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Great Books for Late Summer Reading

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Great Books for Late Summer Reading

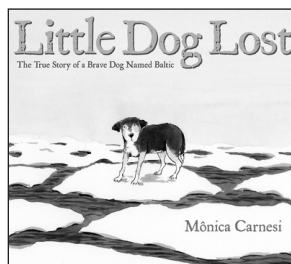
Terrell A. Young, Ed.D. & Barbara A. Ward, Ph.D.

For decades now, reading experts have expressed concern that the competence gained by struggling readers during the academic year is lost during the summer months. While academic enrichment and remediation programs can reduce that loss, one of the best practices to build better readers is by having them read during breaks from school. At least one study clearly supports this suggestion. In his study of 1,600 elementary students in the mid-Atlantic area, researcher James Kim (2009) found that regardless of previous achievement level or race or socioeconomic level, children who read more books performed better on reading comprehension tests in the fall than their peers who had read one or no books over the summer. As one result of this study, Kim and White (2008) and White and Kim (2008) offer helpful ways to keep youngsters reading during the summer. While some districts create a required summer list, others design incentive programs. Still others actually mail a packet of books to their students. Perhaps small book clubs initiated to stem the tide of the summer slump in reading could combine reading engaging trade books with young readers' social nature. Whatever you decide to do, don't let this be The Summer of No Reading. Hasten to a library or bookstore and pick out a book that will foster the love of reading in your household or community. Below we share some of our favorite books for summer.

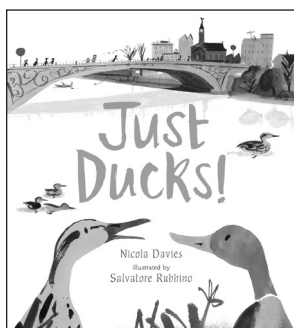
Grades K-3

Carnesi, Monica. (2012). *Little dog lost: The true story of a dog named Baltic*. Penguin Young Readers Group/Nancy Paulsen Books. 32 pages, \$15.99, ISBN: 978-0-399-25666-0.

Animal lovers will relish this true tale of a lucky dog whose story ends well. But it didn't start out that way, and it certainly could have had a tragic ending. Somehow, a dog, later named Baltic, ends up on a sheet of ice floating on the Vistula River in Poland. When passersby spot the dog, they mount a failed rescue effort, and the chunk of ice with Baltic on it flows swiftly to-



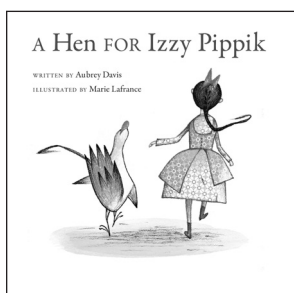
ward the Baltic Sea. Eventually, after many attempts during which Baltic ends up being dunked into the icy water, the crew of a nearby ship captures the plucky canine. One man even takes a small boat to Baltic's precarious perch and then brings him back to become a part of the ship's crew. Back matter includes information about this dog that somehow managed to survive his icy adventure. The endpapers feature a map showing Baltic's involuntary watery journey in 2010. Young readers may draw inspiration from the heroism of dog and humans and smile as they examine the watercolor, pen, and ink illustrations, all paying tribute to this plucky little canine that never gave up. Since no one ever came forward to claim Baltic, how he ended up on that ice remains a mystery. What isn't a mystery is the heroism of Baltic and his new crew.



Davies, Nicola. (2012). *Just ducks*. Illus. by Salvatore Rubbino. Candlewick. 32 pages, \$15.99, ISBN: 978-0-763-65936-3.

Luckily for her, a little girl wakes each morning to the sounds of the mallard ducks that live nearby. While some might find the sounds annoying, she finds comfort in their constancy, knowing that the ducks will awaken her each day. Each day she and her mother visit the park and admire the ducks' antics of the ducks while the constant utterances of the water-loving—and

sometimes loud—creatures weave across some of the pages in mixed media illustrations. In fact, some pages are literally filled with the ducks' "quack-quuuuack, quack-quaack-quack" (p. 6), as well as the girl's astute observations about each duck's "secret patch of blue" (p. 15), the different colorings of males and females, how they find food and what they do at night. Each page contains the main storyline as well as facts about ducks in a smaller font size. Back matter includes an index directing readers to specific pages to learn about duck facts and a note about the 120 different types of ducks that exist in the world. Clearly, both author and illustrator have spent a great deal of time observing ducks; that attention to detail is evident in this appealing title.



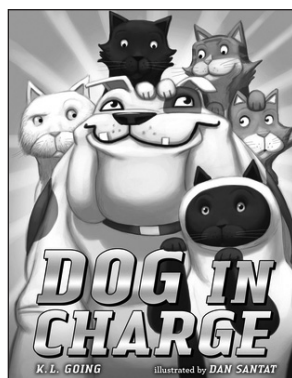
Davis, Aubrey. (2012). *A hen for Izzy Pippik*. Illus. by Marie LaFrance. Kids Can Press. 32 pages, \$16.95, ISBN: 978-1-554-53243-8.

Doing the right thing isn't easy, especially when it seems that everyone else is urging you to do something else. When a chicken with emerald green feathers ends

up on her doorstep, Shaina searches everywhere for its owner. After finding a damaged wooden crate on the street, Shaina figures that Izzy Pippik, the chicken's owner, must have lost her. Certain that he will return for the chicken, she refuses to allow anyone to harm the bird even as her mother eyes the bird for a possible meal. After the beautiful bird lays an egg, Shaina steadfastly maintains that the chicken and its chicks all belong to Izzy Pippik, who will come for them any day now. Eventually, the chicks become chickens, and the town is overrun with Izzy Pippik's chickens. In a strange twist of fate, the town becomes known because of those free-roaming chickens, and by the time Izzy Pippik finally does return, no one wants to give up the birds that have brought good times back to the town. In the end, Pippik does the right thing, rewarding Shaina's honesty, and the townspeople and chickens live happily ever after. This delightful story features a determined, honest girl intent on making sure those chickens come home to roost in the right place even while almost everyone tries to change her mind. The soft pencil and Photoshop colored illustrations are appealing as well.

Going, K. L. (2012). *Dog in charge*. Illus. by Dan Santat. Dial. 40 pages, \$16. 99, ISBN: 978-0-803-73479-1.

As is the case of many well-trained canines, Dog loves earning the praise his family showers on him whenever he does something good. Or maybe he simply loves the dog treats they give him as a reward. Things go awry when his family leaves him in charge while they go to the store. The family's five cats, sedately lined up on the couch as the door closes, disappear to explore the house, and things quickly go to the dogs, make that, cats. Expected to keep the cats in line, Dog is off on a mission to hunt them down, and as they run from him, Dog creates quite a mess, none of which would have occurred if he had let those sleeping cats lie. In the end, desperate to rein them in, he drags out a bag of cat treats, which he can't resist consuming. Exhausted from his labors and with a full tummy, he falls asleep. While he drowns, the cats come to his rescue and clean up everything. Pet lovers will adore this story since both the author and the illustrator clearly know the habits of felines and canines, especially when their human companions are away. The cartoon-like illustrations of cats hiding

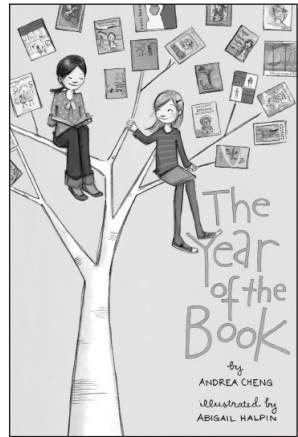


under the bed covers, leaping from clothes hampers, and then curling up next to Dog are delightful. Young readers will want to reread this one because they know that Dog actually isn't in charge of much of anything.

Grades 4-6

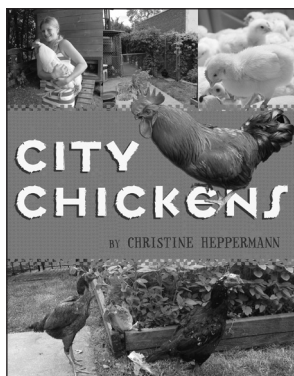
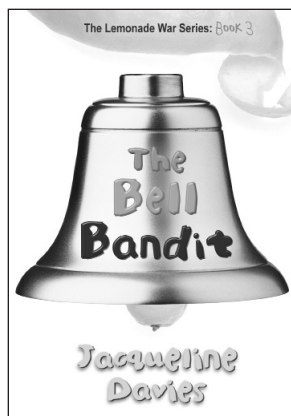
Cheng, Andrea. (2012). *The year of the book*.
 Illus. by Abigail Halpin. Houghton Mifflin Books for
 Children. 160 pages, \$15.99, ISBN: 978-0-547-68463-5.

Fourth grade is lonely for Anna Wang as she watches her friend Laura draw away from her, spending more time with bossy mean girl Allison who tells everyone what to do and makes fun of Anna, her personality and her homemade lunch sack. When Laura seems to be making efforts to rekindle their friendship, Anna isn't sure whether to trust her overtures. Instead, she finds companionship and insight into human nature in the children's classics she is reading. When Laura's home life leaves Laura vulnerable, Anna takes a risk and extends the hand of friendship to Laura just when she needs it most. The author portrays Anna lovingly, and readers will feel drawn to her, taking sustenance from her own family and the books she reads, but also longing for a physical friend. Her kindness is evident in the way she greets the school crossing guard, Ray, even visiting him when he has an accident. The added layer of Anna's initial reluctance to learn how to speak and write Chinese plus her refusal to believe that Laura might actually be interested in her culture make this book memorable and useful in classroom conversations about trust and acceptance. The title covers important themes subtly while portraying family dynamics accurately. If this is Anna's year of reading, it is also a year filled with self-discovery. The pen-and-ink illustrations have been colored digitally, making the book resemble those of Grace Lin. Readers can extend their enjoyment of the book by following the directions and visuals for several of the craft projects Anna undertakes.



Davies, Jacqueline. (2012). *The bell bandit*.
Houghton Mifflin Books for Children. 192 pages, \$15.99,
ISBN: 978-0-547-56737-2.

One of the strengths of the Lemonade War series is that the author's created siblings Jessie, 9, and Evan, 10, are as complex as real-life children, and the situations they face are equally multi-faceted. In this title, the Treskis have driven to the Lake Placid home of their grandmother during the Christmas holidays because their grandmother accidentally set the house on fire. Clearly, something is wrong, and once she returns home from the hospital, she is increasingly disoriented. Her periods of recognizing her beloved grandchildren and even her own whereabouts contrast vividly with periods of confusion during which she slips into the past. Jessie befriends a neighbor boy named Maxwell while the two of them try to figure out the whereabouts of the huge bell that usually sits atop Lovell's Hill. Jessie suspects the Sinclair boys of taking the bell, which has an important part in a New Year's Eve community ritual. While spying on the Sinclairs, they find them torturing a frog in the same way they have bullied Maxwell in the past. Evan comes to Jessie's defense against the boys while he is trying to find his grandmother who has wandered away from home. Strong writing, interesting characters, and two children whose lives are suddenly changed by events beyond their control make this title quite powerful. Readers may want to read the previous two titles before this one in order to understand the dynamics between Jessie and Evan better.



Heppermann, Christine. (2012). *City chickens*.
Houghton Mifflin Books for Children. 64 pages, \$16.99,
ISBN: 978-0-547-51830-5.

This short, informative title about Chicken Run Rescue, a Minneapolis shelter for abused and abandoned chickens founded by Mary Britton Clouse and her husband Bert, describes the pleasures and perils of life as a chicken today. The Clouses have turned their backyard and house into a comfortable place where chickens may

thrive until someone adopts them. Readers will regard chickens differently once they have read this book and may even consider creating their own nests for the feathery creatures often left behind by their former owners. As the author points out, those fluffy chicks hatched in many classrooms tend to be abandoned once they become hens and roosters. The photographs and accompanying stories of these chickens will bring smiles to many faces, and the fact that they have names such as Billiam and Roseman reminds readers that chickens, like other living creatures, have personalities and feelings and deserve to be handled with love and respect. One particularly interesting story involves 106 chicks found dumped in a ditch alongside a highway in 2008. The chicks had been removed from a biology lab and left outside in the cold. The lab didn't want them back since their removal would have affected the integrity of their experiment. Mary came to the rescue of the chicks, one of whom came to be called Billiam. The anecdotes about these feathered creatures and the kindness of their rescuers are sure to prompt empathy as well as gratitude for this couple determined to make a difference in the world. The author admits that she adopted two chickens of her own.



Jenkins, Steve. (2012). *The beetle book*.

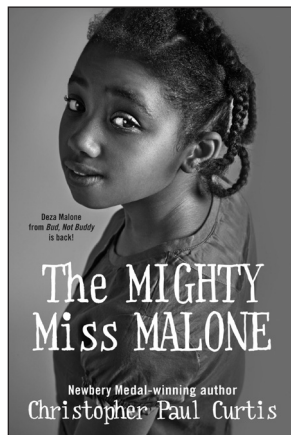
Houghton Mifflin Books for Children. 40 pages, \$16.99,
ISBN: 978-0-547-68084-2.

Steve Jenkins never fails to delight readers with his torn- and cut-paper collage illustrations of various inhabitants of the natural world. In this case, he focuses on beetles in a title sure to lure young readers because of the incredible detail and the ornate colors the illustrations contain. Readers are likely to return to its pages to gaze in amazement at the world's largest beetle, the titan beetle with its powerful jaws, and the colorful African goliath beetle. The aptly named violin beetle looks just like its namesake, but it emits an acid that won't leave any potential predator humming sweet strains. As with his other titles, Jenkins includes interesting beetle snippets, making readers able to supply trivia about beetles on demand. Beginning with two pages about the variations of beetles, the book explains what beetles are, what makes them special, and even solves the mystery of the sounds emitted by some beetles such as the Fijian long-horn beetle and the Madagascar hissing cockroach. This is another visually stunning book complemented with text that doesn't overwhelm young readers, making it an essential classroom purchase. An added bonus is that once readers discover Jenkins' books, they have a large collection of reading material from which to choose.

Grades 7-8

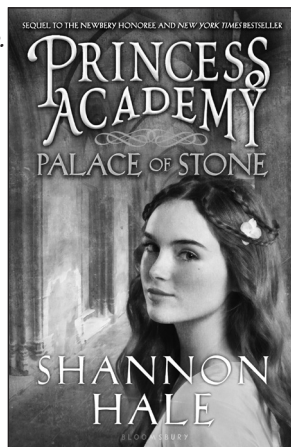
Curtis, Christopher Paul. (2012). *The Mighty Miss Malone*. Wendy Lamb/Random House. 307 pages, \$15.99, ISBN: 978-0-385-73491-2.

Curtis introduced readers to Miss Deza Malone in *Bud, Not Buddy* (Delacorte, 1999). Even though it is the middle of the Great Depression, Deza felt that her life was pretty good in Gary, Indiana. After all, she has loving parents, food to eat, the best teacher in the universe, and a first-rate best friend in Clarice Anne Johnson. As the smartest girl in her class, Deza loves school and is happy that her learning can continue when Mrs. Johnson asked the two friends to come for special summer tutoring. But things change and change quickly for the Malones. Her father is first hurt badly in a boating accident and then leaves for Michigan to find work, Deza's mother loses her job, and soon Deza, her brother Jimmie, and her mother are headed to Michigan to find her father, work, and food. Their journey introduced them to hardship after hardship, struggle after struggle, and disappointment after disappointment. Deza and her mother persevere and hope that one day their family will be reunited.



Hale, Shannon. (2012). *Princess Academy: Palace of Stone*. Bloomsbury. 336 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-1-59990-873-1.

Miri and the other Mount Eskel Princess Academy girls are invited to spend a year in Asland where they can help Britta prepare for her royal wedding. Yet, the invitation offers even more, for each girl has other opportunities presented to her. For Miri, it is the opportunity to attend the university, Queens Castle, where she can quench her thirst for learning and, one day, become a teacher in Mount Eskel. To add to her joy, Peder is also going to Asland to be an apprentice to a master stone carver. While studying at Queens Castle, Miri learns much more than rhetoric and ethics—she learns how one's words could be used to cause harm to loved ones, how those who appear to be friends are not always so, and how a few good people working together can create great



good to benefit many. While Asland is filled with cries for a revolution, Miri and her friends from Mount Eskel experience their own, smaller individual revolutions. Once again, Shannon Hale weaves a story that does not disappoint her readers.

Lawson, Julie. (2012). *Ghosts of the Titanic*.

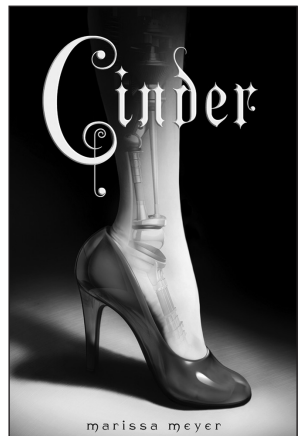
Holiday House. 169 pages, \$16.95, ISBN: 978-0-8234-2423-8.

Twelve-year-old Kevin is the class clown and is always in trouble at school with his teachers and at home with his father. Kevin's father wants him to excel at soccer like his older sister Courtney, but Kevin's passion is swimming. A school unit on the Titanic and a trip to see a museum exhibit have captured Kevin's attention and whetted his appetite to learn more about the famous ship and its passengers. The family travels from their home in Victoria, British Columbia to Shearwater Point, Nova Scotia after Kevin's father mysteriously inherits seafront property from a stranger. Unbeknownst to Kevin, Halifax is the final resting place of 150 people who perished when the grand ship sank. Kevin's story becomes intermeshed with the stories of seventeen-year-old Angus Seaton, a sailor charged with retrieving the bodies and personal effects of Titanic victims, and a seventeen-year-old girl's haunting pleas for help.



Meyer, Marissa. (2012). *Cinder*. Feiwei and Friends/Macmillan. 400 pages, \$17.99, ISBN: 978-0-312-64189-4.

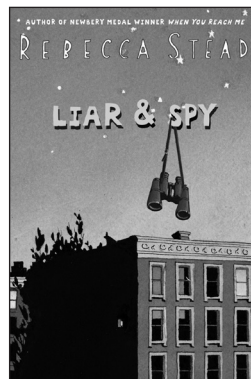
Marissa Meyer's science fiction transformation of the "Cinderella" story introduces a Chinese cyborg, Linh Mei, or Cinder, as her friends know her. Being a cyborg earns Cinder second-class status from most people in New Beijing as well as the disdain of her stepmother. Yet, all of the technology pulsing throughout her body has some obvious benefits. For instance, she can easily detect someone's dishonesty, and she has the reputation of being the best mechanic in New Beijing. This reputation actually attracts a prince to her in hopes that she can repair his android before the annual ball. When the Letumosis pandemic threatens her stepsister's life, Cinder is "volunteered" for plague research that no one has ever survived. It is during this testing that Cinder learns she is



more than just a cyborg. While readers will relish the connections between this modern twist of a well-known story, they will also delight in the unique perspective the author takes.

Stead, Rebecca. (2012). *Liar & Spy*. Wendy Lamb/Random House. 192 pages, \$15.99, ISBN: 978-0-385-73743-2.

Georges experiences many changes when his father loses his job; his mother begins to work extra shifts at the hospital; his former best friend Jason drops him to hang with the cool kids at school; Dallas, the local bully, chooses him as his new target; and his family must sell their beloved home and move into an apartment. At the apartment complex, Georges meets Safer who trains him to become a spy and becomes his only friend. Georges is assigned to carefully observe the comings and goings of one of the tenants. As Safer asks more and more of him, Georges wonders how far is too far to go for your only friend? Rebecca Stead's *Liar & Spy* is full of surprises as well as life-changing questions such as this one.



Grades 9-12

Anthony, Julie. (2012). *Chopsticks*. Illus. by Rodrigo Corral. Razorbill. 304 pages, \$19.99, ISBN: 978-1-595-14435-5.

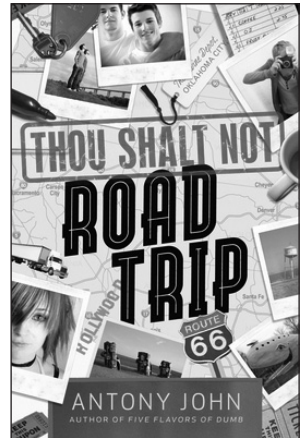
The couple happily embracing on the cover might fool readers into thinking this is just another sweet teen romance. While there is a romance at its heart, the title also explores the thin, sometimes nonexistent line between sanity and insanity. The story begins with the disappearance of piano prodigy Gloria Fleming from a New York rest facility and then moves backward in time to offer clues to how things went so wrong for this talented pianist. After wowing New York and European audiences on her tour, Gloria inexplicably begins playing “Chopsticks,” a sign that she is troubled. On one hand, blame could be placed on Gloria’s father who seems determined to make his daughter a star. Perhaps it could be laid at the hands of Francisco, a boy from Argentina who moves next door to the



Flemings. Or perhaps Gloria's downward spiral began with the death of her mother many years before. The story is told visually with only scraps of text, newspaper clippings, phone text messages, IM messages, pages from *The Bell Jar*, and You-Tube links, all hints about Gloria's whereabouts. At first fairly innocuous, the images become increasingly disturbing, offering clues to the madness that seems to fill the pages and perhaps Gloria's own life. Teen readers will love the visual clues, the lovers' stolen hours, and the uncertainty of what they just read or experienced. At times it seems as though the lines between the identities of Gloria and Francisco are completely blurred. This highly original visual and textual romp through someone's life feels voyeuristic and requires a reread to see what just happened.

John, Antony. (2012). *Thou shalt not road trip*. Dial. 336 pages, \$16.99, ISBN: 978-0-803-73434-0.

Sixteen-year-old Luke's publisher sends him on a publicity tour when the book he wrote chronicling his spiritual journey starts selling and gaining attention. Due to a scheduling glitch, Matt, Luke's older brother, will be responsible for getting him to the book signing venues on time, but Matt has his own agenda involving his girlfriend Alex. Matt rents a Hummer and heads across the country along Route 66. The fact that Fran, a girl on whom Luke once had a crush, comes along adds to the complications. The descriptions of the book signings during which Luke must field difficult questions and sign until his arm aches are spot-on as are the complaints Luke utters throughout the scenic detours on which Matt takes his fellow passengers. Luke is portrayed realistically, floundering from one mistake to another, disappointing and betraying himself and others. Luke is, after all, a seeker, and if he isn't sure exactly what he believes or how firm that belief may be, his seeking is typical of an adolescent. Threaded through the storyline is the very real consideration of how much an author owes to his/her readers, an issue worth pondering in this time in which authors have written partially fictionalized memoirs. Also, worth noting is the media frenzy that ensues once Luke is found to be less than forthright about his book and some of the events occurring on the trip. Once again, readers will be astonished at how quickly the media—or social network, for that matter—can create or destroy some-



one's image. Although the problems Luke is facing seem resolved rather quickly in the end, this title is thoughtful and encourages readers to reflect on their own actions and beliefs. While tackling serious issues, this title does so with humor and moments of bonding between siblings and friends.

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About the Authors

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