

ASPIRE 2020

Middle School Book Blurbs

Read through the following blurbs, making a list of three choices, and then sign up using the Google Forms link that will be emailed to you on **THURSDAY, MAY 14**. You will receive a copy of the Google Form you submit; this is the confirmation of the book you will be responsible for reading. A reminder email will be sent out later this summer. You may purchase the book in whatever format (digital or print) you desire.

PARENTS: We encourage you to investigate each work further to make your own determination about its suitability for your student. **STUDENTS MAY NOT CHOOSE A TITLE THEY HAVE PREVIOUSLY READ.**

Keeper of the Lost Cities Book 1 by Shannon Messenger

Sponsor: Michelle Bahtic

“Twelve-year-old Sophie has never quite fit into her life. She’s skipped multiple grades and doesn’t really connect with the older kids at school, but she’s not comfortable with her family, either. The reason? Sophie’s a Telepath, someone who can read minds. No one knows her secret—at least, that’s what she thinks...

But the day Sophie meets Fitz, a mysterious (and adorable) boy, she learns she’s not alone. He’s a Telepath too, and it turns out the reason she has never felt at home is that, well...she isn’t. Fitz opens Sophie’s eyes to a shocking truth, and she is forced to leave behind her family for a new life in a place that is vastly different from what she has ever known.

But Sophie still has secrets, and they’re buried deep in her memory for good reason: The answers are dangerous and in high-demand. What is her true identity, and why was she hidden among humans? The truth could mean life or death—and time is running out” (Amazon).

Ash Princess by Laura Sebastian

Sponsor: Georgianna Cayon

“Theodosia was six when her country was invaded and her mother, the Fire Queen, was murdered before her eyes. On that day, the Kaiser took Theodosia’s family, her land, and her name. Theo was crowned Ash Princess--a title of shame to bear in her new life as a prisoner.

For ten years Theo has been a captive in her own palace. She’s endured the relentless abuse and ridicule of the Kaiser and his court. She is powerless, surviving in her new world only by burying the girl she was deep inside.

Then, one night, the Kaiser forces her to do the unthinkable. With blood on her hands and all hope of reclaiming her throne lost, she realizes that surviving is no longer enough. But she does have a weapon: her mind is sharper than any sword. And power isn’t always won on the battlefield.

For ten years, the Ash Princess has seen her land pillaged and her people enslaved. That all ends here” (Amazon).

Night by Elie Wiesel **** 7th & 8th GRADE ONLY****

Sponsor: Samantha Cook

“Born in the town of Sighet, Transylvania, Elie Wiesel was a teenager when he and his family were taken from their home in 1944 to Auschwitz concentration camp, and then to Buchenwald. Night is the terrifying record of Elie Wiesel’s memories of the death of his family, the death of his own innocence, and his despair as a deeply

observant Jew confronting the absolute evil of man. This new translation by his wife and most frequent translator, Marion Wiesel, corrects important details and presents the most accurate rendering in English of Elie Wiesel's testimony to what happened in the camps and of his unforgettable message that this horror must simply never be allowed to happen again" (Goodreads).

Night offers much more than a litany of the daily terrors, everyday perversions, and rampant sadism at Auschwitz and Buchenwald; it also eloquently addresses many of the philosophical as well as personal questions implicit in any serious consideration of what the Holocaust was, what it meant, and what its legacy is and will be" (Amazon)

Spark by Sarah Beth Durst

Sponsor: Martha DeAmbrose

"When a shy girl and her dragon-like companion discover their country's idyllic weather comes at a steep—and secret—cost, they recruit fellow students to defy authority and attempt to spread the truth.

Storm beasts and their guardians create perfect weather every day, and Mina longs for a storm beast of her own. But when the gentle girl bonds with a lightning beast—a creature of fire and chaos—everyone's certain it's a mistake. Everyone but Mina and the beast himself, Pixit. Quickly enrolled in lightning school, Mina struggles to master a guardian's skills, and she discovers that her country's weather comes at a devastating cost—a cost powerful people wish to hide. Mina's never been the type to speak out, but someone has to tell the truth, and, with Pixit's help, she resolves to find a way to be heard" (Amazon).

City Spies by James Ponti

Sponsor: Jennifer Greseth

"Sara Martinez is a hacker. She recently broke into the New York City foster care system to expose her foster parents as cheats and lawbreakers. However, instead of being hailed as a hero, Sara finds herself facing years in a juvenile detention facility and banned from using computers for the same stretch of time. Enter Mother, a British spy who not only gets Sara released from jail but also offers her a chance to make a home for herself within a secret MI6 agency" (Amazon).

Ethan Marcus Stands Up by Michele Weber Hurwitz

Sponsor: Kerri-Ann Grosso

Ethan Marcus decides that he is sick of sitting down in school, so he refuses to do so. This lands him in the principal's office, which leads to a new adventure.

The Energy Bus by Jon Gordon

Sponsor: A.J. Hendrix

"The Energy Bus, an international best seller by Jon Gordon, takes readers on an enlightening and inspiring ride that reveals 10 secrets for approaching life and work with the kind of positive, forward thinking that leads to true accomplishment at work and at home. Jon infuses this engaging story with keen insights as he provides a powerful roadmap to overcome adversity and bring out the best in yourself and your team. When you get on The Energy Bus you'll enjoy the ride of your life!" (Amazon).

I Will Always Write Back How One Letter Changed Two Lives by Caitlin Alifirenka and Martin Ganda

Sponsor: Chrissy Jisha

"The true story of an all-American girl and a boy from Zimbabwe - and the letter that changes their lives.

Everyone in Caitlin's class wrote to an unknown student somewhere in a distant place. Martin was lucky enough to even receive a pen-pal letter. There were only ten letters and fifty students in his class. He was the top student, so he got the first one.

That letter was the beginning of a correspondence that spanned six years and two lives.

In this compelling dual memoir, Caitlin and Martin recount how they became best friends - and better people - through their long-distance exchange. Their story will inspire you to look beyond your own life and wonder about the world at large and your place in it" (Amazon).

***How to be a Person* by Catherine Newman**

****Official release May 26. You may PRE-ORDER****

Sponsor: Sarah Johnson

"For the kid who leaves a wet towel wadded up on the floor or forgets to put a new roll on the toilet-paper thingy, humorous writer and etiquette columnist Catherine Newman has created the ultimate guidebook to becoming a person whom everyone will like being around more. Jam-packed with tips, tricks, and skills — all illustrated in an irresistible graphic novel-style — this book shows kids just how easy it is to free themselves from parental nagging and become more dependable — and they'll like themselves better, too! They'll learn how to deal with dirty rooms, care for pets and cactuses, stick up for somebody, and fold a T-shirt. They'll even get a crash course on using the kitchen (including how to turn a 33-cent package of ramen into dinner) and a boot camp for lending a hand outside the house (mowing, shoveling, and fixing something loose has never been easier). This handbook to becoming *beyond helpful* promises that every kid can be a valued and valuable member of the grown-up world" (Amazon).

***Nyxia (The Nyxia Triad)* by Scott Reintgen**

Sponsor: Suzy Lassacher

What lengths would you go to help your family? What would you be willing to sacrifice? What values would you be willing to compromise? These are questions that young Emmett Atwater must grapple with as he competes for a position on the elite team of youths Babel has recruited to travel to the planet Eden to mine a mysterious substance called *nyxia*—the most valuable substance known to man. Unbeknownst to him, what lies ahead will force him to see things for what they really are and forge an unforgettable path of self-discovery.

***Small Spaces* by Katherine Arden**

Sponsor: Sarah Lonetto

WARNING: While this book is written for the middle school audience, it is considered horror fiction. There is no gore but plenty of creepy suspense and scary moments.

Ollie is dreading going on a field trip to nearby Misty Valley Farm with her classmates. Since the tragic loss of her mother a year ago, Ollie has isolated herself from them and instead finds comfort in books. She comes into possession of a strange book called Small Places which seems to have a connection to the scary stories and legends surrounding the Webster family who have owned the local farm for generations. Once at the farm, Ollie seems to notice weird things about its workers and the many scarecrows that line the fields. Events take an even stranger turn when the school bus breaks down upon leaving, and her mother's old watch that she now wears is displaying the word RUN with a countdown. Ollie and two classmates decide it's best to follow the watch's advice and set off to escape whatever danger awaits them. Here begins their terrifying tale of survival while trying to discover what exactly is happening at Misty Valley Farm. Ollie must keep her wits about her and heed the final words of the bus driver..."Avoid large places. Keep to small."

***Will My Cat Eat My Eyeballs?Big Questions from Tiny Mortals About Death* byCaitlin Doughty**

Sponsor: Laura Pereira

“Every day, funeral director Caitlin Doughty receives dozens of questions about death. The best questions come from kids. What would happen to an astronaut’s body if it were pushed out of a space shuttle? Do people poop when they die? Can Grandma have a Viking funeral?”

In *Will My Cat Eat My Eyeballs?*, Doughty blends her mortician’s knowledge of the body and the intriguing history behind common misconceptions about corpses to offer factual, hilarious, and candid answers to thirty-five distinctive questions posed by her youngest fans. In her inimitable voice, Doughty details lore and science of what happens to, and inside, our bodies after we die. Why do corpses groan? What causes bodies to turn colors during decomposition? And why do hair and nails appear longer after death? Readers will learn the best soil for mummifying your body, whether you can preserve your best friend’s skull as a keepsake, and what happens when you die on a plane.

Beautifully illustrated by Dianné Ruz, *Will My Cat Eat My Eyeballs?* shows us that death is science and art, and only by asking questions can we begin to embrace it” (Amazon).

***Other Words for Home* by Jasmine Warga**

Sponsor: Diana Rendina

"I am learning how to be
sad
and happy
at the same time.

Jude never thought she’d be leaving her beloved older brother and father behind, all the way across the ocean in Syria. But when things in her hometown start becoming volatile, Jude and her mother are sent to live in Cincinnati with relatives.

At first, everything in America seems too fast and too loud. The American movies that Jude has always loved haven’t quite prepared her for starting school in the US—and her new label of “Middle Eastern,” an identity she’s never known before. But this life also brings unexpected surprises—there are new friends, a whole new family, and a school musical that Jude might just try out for. Maybe America, too, is a place where Jude can be seen as she really is” (Goodreads).

***Goodbye Stranger* by Rebecca Stead**

Sponsor: Melanie Rodriguez

The story centers on three seventh graders, Bridge, Tab and Emily, who are dealing with typical middle school issues — taking selfies, liking boys, staying friends when your interests start to diverge, divorced parents — but this story takes it a few layers deeper. It's about knowing who you are and who you want to be, and dealing with who others think you should be.

***The Van Gogh Deception* by Deron Hicks**

Sponsor: Kimmy Sanford

A 12-year-old boy is found alone in the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. with no memory of who he is or why he was there. He is taken into foster care by Mary Sullivan and her daughter Camille. They return to the National Gallery to jog his memory, and he receives a clue in the form of his jacket with the name *Arthur* in it. As Art starts to put the pieces together, he and Camille are put in danger. The two of them realize they are in a race to stop a huge art fraud from being committed while also trying to figure out Art’s real identity and his connection to all of it.

The Red Pyramid Book 1 by Rick Riordan

Sponsor: John Seary

“Since their mother’s death, Carter and Sadie have become near strangers. While Sadie has lived with her grandparents in London, her brother has traveled the world with their father, the brilliant Egyptologist, Dr. Julius Kane.

One night, Dr. Kane brings the siblings together for a “research experiment” at the British Museum, where he hopes to set things right for his family. Instead, he unleashes the Egyptian god Set, who banishes him to oblivion and forces the children to flee for their lives.

Soon, Sadie and Carter discover that the gods of Egypt are waking, and the worst of them—Set—has his sights on the Kanes. To stop him, the siblings embark on a dangerous journey across the globe—a quest that brings them ever closer to the truth about their family, and their links to a secret order that has existed since the time of the pharaohs” (Amazon).

From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler by EL Konigsburg

Sponsor: Betsy Zollinger

“When suburban Claudia Kincaid decides to run away, she knows she doesn't just want to run from somewhere she wants to run to somewhere—to a place that is comfortable, beautiful, and preferably elegant. She chooses the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Knowing that her younger brother, Jamie, has money and thus can help her with the serious cash flow problem she invites him along.

Once settled into the museum, Claudia and Jamie find themselves caught up in the mystery of an angel statue that the museum purchased at an auction for a bargain price of \$250. The statue is possibly an early work of the Renaissance master Michelangelo, and therefore worth millions. Is it? Or isn't it? Claudia is determined to find out. This quest leads Claudia to Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, the remarkable old woman who sold the statue and to some equally remarkable discoveries about herself” (Amazon).