Quintero

*School Library Journal:

Gr 9 Up — Sixteen-year-old Gabi Hernandez has a lot to deal with during her senior year. Her best friend Cindy is pregnant; her other best friend Sebastian just got kicked out of his house for coming out to his strict parents; her meth addict dad is trying to quit, again; and her super religious Tía Bertha is constantly putting a damper on Gabi's love life. In lyrical diary entries peppered with the burgeoning poet's writing, Spanglish, and phone conversations, Quintero gives voice to a complex, not always likable but totally believable teen who struggles to figure out her own place in the world. Believing she's not Mexican enough for her family and not white enough for Berkeley, Gabi still meets every challenge head-on with vulgar humor and raw honesty. In moments, the diary format may come across as clunky, but the choppy delivery feels purposeful. While the narrative is chock-full of issues, they never bog down the story, interwoven with the usual teen trials, from underwhelming first dates to an unabashed treatment of sex, religion, and family strife. The teen isn't all snark; there's still a naiveté about whether her father will ever kick his addiction to meth, especially evident in her heartfelt letters to him. When tragedy strikes, readers will mourn with Gabi and connect with her fears about college acceptance and her first sexual experience. A refreshing take on slut- and fat-shaming, Quintero's work ranks with Meg Medina's *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* (Candlewick, 2013) and Junot Diaz's *Drown* (Riverhead, 1996) as a coming-of-age novel with Latino protagonists.—Shelley Diaz, School Library Journal --Shelley Diaz (Reviewed August 1, 2014) (School Library Journal, vol 60, issue 8, p104)

11th grade: *Some Assembly Required: The Not-So-Secret Life of a Transgender Teen*, Arin Andrews

*Kirkus:

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Diana O'Connor, MLS – Rangel Teacher Librarian

In a plainspoken and sometimes-humorous memoir, transgender teenager Andrews discusses his life so far. Andrews received national recognition when he was profiled on television's Inside Edition as one half of a transgender teen couple (the other half, Katie Rain Hill, has written her own memoir, *Rethinking Normal*). In a conversational tone, the author describes events from his childhood and teen years: dating a girl of whom his parents disapproved, first encountering the concept of being transgender in a series of YouTube videos, and most significantly, dating and falling in love with Katie Hill, a transgender teen girl whose profile in a local newspaper had helped inspire him to transition himself. Perhaps an unintentional consequence of the simultaneous publication of Hill's and Andrews' memoirs after the two have ended their romantic relationship is that readers see many of the same incidents in both books: a failed family ski trip, a first sexual experience, Katie's eventual choice to date someone else - recounted from vastly different perspectives. Here, Andrews' tone when writing about the relationship is largely reverent, and background information about societal gender expectations and physical transition processes fit in easily among typical teenage concerns like love, heartbreak and prom. Friendly and informative. (Memoir. 12 & up)(Kirkus Reviews, August 15, 2014)

12th grade: Just Mercy: a story of justice and redemption, Bryan Stevenson

*Kirkus:

/ Starred Review */* A distinguished NYU law professor and MacArthur grant recipient offers the compelling story of the legal practice he founded to protect the rights of people on the margins of American society. Stevenson began law school at Harvard knowing only that the life path he would follow would have something to do with [improving] the lives of the poor." An internship at the Atlanta-based Southern Prisoners Defense Committee in 1983 not only put him into contact with death row prisoners, but also defined his professional trajectory. In 1989, the author opened a nonprofit legal center, the Equal Justice Initiative, in Alabama, a state with some of the harshest, most rigid capital punishment laws in the country. Underfunded and chronically overloaded by requests for help, his organization worked tirelessly on behalf of men, women and children who, for reasons of race, mental illness, lack of money and/or family support, had been victimized by the American justice system. One of Stevenson's first and most significant cases involved a black man named Walter McMillian. Wrongly accused of the murder of a white woman, McMillian found himself on death row before a sentence had even been determined. Though EJI secured his release six years later, McMillian "received no money, no assistance [and] no counseling" for the imprisonment that would eventually contribute to a tragic personal decline. In the meantime, Stevenson would also experience his own personal crisis. "You can't effectively fight abusive power, poverty, inequality, illness, oppression, or injustice and not be broken by it," he writes. Yet he would emerge from despair, believing that it was only by acknowledging brokenness that individuals could begin to understand the importance of tempering imperfect justice with mercy and compassion. Emotionally profound, necessary reading. (Kirkus Reviews, September 1, 2014)

*All reviews from Novelist database.