

Recommended Books for Incoming 6th Graders

(The following reviews are from titlewave.com and amazon.com)

Waiting for Normal (Connor):

A heroine with spunk and spirit offers an inspiring lesson in perseverance and hope. When a young girl's parents divorce, she's separated from her stepfather and her two young half-sisters. Life is far from normal as Addie and her irresponsible mother settle into a tiny trailer on the corner of an urban intersection. Addie admits, "I'm good at getting used to things-- been doing it all my life," and immediately makes a cozy nest for herself in the trailer. She optimistically starts sixth grade, makes friends, meets her neighbors and keeps house on a shoestring while her unpredictable mother spends days sleeping and nights chatting on the Internet. Challenged by dyslexia, Addie works extra hard to succeed in school and learn her flute part in the orchestra. Yearning for a "normal" life, Addie's shaken when her stepfather and sisters move away leaving her on her own with her moody mother who disappears for days. Disappointed and alone, Addie realistically makes the best of a bad situation. In the end, her positive attitude and ability to find happiness make all the difference as she patiently waits for "normal." First-rate.

The Sisters Grimm Series (Buckley):

Buckley has created a world in which humans and fairy-tale creatures live side-by-side in rural New York in an uneasy alliance. Brought here by Wilhelm Grimm in an attempt to save them, the Everafters are now kept in check by the man's descendants. Enter Sabrina and Daphne Grimm, two sisters seemingly abandoned by their parents, who have been brought to live with a grandmother whom they thought was dead. Heartbroken and wary, the girls are immediately swept up in a mystery that includes giants, pixies, fairies, and witches. Readers well grounded in their fairy tales will get the most pleasure from recognizing the characters- Prince Charming, Jack-the-Giant-Killer, the Three Pigs, the Magic Mirror, and more-but the fast pace, sly humor, and cleverly inserted vocabulary lessons will entertain even those who are meeting the characters for the first time. Softly rounded, black-and-white illustrations and old-fashioned silhouettes at the chapter headings complete the first-rate design of this madcap adventure.

Written in Bone (Walker)

In 2005, scientists from the Smithsonian Institution unearthed the first of several gravesites found at Jamestown, Virginia. This carefully written and attractive book chronicles the fascinating scientific procedures used to meticulously and painstakingly excavate this archeological dig, and others nearby. Using the principles of forensic anthropology, archeologists discovered not only the scientific details of the Colonists' lives, but information that helped answer the author's driving questions. Part science, part history book, this title presents newly discovered facts. From information gleaned from the skeletons, the reader learns about the daily life of several inhabitants. The book includes numerous well-captioned color photographs, diagrams, and maps to provide an excellent visual overview. Anyone enamored by the science involved in the currently popular crime forensic television programs will appreciate this book as it describes how these methods are used to uncover historical facts. An intriguing high-interest read, it also provides sound facts and documentation for the serious young researcher. The book includes a substantial amount of source notes, a detailed

timeline, a bibliography of books, articles and interviews, suggestions for further reading, and websites.

Where the Mountain Meets the Moon (Lin):

Minli is a high-spirited, adventurous young girl who lives in a tiny, poor village in the corner of Fruitless Mountain and the Jade River. Though weary from long hours in the muddy rice fields, Minli's father entertains her each evening with fantastic tales of dragons, treasures, and ancient times when Fruitless Mountain was lush and green. The stories do more than entertain Minli—they fuel her desire to seek a better life for her family. Inspired by Chinese folk tales, author/illustrator Grace Lin brilliantly weaves tales within a tale as she takes Minli on the adventure of a lifetime beginning with magical goldfish and ending with an encounter with the Old Man of the Moon. Readers will love this extraordinary tale with its fanciful characters, colorful illustrations, and the hopes and dreams of a determined and courageous young girl.

Anything But Typical (Basking):

People say 12-year-old Jason Blake is weird. He blinks his eyes oddly and flaps his hands, his fingers jerking "like insects stuck on a string." Jason is autistic. He hates art class and PE, where there's too much space and unorganized time, but he feels at home on his computer, writing stories on the Storyboard website. When he meets a fellow writer named Rebecca online and has the chance to meet her in person at a Storyboard conference, he panics. What will happen to their comfortable online relationship when she meets him? Baskin's delineation of an autistic boy's world is brilliant, putting readers into Jason's mind, showing how he sees the world, understands how his parents feel about him, frets about fitting in and yearns to find at least one friend in the world. Readers even get some tips about writing short stories as they observe Jason composing his way to self-acceptance.

Mudshark (Paulsen):

Without even trying, Mudshark is a very cool 12-year-old (he acquired his nickname after wowing his peers with lightning-speed reflexes during a game of Death Ball ("a kind of soccer mixed with football and wrestling and rugby and mudfighting")). He is mentally quick as well: his powers of observation and photographic memory enable him to tell kids where to find misplaced possessions. But when the school librarian acquires an apparently psychic parrot, Mudshark's role is threatened. This, he reluctantly admits, "rattled his cool," and he is determined to discover the whereabouts of the missing blackboard erasers before the parrot does, a feat that entails crafty and comical maneuverings. Additional diversions (chapters open with dispatches from the principal, offering updates on a loose gerbil and an escalating crisis in the faculty restroom) keep this compact story quick and light. Yet three-time Newbery Honor author Paulsen (Hatchet) delves deeper, shaping Mudshark as a credible and compassionate protagonist, despite his improbable abilities and the even more improbable situations that arise at his off-kilter school. Which makes this clever novel all the cooler.

Extra Credit (Clements):

A forced pen-pal exchange turns into an opportunity for real communication between Illinois sixth-grader Abby Carson and Sadeed Bayat, the best English-language student in his Afghan village. When Abby's first letter arrives in Bahar-Lan, 11-year-old Sadeed is asked by the elders to compose his sister Amira's reply; it isn't proper for a boy and girl to correspond with one another. But soon Sadeed can't resist telling Abby that it is he who has been writing to her.

The third-person narrative alternates points of view, allowing for inclusion of intriguing details of both lives. Never a scholar, Abby prefers the woods behind her family's farm and the climbing wall in her school; in the afternoons, Sadeed works in his father's grain shop. In spite of their differences, Abby and Sadeed connect through their imaginations, and their earlier readings of *Frog and Toad Are Friends*. They learn, as Abby reports, that "people are simple, but the stuff going on around them can get complicated." Full-page pencil illustrations throughout add to the book's appeal. Clements offers readers an engaging and realistic school story and provides an evenhanded comparison between a Midwestern girl's lifestyle and a culture currently in the news.

Almost Astronauts (Stone):

"Space gals. Astronettes. Astrodolls . . . Who do these women think they are?" The media mocked them. Male astronauts did not want them, and neither did then vice-president Lyndon Johnson. If they were to let women into the space program, blacks and other minorities would be next. Nearly 20 years before the U.S. officially admitted women into the astronaut program, 13 women, known as the Mercury 13, fought for the right to soar into space. This dramatic, large-size photo-essay covers their stories, along with the exciting politics of the women's liberation struggle in the 1950s and '60s ("What is a woman's place?") and the breakthrough science and technology surrounding space exploration, including details of the would-be astronauts' tests and training. The chatty, immediate style ("Picture this") and full-page photos make for a fast read, and the crucial civil-rights history will stay with readers.

Neil Armstrong is My Uncle and Other Lies Muscle Man McGinty Told Me (Marino):

It is rare to have a story told with sympathy from the viewpoint of a bully. This debut novel, set in upstate New York in the summer of 1969, does just that with wit and a light touch that never denies the story's sorrows. Tammy, 10, is stuck at home with her cold parents while her brother is away in Vietnam. In her first-person narrative, she reveals the hurt and loneliness that fuel her anger as she targets the new, skinny kid, Douglas, who has moved into a foster home on the block. She mocks him for telling wild lies: he is training for the Olympics; his uncle is Neil Armstrong, about to walk on the moon; and more. The other kids, including the snotty girls from the loving family next door, let him be. Why is Tammy so furious? Gradually the reader sees that she blames Douglas for the disappearance of her beloved only friend, a foster kid who moved away without telling Tammy why and where she was going; Douglas is a bit too nice, but he messes up when he tries to help Tammy, and many readers will recognize the muddled and caring gestures among friends and enemies.

Day of the Pelican (Paterson):

Meli and her family are minority Albanians living in Serbian-controlled Kosovo in 1998. After her brother is beaten by Serbian police, the family flees then immigrates to America. Paterson conveys their struggles first to survive, then to fit in. The theme of what people do with the hatred they feel toward those who have mistreated them is the novel's great strength.

Recommended Books for Incoming 7th Graders

(The following reviews are from titlewave.com and amazon.com)

Bone Graphic Series (Smith):

The nine-volume Bone graphic novel series was the toast of the comics world when it was published by Smith's own Cartoon Books beginning in the early 1990s; in this first volume of Scholastic's new edition, the original b&w art has been beautifully converted into color. Smith's epic concerns three blobby creatures who have stumbled into a valley full of monsters, magic, farmers, an exiled princess and a huge, cynical dragon. The story is something like a Chuck Jones version of The Lord of the Rings: hilarious and action-packed, but rarely losing track of its darker subtext about power and evil. The first volume is the most lighthearted of the bunch featuring some of the wittiest writing of any children's literature in recent memory. It also introduces the Bone cast's unforgettable supporting characters: the leathery, tough-as-nails, racing-cow-breeding Gran'ma Ben; the carnivorous but quiche-loving "rat creatures"; a spunky trio of baby opossums; and Ted the Bug, whose minimalist appearance (a tiny semicircle) exemplifies Smith's gift for less-is-more cartooning. This is first-class kid lit: exciting, funny, scary and resonant enough that it will stick with readers for a long time.

Maximum Ride Series (Patterson):

A group of genetically enhanced kids who can fly and have other unique talents are on the run from part-human, part-wolf predators called Erasers in this exciting SF thriller that's not wholly original but is still a compelling read. Max, 14, and her adopted family—Fang and Iggy, both 13, Nudge, 11, Gazzy, 8, and Angel, 6—were all created as experiments in a lab called the School. Jeb, a sympathetic scientist, helped them escape and, since then, they've been living on their own. The Erasers have orders to kill them so the world will never find out they exist. Max's old childhood friend, Ari, now an Eraser leader, tracks them down, kidnaps Angel, and transports her back to the School to live like a lab rat again. The youngsters are forced to use their special talents to rescue her as they attempt to learn about their pasts and their destinies. The novel ends with the promise that this journey will continue in the sequel.

The Hunger Games Series (Collins):

In the ruins of a place once known as North America lies the nation of Panem, a shining Capitol surrounded by twelve outlying districts. The Capitol is harsh and cruel and keeps the districts in line by forcing them all to send one boy and one girl between the ages of twelve and eighteen to participate in the annual Hunger Games, a fight to the death on live TV. Sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen, who lives alone with her mother and younger sister, regards it as a death sentence when she is forced to represent her district in the Games. But Katniss has been close to dead before -- and survival.

Twilight Series (Meyer):

Headstrong, sun-loving, 17-year-old Bella declines her mom's invitation to move to Florida, and instead reluctantly opts to move to her dad's cabin in the dreary, rainy town of Forks, WA. She becomes intrigued with Edward Cullen, a distant, stylish, and disarmingly handsome senior, who is also a vampire. When he reveals that his specific clan hunts wildlife instead of humans, Bella deduces that she is safe from his blood-sucking instincts and therefore free to fall hopelessly in love with him. The feeling is mutual, and the resulting volatile romance

smolders as they attempt to hide Edward's identity from her family and the rest of the school. Meyer adds an eerie new twist to the mismatched, star-crossed lovers theme: predator falls for prey, human falls for vampire. This tension strips away any pretense readers may have about the everyday teen romance novel, and kissing, touching, and talking take on an entirely new meaning when one small mistake could be life-threatening. Bella and Edward's struggle to make their relationship work becomes a struggle for survival, especially when vampires from an outside clan infiltrate the Cullen territory and head straight for her. As a result, the novel's danger-factor skyrockets as the excitement of secret love and hushed affection morphs into a terrifying race to stay alive. Realistic, subtle, succinct, and easy to follow, *Twilight* will have readers dying to sink their teeth into it.

Firegirl (Abbott):

Tom, a seventh grader, tells about the arrival of Jessica, a new student who was badly burned in a fire and is attending St. Catherine's while she gets treatments at a local hospital. The students in Tom's class are afraid of her because of her appearance but little by little he develops a friendship with her that changes his life. Through realistic settings and dialogue, and believable characters, readers will be able to relate to the social dynamics of these adolescents who are trying to handle a difficult situation. The students who shy away from Jessica are at a loss as to what to say. Tom begins to look beyond her exterior and realizes that his life will not be the same after she leaves, just three weeks later. The theme of acceptance is presented in a touching story of friendship that is easy to read yet hard to forget.

The Chronicles of Vladimir Tod (Brewer):

Junior high really sucks for thirteen-year-old Vladimir Tod. Bullies harass him, the principal is dogging him, and the girl he likes prefers his best friend. Oh, and Vlad has a secret: his mother was human, but his father was a vampire. With no idea of the extent of his powers, Vlad struggles daily with his blood cravings and his enlarged fangs. When a substitute teacher begins to question him a little too closely, Vlad worries that his cover is about to be blown. But then he faces a much bigger problem: he's being hunted by a vampire killer.

The Clique Series (Harrison):

Massie Block is happily ruling her fabulous clique at her exclusive Westchester middle school when LBR (Loser Beyond Repair) Claire Lyons, the new girl, has the nerve to show up at OCD wearing Keds and two-year old GAP overalls. She is clearly not Pretty Committee material, and Massie, Alicia, Dylan and Kirsten have no problem letting everyone know it. Unfortunately Claire's family is staying in the guesthouse on Massie's family's huge estate while they look for a new home, and the girls are stuck with each other. Claire's future looks worse than a bad Prada knockoff. But with a little luck and a lot of scheming, Claire might just come up smelling like Chanel Mademoiselle....

Artemis Fowl Series (Colfer):

Twelve-year-old genius Artemis Fowl decides to reinvigorate his family fortunes by kidnapping a fairy and demanding its gold. Having obtained and decoded the Book, a tome containing all of the fairies' secrets, Artemis captures an elf named Holly Short and holds her captive at his family mansion in Ireland. However, he hasn't reckoned on the resources and cunning of the LEPrecon Unit, an elite branch of the fairy police force, whose members will stop at nothing to rescue Captain Short. It seems that the wicked ways of the Mud People

(humans) have driven most of the magical creatures underground, where a gritty, urban fairy civilization is flourishing. The fairy characters are mouthy and eccentric, but Artemis is too stiff and enigmatic to be interesting; the story bogs down when the focus is on him. The combination of choppy sentences and ornate language will appeal to some readers, although not necessarily to Harry Potter fans; the emphasis here is more on action (some of it gory), technology, and deadpan humor than on magic, and only one character (Artemis) is a child.

The Last Song (Sparks)

Seventeen year old Veronica "Ronnie" Miller's life was turned upside-down when her parents divorced and her father moved from New York City to Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina. Three years later, she remains angry and alienated from her parents, especially her father...until her mother decides it would be in everyone's best interest if she spent the summer in Wilmington with him. Ronnie's father, a former concert pianist and teacher, is living a quiet life in the beach town, immersed in creating a work of art that will become the centerpiece of a local church. The tale that unfolds is an unforgettable story of love on many levels--first love, love between parents and children -- that demonstrates, as only a Nicholas Sparks novel can, the many ways that love can break our hearts...and heal them.

Recommended Books for Incoming 8th Graders

(The following reviews are from titlewave.com and amazon.com)

The Compound (Bodeen):

A teen questions the world his father has created and finds some shocking answers. Fifteen-year-old Eli and his family live in the Compound, a state-of-the-art underground shelter designed by their billionaire father to withstand a nuclear attack and protect them for the "next fifteen years in luxurious comfort." After six years of isolation, Eli still thinks about his twin brother Eddy and his grandmother, who were "accidentally" left behind the fateful night his father herded everyone else into the Compound and locked the door. Eli wonders why his mother keeps producing children, why his father stays in his locked study and why certain supplies are running out. When Eli unexpectedly connects to the Internet, he discovers his father has sealed them away from the real world. As his awareness of reality grows, Eli matures from a callow kid into a caring person who knows it's up to him to save his family. Suspenseful and riveting, this debut novel raises serious issues about what it means to survive.

Dairy Queen (Murdock):

Finally, a football book a girl can love. With wry, self-deprecating wit, D.J. Schwenk narrates this story of her 15th summer. With her older brothers at college on football scholarships, and her father nursing a bad hip, most of the grueling work necessary to keep a small dairy farm running has fallen on D.J.'s broad shoulders. She had to quit basketball halfway through the season, and neglecting her homework earned her an F in sophomore English. Now, in addition to mucking out the barn and bringing in the hay, a family friend who coaches the rival high school's football team, has asked D.J. to train his talented but lazy starting quarterback, Brian Nelson. Brian may have brains, money and looks, but he's going to learn the meaning of hard work from D.J. And he, in turn, will teach D.J. how to communicate. This is Romeo and Juliet in Wisconsin, with cows, but it's more comic than tragic. Teens will readily identify with D.J.'s struggle to articulate her feelings of anger, confusion and romance within a family where silent, stalwart self-reliance is valued above all else. Murdock takes no cheap shots; every character she creates is empathetic: the electively mute younger brother, Curtis, the jaded best friend, Amber, even cranky, cold Dad, who finds his place (in the kitchen) when injury sidelines him. With humor, sports action and intelligence abundant, this tale has something for everyone.

Ender's Game (Card):

Young Ender Wiggin may prove to be the military genius Earth needs to fight a desperate battle against a deadly alien race that will determine the future of the human race. Winner of both the Hugo and Nebula awards for excellence in science fiction.

The Hunger Games Series (Collins):

In the ruins of a place once known as North America lies the nation of Panem, a shining Capitol surrounded by twelve outlying districts. The Capitol is harsh and cruel and keeps the districts in line by forcing them all to send one boy and one girl between the ages of twelve and eighteen to participate in the annual Hunger Games, a fight to the death on live TV. Sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen, who lives alone with her mother and younger sister,

regards it as a death sentence when she is forced to represent her district in the Games. But Katniss has been close to dead before -- and survival.

The Orange Houses (Griffin):

This brutally realistic novel follows the fortunes of three young people on the fringes of their Bronx housing project: a hearing-impaired student, an illegal immigrant artist, and a tortured veteran. Hints of the violence to come appear from the very first page; nonetheless, readers will still be surprised by the disturbing but absorbing novel's relentlessly intense events.

Twilight Series (Meyer):

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Life As We Knew It Series (Pfeffer):

Pfeffer tones down the terror, but otherwise crafts a frighteningly plausible account of the local effects of a near-future worldwide catastrophe. The prospect of an asteroid hitting the Moon is just a mildly interesting news item to Pennsylvania teenager Miranda, for whom a date for the prom and the personality changes in her born-again friend, Megan, are more immediate concerns. Her priorities undergo a radical change, however, when that collision shifts the Moon into a closer orbit, causing violent earthquakes, massive tsunamis, millions of deaths, and an upsurge in volcanism. Thanks to frantic preparations by her quick-thinking mother, Miranda's family is in better shape than many as utilities and public services break down in stages, wild storms bring extremes of temperature, and outbreaks of disease turn the hospital into a dead zone. In Miranda's day-by-day journal entries, however, Pfeffer keeps nearly all of the death and explicit violence offstage, focusing instead on the stresses of spending months huddled in increasingly confined quarters, watching supplies dwindle, and wondering whether there will be any future to make the effort worthwhile.

Harry Potter Series (Rowling):

A series of seven fantasy novels, these books chronicle the adventures of the adolescent wizard Harry Potter and his best friends, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, all of whom are students at Hogswarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The main story arc concerns Harry's quandary involving the evil wizard, lord Voldemort, who killed Harry's parents in his

quest to conquer the wizarding world and subjugate non-magical people (muggles). Winner of numerous awards.