

## **Middle School Summer Reading 2022**

Summertime travel happens in a lot of different ways for all of us. One of the most tried and true is to travel across time, space, and psyche with books.

Some journeys take us across the world, some across the street. These three books take you from a single neighborhood in a city in Japan, to an imagined city in Nigeria, to a future earth and a whole new world. **You are asked to choose at least one of these books to read over the summer (before we return in the new school year).** You may find the book(s) through your local public library, local independent bookstores, or other online sources. We will meet as a community to talk about themes that arise in each and all these books when we return. Happy reading!

**Choose ONE of the following three books to read this summer!**

### **Temple Alley Summer**

Humidity. Watermelon. Sticky air and warm breezes. These aren't typically what some think of as the setting for a ghost story. Kazu is a fifth grader, and he lives in the home his grandfather, who recently passed away, built. One night, Kazu wakes up to pee out his window (one of the many pitch-perfect details that keeps this story grounded) and he sees what he knows is a ghost leaving his family's altar room. He continues to see the ghost child at school and is surprised when his best friend insists this child isn't a ghost but has in fact always been in their class. So begins a ghost adventure story. Not the bump-in-night, headless horseman kind but one fully rooted in its Japanese soil. Kazu lives on Kimyō Temple Alley, a name that roughly translates to the street where the dead return to life. Kazu and his best friend set off on a journey to discover the truth. Along the way they run into obstacles such as older members of their community who want the past to remain the past. But throughout it all, they show resilience in the face of all the challenges.

### **Ikenga**

The ghost of Nnamdi's murdered father (the police chief of Kaleria, Nigeria) returns all-too-briefly to speak with Nnamdi. Through this conversation, Nnamdi comes into possession of the Ikenga, a magical statue that can transform Nnamdi into a man with great strength. Tapping into Nigerian myth and melding it with comic book lore, Nnamdi's story is both an origin story of a hero but also the story of a young individual trying to manage their emotions given extreme circumstances. This is a story steeped in place: its Nigerian mythology and characters. Like the Incredible Hulk, the more Nnamdi transforms, the harder it becomes to control the rage. At first, he is celebrated in the media coverage for using his powers to tackle the criminals that are plaguing his

community but soon that coverage begins to change, and he is seen as a menace. Nnamdi and his friend work together to help rescue a kidnapped classmate and along the way work to solve the mystery of his father's murder. Like Temple Alley Summer, this is a ghost story and a mystery wrapped together with a hero's journey. As in all modern hero tales: with great power, comes great responsibility.

### **The Last Cuentista**

Haley's Comet is coming. The year is 2061 and Petra Peña loves her grandmother and her cuentos. But a solar flare has set Haley's Comet off its historical, cosmic path and the comet is heading toward earth. This is a story that will make you fall in love with our planet and its stories. You can feel and smell the pinyon pines of New Mexico, the sterilized world of the spacecraft and the imagined world of Sagan. Beautifully blending Mexican American mythology with science fiction, this story will remind you of other stories you've heard or read but it's wholly its own story. Petra's eyesight is bad, so bad that her parents make her lie about it when they earn a spot on one of the few off-world ships that will save only a few hundred humans before the comet strikes Earth. This isn't a light story. In fact, it's quite heavy at times. But it's one of the most beautifully affirming books I've read in a long time. Petra's parents want her to be a scientist and as they set off on the 380-year journey through space toward a supposedly habitable planet (Sagan), Petra's parents download all of the science knowledge one could ever need into her brain. But Petra really wants to be a cuentista, a storyteller, like her grandmother and she has all of the world's stories downloaded into her brain as well. Like the other two books this is a ghost story as well as science fiction. In the end, however, like all books, it's ultimately a story, our story, first and foremost. A story of resilience, a story of hope, a story about finding connection with others.

### **Additional (and Optional) Summer Books**

For those of you looking for additional information books to read this summer, here are some additional titles to check out.

### **How to Find What You're Not Looking For** (Ages 8 – 12)

By Veera Hiranandani

It's 1967, and Ariel Goldberg's adored older sister, Leah, has fallen for Raj, an immigrant college student from Bombay.

Their parents disapprove: To them, it's bad enough that Leah wants to marry someone of a different race, even worse that he isn't Jewish. After Leah elopes without even a

letter to her sister, 11-year-old Ari is forced to reckon with a new understanding of her place within her family as the daughter who is now expected to take on the good-girl role. But that's not her only problem. Her parents dreamed of a better life, yet they can't afford to keep their beloved bakery running. Her mother sees Ari's struggle with dysgraphia as laziness, and as the only Jewish kid in sixth grade, she faces antisemitism that goes unrecognized by her teachers. Her strained relationship with her parents and their beliefs rings heartbreakingly true alongside her struggle to find her own voice through poetry. As she and her best friend set out in secret to find Leah and repair her broken family, Ari must decide what she believes is right in an increasingly tumultuous world.

**Bright** (10 - 13)

By Brigit Young

Whenever Mr. Garcia introduces a new math concept Marianne's sure she won't understand, her mind goes into "drift" mode, and now she is struggling and in danger of repeating the grade. On a whim, Marianne joins Quiz Quest, the trivia team Mr. Garcia runs, to earn extra credit—but she's shocked to learn that she not only has to participate, but sincerely help her team. In this pitch-perfect narrative that never moralizes, Marianne represents an often-overlooked type of character in middle-grade fiction: She's a student who's slipped under most radars, always struggling academically but usually able to scrape by. As Marianne studies intensively with her diverse team members, she begins to understand various ways people learn and recognize her own strengths in emotional intelligence and team building. Quiz Quest also makes her confront her usual coping strategy—acting "stupid," something she starts to recognize with discomfort that's often equated with more girly behavior—as deflection.

**Karthik Delivers** (10 - 14)

By Sheela Chari

Forced to deliver orders for his parents' struggling grocery store, pining after Juhi Shah, and harassed by neighborhood bullies, Karthik Raghavan can't think of a worse way to spend his vacation. But Shanthi, a Boston University graduate student and aspiring playwright with a weakness for the Raghavan family store's spicy chips, asks him to play the lead role in her play about the early life of Leonard Bernstein. Karthik starts to imagine himself as more than just a rising ninth grader: The more he learns about acting, the more he likes it, and it doesn't hurt that his stunning memory helps him quickly master his lines. Karthik isn't sure if he wants to grow up to be an actor, but he is sure that he wants to explore the possibility of doing so, a wish he's positive his parents

won't support. The more he rehearses, and the faster the summer rolls on, though, the more the people in Karthik's life surprise him—and the more motivated he feels to find himself.

**Jennifer Chan is Not Alone** (8 - 12)

By Tae Keller

Mallory Moss, a 12-year-old girl in a small Florida town, was the first to meet Jennifer Chan. Chinese American Jennifer moved from the Midwest into the house across the street during the summer. Mallory, who is Korean and implied White, knows that the new girl will have trouble once their predominantly White, Christian school begins: For one thing, Jennifer believes in aliens. Alternating between chapters labeled “Now” that are set in the present day and “Then,” describing events before Jennifer vanishes, the book dives right into the action as Jennifer goes missing in the first chapter. Texts start flying between Mallory and her friends as they worry about what Mallory calls “the Incident” with Jennifer that took place a few days before her disappearance. While the search for Jennifer intensifies, Mallory replays prior events with growing dread, looking for clues. The storyline slowly reveals cracks in friendships, with Mallory questioning her responsibility for many pieces of this puzzle.

**Out of Range** (9 - 12)

By Heidi Lang

The story opens with 14-year-old Abby, 12-year-old Emma, and 9-year-old Ollie on a disciplinary hike with their camp counselor. When the counselor leaves them to scout the trail, Abby decides to return to camp, with Emma and Ollie reluctantly following. Soon lost, the presumably White sisters flee from a forest fire down to a river, where Emma falls in and is swept away and Ollie vanishes trying to follow her, leaving Abby on her own. In the ensuing hours, Emma nearly drowns, Ollie injures her ankle, and Abby encounters a bear. Their harrowing, sparring, lost-in-the-woods present-day drama alternates with critical backstory from each sister's perspective. A recent family relocation from California to Utah has left Abby friendless; after joining the cross-country team, she abandons Emma. Equally displaced, Emma's hurt Abby has ditched her, while Ollie pretends to not mind moving but resents being ignored by both her sisters.

**Those Kids from Fawn Creek** (8 - 12)

By Erin Entrada Kelly

When new student Orchid Mason arrives—a rare occurrence in a town that hardly ever sees change—her stories of living in Paris and New York City seem too good to be true.

Painfully shy Dorothy and her best friend, Greyson, who doesn't fit his father's gender expectations, are enraptured by Orchid's stories of the world, which give them hope for something better than life in a place where Gimmerton Chemical is the main employer. But not everyone is as welcoming, and Janie, the queen of the social scene, plots to put the new girl in her place. Lessons on similes, metaphors, and poetry from Mr. Agosto, their English teacher whose family left Venezuela for Fawn Creek when he was small, are brilliantly used to enrich the characters' observations.

**Falling Short** (9 - 13)

By Ernesto Cisneros

Brand-new sixth graders Isaac Castillo and Marco Honeyman are more like family than friends. Despite their apparent differences—Isaac's a talented basketball player who struggles academically, while Marco's a supershort straight-A student who prefers chess to contact sports—they have been inseparable besties since kindergarten. Isaac knows how to talk Marco through his panic attacks and discussions of his absent father, and Marco calmly listens to Isaac's fears about his father's not-so-secret alcohol abuse. After a misunderstanding leads Isaac's former teammates to convince Marco, he could be their middle school basketball team's next Muggsy Bogues (the smallest player in NBA history), Marco and Isaac dedicate themselves to getting him a spot on the team, even though he's never played before.

**Little Monarchs** (Graphic Novel) (8 - 12)

By Jonathan Case

It's 2101, and most mammals have died from sun exposure—a fate the few remaining humans suffer if they don't live underground as Deepers. Some Deepers are friendly; others will take what they can get by any means necessary. Since Elvie's parents departed for Michoacán, Mexico, 8 years earlier in search of more monarch butterflies, ran into danger, and have not returned, 10-year-old Black science whiz Elvie has been cared for by her guardian, Flora, a White scientist. Flora and Elvie hope to make a vaccine that enables humans to tolerate sunlight. They struggle to find food, and Flora's awful cooking sometimes makes their foraged food inedible. Elvie's journals, which contain her homework, science notes, and sketches, trace their journey—including tracking their latitude and longitude daily—as they follow the amazing migration path of the monarchs, whose young have the ingredient necessary for making both the sun sickness antidote and the vaccine.

**Salt Magic** (Graphic Novel) (10 - 16)

By Hope Larson

Larson and Mock open this story with a kiss, as Elber, just returning to Gypsum, Oklahoma, from fighting in World War I, proposes to hometown girl Amelia. Elber's youngest sister, Vonceil, 11, watches in envy and disgust: Until Elber left two years ago, she had been his favorite companion. At the hastily arranged wedding, volatile Great-Uncle Dell accuses Amelia of being the white witch who killed his brother Jesse nearly 70 years earlier. Not long after these events, a mysterious woman dressed in white comes to town, accuses Elber of abandoning her in France, and magically turns the farm's fresh spring to salt water. Vonceil goes to Great-Uncle Dell for help, and he tells her a strange story that parallels an adventure that Vonceil then has with a sugar witch.

**In the Key of Us** (10 - 14)

By Mariama J. Lockington

Living in a new town with her Aunt Janine and Uncle Mark, who are expecting their first child, Andi feels like she's in the way of their growing family and has lost the magic she once felt when playing the trumpet. When her aunt and uncle suggest she attend a prestigious summer music camp—with uniforms, a no-cellphone policy, and mostly White campers—she's sure that going is a mistake. However, soon she finds friendship with Christopher Flores, a quirky Filipino American logophile who is harboring family secrets and trauma of his own. She also meets Zora Johnson, a flutist, and the only other Black girl there. Zora seemingly couldn't be more different: Her clothes are sparkly, and she's bubbly and groomed for perfection by her high-achieving parents. But beneath her extroverted veneer, Zora has her own dreams and desires that diverge from her parents' plans. Over time, the girls come to realize how much they have in common.

**The Last Mapmaker** (9 - 13)

By Christina Soontornvat

Twelve-year-old Sai is from the marshy Fens, an area whose residents are looked down upon. But with the right clothing and some quick thinking, she's earned an Assistantship with Paiyoon, the Mangkon Royal Navy's Master Mapmaker, at least until her 13th birthday, at which point, when she does not receive a lineal, or golden bracelet whose links represent the recipient's noble ancestors, her lowly status will be clear to everyone, including Paiyoon. Luckily for Sai, before her birthday Paiyoon secures a spot on a royal ship bound for the south—the direction of a mysterious, shadowy continent and rumored dragons—that is tasked with claiming treasure for the kingdom. Paiyoon takes Sai with him on a voyage that could finally allow her to move beyond the Fens,

but as she sails farther from home, she will have to decide whom to trust and what sacrifices she is willing to make for her future.

**Healer and Witch** (10 - 14)

By Nancy Werlin

Sylvie might be a witch. She has more than just a talent for healing people like her midwife mother, Jeanne; Sylvie possesses mysterious powers like those of her Grand-mère Sylvie. However, when her grandmother dies before she can train Sylvie to use her powers for good, Sylvie commits a grave error: Trying to relieve Jeanne of her grief, Sylvie accidentally removes all Jeanne's memories of both her mother and daughter. Now Sylvie is venturing beyond her small village of Bresnois to find a magical teacher to help her correct her mistake and heal Jeanne. When the farrier's son, Martin, insists on joining Sylvie on her quest, the two of them pose as siblings and set off, eventually reaching Lyon. Unfortunately for Sylvie, not everyone in the large towns and cities of Catholic early modern France appreciates a woman with unusual powers, and inquisitors pose a real threat. Sylvie and Martin need to work together to figure out whom they can trust and how they will eventually get home—if they return home at all.

**Star Child: A Biographical Constellation of Octavia Estelle Butler** (12 & Up)

By Ibi Zoboi

Weaving together quotes from Butler, prose passages of historical and biographical information, and her own original poetry, Zoboi explores the visionary speculative fiction author's early life. This ambitious experimental biography is at once a tribute from an adoring fan and an introduction to Butler's juvenilia and her childhood growing up as a shy Black child in postwar 1950s America. Each chapter covers a different aspect of, or key moment in, Butler's girlhood and adolescence, showing the challenges she overcame and the sustaining force of her imagination. Included are black-and-white childhood photos and a facsimile of a handwritten story about wild horses that Butler worked on as a child and illustrated herself.

**Dragon Pearl** (8 - 12)

By Yoon Ha Lee

Thirteen-year-old Min cannot believe her older brother, Jun, has deserted his Space Force post, as he's been accused of doing. Naturally, Min runs away from home to clear her brother's name. It's a Rick Riordan trademark to thrust mythological figures into new settings. Fans will breathlessly watch while fox-spirit Min charms her way onto a hijacked starship, ending up on her brother's military star cruiser on the way to the



lawless Ghost Sector. Lee has created an adrenaline-filled space opera with mythological creatures living alongside humans. Min and her family are gumiho, or shape-shifting foxes, but they present as human to hide their magical natures. She takes on the identity of Jang, a male cadet killed in battle, and enlists the aid of two other supernatural Space Force cadets: Haneul, a female dragon, and Sujin, a nonbinary goblin. Min is first and foremost a teenager on a mission and a magical being second.

***This is Our Rainbow*** (Anthology) (8 - 13)

Edited by Katherine Locke & Nicole Melleby

As the title suggests, this collection delivers a spectrum of diversity in representation of both personal identities and genre. Whether the stories contain overt fantasy (like dragons, spells, the undead, and time loops), subtle glimmers of the supernatural (like ghosts and magical letters), or realistic grounding in the everyday (like a new kitten, sports, and school), they capture with honesty and vulnerability the feelings that accompany events like the grief of losing a friend or facing rejection from a crush, the nervous thrill of new feelings for someone special, and the freeing, but sometimes still scary, power of self-discovery. Although most of the selections are prose, the anthology includes two comics and one story in verse.

**Non-Fiction**

***The Race of the Century*** (12 - 18)

By Neal Bascomb

In 1954, American Wes Santee, Australian John Landy, and Englishman Roger Bannister each independently endeavor to achieve the never-before-accomplished and seemingly superhuman goal of being the first person to ever beat the four-minute barrier that runners for decades had been unable to best. The three runners' grueling training regimes as well as the wins and defeats they experience along the road to breaking records are recounted in this riveting work. This is a who's who of iconic mid-century runners, the contemporaries of Santee, Landy, and Bannister who both challenge them and help them hone their techniques. Each race on the track becomes a race against time as the men strive to be the first and come ever closer to their goal. An overview of the history and science of running adds valuable context and emphasizes the historical significance of this feat. Heart-pumping, detailed play-by-plays of the tight races and



devastating losses that shape the runners during their pursuit of a faster mile will bring readers trackside.

### **How Does Space Work**

Editors Annie Moss, Hannah Westlake

A visual guide to space and the Universe for complete beginners to astronomy. The book starts with an explanation of our view of the Universe from Earth, then takes a tour of the Solar System, the stars and galaxies, and the furthest reaches of space. The last chapter looks at the technology we use to explore the Universe, from the International Space Station to Mars rovers and the new and revolutionary reusable rockets.