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# Cambium

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INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM FROM THE ARBOR SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES

## A LITERATE LIFE

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What joy to be a child at the start of summer, endless days stretching ahead with little responsibility. Perhaps unique to childhood is the potential to fill days with uninhibited reading. I remember so clearly discovering the row of Frank Baum books at the library and curling up high in my neighbor's tree, hidden for hours to read. With children of my own I relish the opportunity to usher them into the joyous world of books.

Reading with children is a culture complete with its own set of rituals. Perhaps the simplest and most common ritual is reading aloud, often before bed. Such a pleasure, and ample research shows that reading aloud has a host of positive benefits. From the board books we read to infants (which they alternately chewed and read, either fine so long as they developed a love of books) to adult classics such as *The Hobbit* and adventures of Sherlock Holmes, we try to read aloud to all three of our children every night. This juggling act must involve material that is appropriately challenging to each. What is good for the fifth grader may not be appropriate for the five-year-old.

One eagerly anticipated ritual is the arrival of Arbor School's summer reading list. Two or three pages of age-appropriate books vetted by our librarian are the key to a treasure. It is reminiscent of the thrill of getting a syllabus for a new college course, a roadmap into unknown territory. The day it arrives is like a holiday. We pull forgotten favorites off our bookshelves and place

dozens of new books on hold at the local library. Each girl gets a basketful.

Reading permeates our day. We begin with reading the newspaper and end with reading books in bed. (I have always secretly wished I lived in the physicist Stephen Hawking's childhood home. There, everyone would bring a book to the dinner table, even when they had company.) In our house, books exist in every room. Such liberal access, whether at home or at the library, allows children to roam their own imaginations. Once they become capable readers, their wanderings take them to surprising places. Claire, 11, recently chose William Burroughs's *This New Ocean* and read 723 pages on the history of the Apollo space program. She describes our bookshelves: "Shelves down low are devoted to picture books and board books... next up are the chapter books for older kids and reading aloud... highest are the novels and old books, books written by my great-grandmother, and used mostly by adults. These are their bedtime books." Books from my childhood mingle with books from my husband's childhood and the books of our children. Reading is a family affair.

Nine-year-old Celeste and I just began to read a 99-year-old edition of *The Secret Garden* given to me by my grandmother, and to her by her grandmother. I am reminded that, like the books themselves, a love of reading is handed down through the generations.

— Sarah Mock, Arbor parent



ARBOR SCHOOL  
OF ARTS & SCIENCES

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# WINDOWS, MIRRORS, & ZEITGEIST

## BUILDING SUMMER READING LISTS

by Maureen Milton, Librarian and Arbor parent

Where I live, we have a rule: the house must always weigh the same. To wit, if our daughter acquires a new skirt or a sparkly, decorative hair ornament, a like item must be relinquished to the “pitch pile.” Likewise, if the man cave in the basement mysteriously sprouts a new pair of skis or tent or the most ineluctably irresistible new technology in outback water purification, a similar (and yet altogether outdated and different) article must move on.

Fortunately, at Arbor I can ignore such draconian measures when it comes to Summer Reading Lists. We portray them as “some of the best literature available for children to read... as a summer gift to your family.” I compose them as I might compose a fantasy list of interesting guests for a cocktail party. My hope is that when children and their families receive the lists they might meet a number of characters:



**The Usual Suspects:** Classics; Western European or North American authors. I try to time the classics so that they arrive at just the right time. Elizabeth Enright was a genius and remains a great read-aloud for every age, but she is best read to one’s Intermediate (4th-5th grade) self, as is *Johnny Tremain*, *The BFG*, and *The Wheel on the School*. The writing and the subject matter in such titles as *Treasure Island*, *Never Cry Wolf*, or *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* seem to better resonate with one’s Senior (6th-8th grade) self.

**Curricular Connections:** Ancient Greeks; Folk & Fairy & Tall Tales; Historical Fiction, perhaps about the place and time of study that fall, or perhaps about the *place* of study, but set during a time period they may not directly study. I like to imagine that an Intermediate child’s reading of Ellen Klages’s *The Green Glass Sea* and *White Sands, Red Menace* will inform his or her study of the Americas in the Seniors, even if there is no formal study of post-WWII United States. While they may not yet study the American internment of citizens of Japanese descent, maybe a student’s reading of Yoshiko Uchida’s *Journey to Topaz* or Allen Say’s *Music for Alice* will provide more depth to a discussion in a Humanities class.

Taylor reads in an apple tree

**Funny books:** Here is a category that appeals to everyone, from the most reluctant to the most sophisticated reader. Lots of kids love Jon Scieszka’s comic memoir *Knucklehead: Tall Tales and Mostly True Stories about Growing Up Scieszka*, but they may not yet be ready (or willing) to read the equally, differently hilarious *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, published in 1899 by E. Nesbit, or Helen Cresswell’s P.G. Wodehouse-for-the-short-set, *The Bagthorpe Saga*. Sometimes I might include the funny (but so clearly, from the title, fictional) *Alcatraz Versus the Evil Librarians* by Brandon Sanderson. I’m not sure that this title necessarily meets the “best literature available” criterion in the paragraph that precedes the list, but the title (like *Whales on Stilts!*) says “I’m funny” and will provide a welcome respite to many a reader after a delightful but tearful bout of Wilson Rawls’s classic *Where the Red Fern Grows*.

**A Genre Variety Pack:** In addition to all of the other named categories, I always make sure that I have a few mysteries, scary stories, action/adventure, and fantasy. These types of titles tend to get lots of circulation at Arbor already (c.f., “The ‘Not-It’

List” below), but a good party involves making merry with old friends as well as mingling with new acquaintances.

**Non-fiction:** Much has been written on the appeal of non-fiction to boy readers, but I think that good non-fiction appeals to everyone. And while I read recently that 80% of many libraries’ collections are non-fiction, this does not apply to our K-8 school library. Still, good books are interesting and well written and if they show us something we didn’t know about before (*Cat Mummies* by Kelly Trumble, *Open the Door to Liberty!: A Biography of Toussaint L’Ouverture* by Anne Rockwell, or *Phineas Gage: A Gruesome but True Story About Brain Science*), so much the better. Or, top-notch non-fiction provides us more or further information about a familiar topic (Arthur Geisert’s *Roman Numerals I to MM*, Kathleen Krull’s *Giants of Science* series, or Patricia Lauber’s award-winning *Volcano: The Eruption and Healing of Mount St. Helens*), and for that we are glad.

**The “Not-It” List:** Including titles that are New York Times bestsellers (yes, even one British wizardry title that forced the Times bestseller list to bifurcate into a best-seller list for children along with the one for adult fiction) is part of my scheme toward the world domination of reading. If *Harry Potter* or *Artemis Fowl* or *The Lightning Thief* nestles amid the rest of the list, how bad could the others be? If she’s recommending *Harry Potter/Artemis Fowl/The Lightning Thief*, that vaguely lunatic librarian can’t be completely without reason. Now, this logic may be flawed, but if a child (or a parent) who’s only read the HP series through seven times happens upon a DIFFERENT title or writer on his or her way all the way down to the R’s in the list, imagine the reward. More specifically, there are hundreds of titles that never get anywhere near a bestseller list or a shiny medal sticker (Joan Aiken’s *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase* or C. Day Lewis’s bumptious boys in *The Otterbury Incident*, or the fantastic, little-known fantasy *Taash and the Jesters* by Ellen Kindt McKenzie), and they need my loving support and the children’s reading eyes through appearance on the Summer Reading List. Besides, hasn’t everyone already read Jeff Kinney’s *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*?

**Movie tie-in:** Sometimes Johnny Depp can get you to read Lewis Carroll’s crazy *Alice in Wonderland* when I can’t. Maybe you’ll move on to *The Annotated Snark* from there.

**Poetry:** Primaries, Juniors, Intermediates, and Seniors all receive separate lists that are alphabetical by author, with no divisions by genre, except for the poetry section at the end. While I usually list only a handful of poetry books (Adam Rex’s *Frankenstein Makes a Sandwich*, Cicely Mary Barker’s *Flower Fairies of Summer* or Vera Williams’s *Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart*) and poets (Douglas Florian, Marilyn Singer) as such, I usually include stories in rhyme (Mary Ann Hoberman’s *The Seven Silly Eaters*) or books written in blank verse (Karen Hesse’s *Out of the Dust*) in the body of the list, just to keep readers on their toes.

**I Already Read That!:** Just because you wore out the pages on your *D’Aulaire’s Book of Greek Myths* as a Primary doesn’t mean it doesn’t merit re-reading. Maybe you read Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* in third grade (I tried to talk you out of it) and now you should read it again because you’re older. Often books appear on more than one list; E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web* appears on Primary, Junior, and Intermediate lists because it is a rich read-aloud, but also a rewarding read-alone and I’ll be darned if you’re allowed to graduate without having read it at least once.



Poetry titles on display in the Arbor library

Emily Style's "Curriculum as Window and Mirror": It seems imperative to me that the library and its lists serve as what Wellesley College's Emily Style calls both "window and mirror," insofar as readers can see and imagine themselves reflected in Elsa Beskow's lovely *The Flowers' Festival* as well as being able to see and imagine others in Mildred Taylor's gorgeous classic *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* or Daniel Pinkwater's curiously charming picture book *Uncle Melvin*.

Needless to say, there are numerous titles worthy of our lofty "best literature available for children to read... as a summer gift to your family." So, while I don't have to keep the list weighing the same, I do have to engage in annual pruning. This is my sixth year as a school librarian, and prior to my first year, I had only my own antediluvian childhood reading (*Harriet the Spy*, *The Phantom Tollbooth*) and those favorites from reading with my own children. In my first year, I merely added a few familiar-to-me favorites to my predecessor's lists. I don't think that I deleted anything. The second year, I had read most of the picture books on the lists and was better able to add/delete titles that I had tried during storytime at school or with my own children at home. Everyone still loved Donald Hall's *The Ox-Cart Man* and cheered for the newly introduced *Boing!* by Sean Taylor and for Zach's birthday book, *Boxes for Katje* by Candace Fleming.

Editing of the lists often involves a change in curriculum, the students, my well-controlled moods, unforeseeable external circumstances, or literary zeitgeist. For the Seniors, the curriculum rotates through a three-year cycle, so I've had lots of time to read new titles about South Asia (try *The Tree Girl* by Sirish Rao, Gita Wolf, and Indrapramit Roy, published by the brilliant Tara Publishing out of Chennai, India). Maybe there is a mix of reading abilities in the upcoming class, so I should include Rosemary Wells's *Red Moon at Sharpsburg* on the Americas-year reading list. Sometimes, as I go through the lists, I think to myself, "Hmm, there's not enough funny/biography/superhero/my favorite on this list," so I'll inject Elise Broach's *When Dinosaurs Came With Everything*, Nicolas Debon's singular biographic novelish work about the famous Canadian artist *Four Pictures by Emily Carr*, or J. Brian Pinkney's scratchboard illustrated hero Sparrowboy at various levels, and maybe only for that year.

Perhaps the most long overdue edit occurred in my first or second summer after I received an unexpected phone message from a genial children's librarian at a local public library branch. There seemed to be some urgency attached to my return call. When I reached her, this companionable colleague was merely curious about our Junior Summer Reading list. One of our second-grade lads had marched into her branch wielding the list and asking for help locating the various (and admittedly, at times, obscure) titles that he might enjoy. Right near the top was a book I had never read by M.T. Anderson, a fine author known mostly for his arch, well-written Y.A. titles. Was I aware that this title, *Thirsty*, was a sort of steamy adolescent vampire title and might not suit the intended audience? I admitted that I was, indeed, NOT AT ALL AWARE of this particular inclusion, but that I was eternally grateful for her careful direction of the poor, hapless child away from this pronounced instance of the wrong book in the wrong place. I still send her flowers each June.

And as June approacheth, and May is here, I must prepare my flower order and, especially given the impending due date of this summer's lists, I must weigh in on new titles for inclusion (I always look back on the year's new book acquisitions) and exclusion (see above) in this summer's lists.

It is a tradition at Arbor School for a child to present the library with a copy of a favorite book in honor of his birthday. These birthday books are adorned with a special bookplate to credit the donor and mark the occasion, and we find that our students delight in discovering a birthday book from an older buddy or particular friend.

Download Arbor's summer reading lists for all four K-8 grade levels at <http://www.arborschool.org/pdfs/SummerReading2010.pdf>.

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# HOW TO READ WITH YOUR CHILD

## ADVICE TO PARENTS OF DEVELOPING READERS

by Annmarie Chesebro, ICCI Director of Teacher Training and Arbor parent

Without a doubt, reading habits and practice can be well supported at home. No matter what your child's age or level of reading proficiency, sharing with him your reading habits and preferences, reading aloud together, discussing books and conveying the importance and purposes for reading are all steps we can take in support of our children. Parents can also lead children forward into more complex stories, new genres, and richer vocabulary by reading texts children are not yet able to tackle independently, helping them anticipate what is yet to come.

That said, learning to read can often seem a mysterious process, and the best path to literacy is certainly a hotly contested issue among educators and politicians. Experts take positions in stark opposition to each other, asserting what must be done to support developing readers, and schools often fail to communicate their own strategies, leaving parents wondering how best to coax a child through the summer reading months. What follows is some of the general advice we offer to parents at Arbor.

**Pre-readers:** No one debates the importance of gathering a pre-reader into your lap for a cozy read-aloud. Listening to the sounds and rhythms of rich language, children can predict and imagine story as they enjoy and anticipate the act of reading. As parents read predictable texts with inviting rhythms, structures, and rhymes again and again, children come to remember and even memorize good bits of books. We can then encourage them to “read” the pictures, to predict (or remember) how a particular sentence might end, to guess what might happen to a character, or to turn the page of a book at the proper time. By keeping a finger beneath the text while reading, parents can help children build understanding of directionality in text, match between print and spoken word, and even “wordness” itself. Soon a child can navigate herself through the same book, relying on memory, pictures, and language patterns, perhaps even mimicking her parent with the “fingerslide.” At this point, simply listening to your child and posing conversational questions can be an exciting role switch.

Because encoding (constructing words) and decoding (reading words) are so intricately related, helping children pay attention to the sounds they hear in rhymes and songs is also a great help to pre-readers. Inviting your child to notice the shape of tongue or lips as they make a particular sound within a word helps build the notion that sounds and words are a “package deal.” It is just such an understanding that children draw from to take their first steps in writing, stretching the sounds they hear within words and later recording the letter combinations that match what they hear.

**Emergent readers:** Continuing this focus on speech and pronunciation with emergent or beginning readers remains important in the classroom and certainly can be carried through play with language at home. A child can develop greater phonemic awareness and skill through attention to speech and pronunciation and later retrieve this knowledge in order to write. When others are able to read this writing (even if it isn't yet conventionally correct), a young author and reader is motivated and inspired to continue the process.



*Quinn and Nili enjoy a tale of heroes and a friend's company*

As a reader begins to match words and print and to become more independent, even with minimal decoding skills, parents can invite her to share quiet moments of concentration on a book. Starting with a “picture walk” and looking through an illustrated book to make logical inferences about characters and story line is a helpful step in laying a foundation of meaning that can pull a child through the challenges of decoding. Following this, the parent or child can “finger-point” as the child moves through a text, the adult voice joining the child’s reading as needed for support. When children encounter a difficult word, parents can help imagine what would make sense in the story or sentence at that point and then analyze the word itself, matching this prediction based on meaning with alphabetic information.

At this stage, it is important to remember how much concentration and physical stamina is required for reading. Supporting a new reader by taking turns reading pages or paragraphs, or by reading a page in advance while the child listens, can help. When a book is done, taking the time to retell the story, to imagine oneself in the place of the main character, or to comment on the illustrations only enriches the experience for a child. And, just as with pre-readers, revisiting the same books again and again through listening and later reading independently, perhaps to a sibling, a pet, or even a stuffed animal helps a child build confidence and find more chances to absorb semantic, syntactic, and graphic language cues.



**Transitional readers:** This group of readers knows how to decode and make meaning, but is working on fluency, independence, sustaining comprehension and interest over an entire book, and understanding new genres with more complex vocabulary. This is a great time to suggest that your child find a quiet corner amid the bustle of summer activities to read with a friend. Indeed, making such time for uninterrupted quiet and concentration can be one of a parent’s most helpful acts. Children will often take up this idea eagerly—sharing natural, informal conversations about books, monitoring their own reading a bit more carefully and sustaining their interest longer with a friend by their side.

As parents, this is a great time to start conversations with children about our own reading habits, preferences, and methods for choosing books. Not far away from this themselves, children love hearing stories about how parents first learned to read. Conversation about books can feel “grown up” and exciting to transitional readers. Reading a book your child has finished or taking turns reading pages aloud can provide an entry into such discussion.

Reinforcing reading strategies taught at school when listening to your child read aloud is always helpful. One of the most important (and sometimes challenging to the adult listener!) supports we can offer transitional readers as they come upon a difficult word is actually to wait and give the child the chance to unravel the text himself. Gently suggesting that he take a “running start” to reread the sentence, that he break up words into syllables and known word bases, sound out difficult phonemes, or use context and visual clues to first make reasonable substitutions are all strategies built at school and certainly transferable to home.

**Fluent readers:** As with transitional readers, fluent readers may need parents’ help to find uninterrupted time for independent summer reading in order to continue building the stamina and focus supported by reading for long periods of time during the school year. Engaging fluent readers in conversation about texts, parents can invite children into deeper reflection and even encourage and support stretching into less

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familiar genres. In fact, conversation and discussion itself supports reading, particularly when parents infuse this with new vocabulary, sophisticated syntax, and even spirited, informed arguments.

Even though they are capable and independent, fluent readers still benefit from listening to parents read aloud. Choosing a book that stretches them to experience new genres, vocabulary, and complexity leads their independent reading forward just as with earlier readers. Sitting with a child as she tackles a more challenging text herself, parents can offer supports similar to those suggested for transitional readers as a way to scaffold growing independence and continued reach toward complexity and challenge.

As our children grow as readers, offering active support and room to practice independently; making time to read side by side and to each other, to have conversations about reading of all sorts; and sharing our own predilections, strategies, and histories with reading all serve to communicate to our children how important and enriching a literate life can be.

### Further reading:

*Beyond Leveled Books: Supporting Transitional Readers in Grades 2-5*  
by Karen Szymusiak and Franki Sibberson (Stenhouse, 2001)

*The Reading Zone: How to Help Kids Become Skilled, Passionate, Habitual, Critical Readers* by Nancie Atwell (Scholastic, 2007)

*Guiding Readers and Writers Grades 3-6: Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy* by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell (Heinemann, 2001)

*When Reading Begins: The Teacher's Role in Decoding, Comprehension, and Fluency* by Ardith Davis Cole (Heinemann, 2004)

## GROWTH SPURTS & PASSIONS

### RETHINKING THE JUST-RIGHT BOOK

by Felicity Nunley, Primary teacher and Arbor parent

As the sun lights the stacks of the Arbor library, the Primaries, Arbor's kindergarten and first-grade students, are browsing for books. Some reach for the books that are propped up enticingly on tabletops and bookshelves. Others make a beeline for their favorite non-fiction sections — cats, boats, tree forts. One child reaches high, standing on a stepstool to grab the perfect book. He totes it to the check-out station, scans the wand across the library ID tag, and sighs with the contentment of having found just the right book. The title? Roy Jenkins's 989-page biography *Churchill*.

The science of matching the right book at the right time to young readers is a subject that has been written about exhaustively. Indeed, there is a whole industry dedicated to pinpointing a child's reading level to within a few percentage points, the better to identify appropriate reading material. There are lexiles and DIBELS and DRAs — measures that consider the speed and accuracy of a reader to determine her reading level.

In the attempt to quantify the magical, mysterious process of learning to read, though, a lot gets lost. The journey of learning to read is different for almost every

child, with periods of rapid development and times of consolidation. To develop the habits of reading in young children, one must consider more variables than the speed and accuracy with which they move through a text. Choosing books for young readers quickly becomes more of an art than a science.

Learning to read requires lots of practice. Like skiing, the more you do it, the better you get. In the Primaries, we know that children need time to “put in the miles.” As Richard Allington writes, “kids need not only to read a lot, but they also need lots of books they can read accurately, fluently and with comprehension right at their fingertips.” Providing children with “just right” reading material is critical to aiding their development as readers. Our job is to offer material that provides some measure of challenge, but not enough to get frustrated. A simple rule of thumb says that if a child makes more than a handful of errors on a page, the text is too difficult and the pleasure of reading will be interrupted. Similarly, nothing can kill the joy of skiing for a novice like falling on every turn down a black diamond run. But conversely, if the skier stays on the beginner runs too long practicing only the most basic skills, she misses the exhilaration of “ballroom” skiing on a just-right slope.

In the Primaries, we have developed a system to deliver just-right books to the fingertips of children. Each week we have Book Bag time, a time devoted solely to putting in miles with books. Each child has a Ziploc bag that we have filled with three books at a just-right level. During Book Bags, they have time to read and re-read from their bag, practicing their habits of independent reading and building their endurance and stamina for long-distance reading. They have opportunities to read to a teacher, a parent volunteer, the goldfish, the amaryllis, or, just recently, even some mosquito larvae found in the pond at recess.

In our classroom library, we have a wide selection of books to accommodate the many reading levels in any kindergarten and first-grade classroom. Our earliest readers enjoy books with few words and predictable, patterned text supported by obvious picture clues. We also have books with a few more words, catchy illustrations, and a satisfying punch line. Some books are a little thin on narrative plot, but are designed to give specific decoding practice. After many miles, our students make their way into early chapter books and beyond.

As we select books for our students, we consider not only their reading level but also their interests and pleasures: Ava loves cats and Sam loves wacky humor. We also consider that some readers may need the support of a phonetic text while others feel comfortable using the context and pictures for clues.

In our classroom, we have chosen not to organize our books according to distinct demarcated levels; rather we have a sense of the levels of the books in our collection. We have our perennial favorites, books that are consistently engaging and successful in supporting young readers. Rather than assigning a child to a specific level and collection of books, we can choose books as we know children, responding to their growth spurts and current passions.

But let’s return to our Churchill-reading hero in the library. Clearly, Churchill’s biography would not fit the criteria of a just-right book for this wiggly-toothed reader. But does that make it a wrong book? We think not. It might be just the right prop to help this boy self-identify as a lover of books. Young readers often move through a stage of selecting the heftiest books in the collection, tucking the tomes under an arm and proudly strutting across the playground. Just as young students fill pages with scribbles to imitate adult writing, so too young readers approximate the behavior of grown-up readers. Just-right books should only form one portion of a young reader’s diet. As Henry, a kindergartener in our class, explained, he can’t read the words in his favorite bug book yet, so he just “reads the pictures.” And children of all ages benefit from hearing rich stories written at a level above their independent abilities read aloud.

We certainly do not wish to inadvertently suggest to our students that if there are “right” books, there are “wrong” books. We don’t want children to feel limited to a

We have found that at the kindergarten and first grade level, it works best for teachers to select books for the students’ book bags. There is a great efficiency in having the books pre-selected so that the children’s time can be spent reading rather than selecting books (and having teachers approve the reading level). We have found that students are generally pleased to have books selected for them and are eager to try the “fresh” books in their bag. We do think it is important, though, for children to have the opportunity to choose their own reading. At Quiet Reading times, children select their own books according to their interests rather than their reading level. We find that often the Primaries choose to dip into their book bags at this time, too.



narrow spectrum of books that are “just right.” Rather, we hope that children read broadly and often. We do them a disservice if we train them to expect the “just, just, just exactly right” book, and perhaps even stunt their innate urge to reach beyond their current capabilities and grow in the process. Rather, we hope the children will visit their local libraries and cut a wide swath through literature.

In the end, choosing the right books for students is about knowing kids and knowing books. Here in Portland we are lucky to have a rich book culture, with an easy-to-use library system and many bookstores. Get to know your school librarian, your local librarian, the people at the independent bookstore near you. Peruse the shelves, make long hold lists on the library website, read and reflect and read some more — just as you teach your students to do.



*Henry, Abe, and Jack share their new discoveries in the library during an independent reading group time*

**Some common adult assumptions that don't always turn out to be true:**

***If you've read a book once, you're done with it.*** Actually, early readers benefit hugely from frequent re-readings of a book. Each re-reading allows for greater fluency and creates opportunities for new discoveries in the text.

***The best place to practice reading is in a cozy bed just before sleep.***

It is important to keep in mind that reading is real work for beginners. I don't do my best work just before my eyelids drop. (A cozy bed is still a fine place for being read to, of course.)

***They probably won't like this book.***

Actually, they probably will if we assume that they will.

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## BROADENING HABITS

### INVITING CHILDREN INTO A WIDER WORLD OF BOOKS

by Robin Gunn, Primary teacher

Sarah proudly announces that she is on number 23 of the Secrets of Droon series, and Michael has his parents scouring every bookstore within a 50-mile radius for the next book in the Warriors saga. Ben continues to devour the animal books on our non-fiction shelves; Leah is on a steady diet of Sharon Creech. These scenarios are familiar to my teaching experience and, I imagine, to yours as well. These students are reading; in fact it could be said that they are reveling in the many wonders that print brings to life. But what happens when we want to open that reading door a little wider? To shed light on books that sit beyond a much-loved series, genre, or author? I offer here a few strategies that have worked to form broader reading habits in our Arbor classrooms.



Harper and Nina browse new reading possibilities during Quiet Reading time

**Book Bags:** Our Primary (K/1) and Junior (2/3) classrooms use some variation on a practice we call Book Bags. Each child has her own bag of three teacher-chosen books that she reads during a designated Book Bag time each week. Using our students' interests as a guideline, book bags provide us with a great opportunity to introduce new books to our readers. Rachael likes reading fiction stories involving horses, so amid our selections for her is a non-fiction book on different horse breeds. Gabriel, planted solidly in the Cam Jansen series, is able to explore Encyclopedia Brown. Sophie, who leaves a trail of unfinished books behind her, has a goal to stick with the *Gooney Bird Greene* copy in her book bag.

**Book Groups:** Book groups created around a particular book, theme, or author serve a similar purpose in that they broaden the readers' scope within a structured format. We recently formed a book group of Primaries while they were studying the Ancient Greeks. Members of the group chose the particular myths they wanted to read, coming together to discuss elements such as common themes and characters. While the group described parts that made them laugh out loud or endings that were surprising, they piqued one another's interest. Soon every child had read all ten myths, while the initial expectation had been six.

**Recommendations:** Who can resist a good book recommendation? Book pitches, formal or informal, seem to be the fastest way to get a book into a child's hands. Given by a teacher, ("If you like books about adventure, you won't believe what happens to Elmer in *My Father's Dragon!* Look, there's even a map at the beginning. I wonder what this rhinoceros is doing in the middle of Wild Island?"), librarian ("If you liked the book I just read, *Fortunately*, then I bet you'd like *Boing!* because this character also gets himself in some unfortunate situations."), or friend while standing in the library check-out line ("*The Penderwicks* is such a good summer book, I really think you should read it!"), they can be irresistible. For reluctant readers, I find it is helpful if I read a snippet of the book aloud before handing it over with a comment such as, "I wonder who Ragweed will end up meeting along the trail? You'll have to let me know when you get to that part!"

Written book recommendations might look like the one hanging in the Intermediate (4/5) classroom, a collection of posterboards lining the window with columns for the title, author, and recommending student's name. The Juniors (2/3) keep a spiral-bound

notebook for their recommendations, tabbed by the children according to genre. Other classrooms have created a Books We Love display that highlights favorite titles by bringing them out of their regular homes on the shelf and finding ways to best exhibit enticing covers.

**Read-alouds:** Teachers reading aloud to their classes, often from a book related to their current Theme work, are a common sight at Arbor. What books might be on your radar if you were to focus on introducing read-alouds that address gaps in your students' reading repertoire? It is hard sometimes not to judge a book by its cover, and the mustard yellow hardback of *The Trumpet of the Swan* was not the most appealing book on our classroom shelf. All it took was a read-aloud, and suddenly it was on the birthday wish-list of several students who proudly brought in their copies, displaying a more up-to-date cover and a newfound love for E.B. White. In addition to bringing fresh eyes to older books, read-alouds are a powerful way to enliven the many unexplored genres and authors just waiting on the shelves. We often begin our day in the Primaries with a poetry book in hand and the question, "Who wants to put their finger in a poem?" Hands go up and the group waits in anticipation as the poem is randomly selected by one of their number. Perhaps it is one they recognize, like "Keep a Poem in Your Pocket" or "April Rain Song," or maybe it is so deliciously new that they close their eyes and imagine a picture to go with the words.

**Focused Study:** Arbor classrooms use times throughout the year for book studies around a particular author, illustrator, genre, or theme. In the days leading to Winter Break the Primaries focused on poetry. Poems were read aloud by both teachers and children, to be later shared during all-school assemblies. Book Bags were sure to include a collection of poetry, our book display included a variety of poets and poetry forms, and suddenly a new genre was being added to the books children selected during Choice or Quiet Reading. Other recent studies have included biographies, books on kindness and justice, and the work of author/illustrators Eric Carle and Faith Ringgold.

While these examples are classroom based, they can easily be adapted for families who ask the common question: "How can I best support my child's reading during the summer months?" In direct response to that question, I'll close with a list of additional ideas that seem to fall under the themes of time, exposure, and sharing:

Make reading a family ritual by setting aside time for read-alouds or quiet reading time for the whole family. Go to the library and fill a bag with books that will have a prominent place in your home. Read book reviews. Post a list of books to read and update it with recommendations from friends. Do a summer study inspired by your child's interests. Read poetry together before bed. Memorize poems to recite during car rides. Form a parent-child book club with other families.



*Meg and Nolan share favorite scenes from their books*

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# A TASTE FOR Y.A.

## HOW TO READ & RECOMMEND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

by Leigh Wood, Senior Humanities and P.E. teacher

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### Books I'm recommending right now:

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**Adventure:** (girl) *Kiki Strike* by Kirsten Miller; (boy) *Touching Spirit Bear* by Ben Mikaelson

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**Animals:** *The Sight* by David Clement-Davies (this is also light fantasy), *Hurt Go Happy* by Ginny Robby (realistic)

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**Mystery:** *The Westing Game* by Ellen Raskin, *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak (for older readers, also a WWII story)

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**Tear-Jerker:** *A Summer to Die* by Lois Lowry

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**Realistic Fiction:** (girl) *Star Girl* by Jerry Spinelli, *Hope Was Here* by Joan Bauer; (boy) *Tangerine* by Edward Bloor

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When I think back on myself as a child and student, I recall that I was an avid reader in elementary school. I loved immersing myself in the pages of a book and imagining myself as one of the characters. But once I reached the middle grades, my pleasure reading slowed and, as I grew busy and out of the habit, all but stopped in high school. I had loved perusing the shelves of my school library and getting recommendations from my librarian, so why was it that I never checked out a pleasure reading book from the school library in the seven years I spent in middle and high school? Why did I become so ambivalent about reading for enjoyment? I believe it was because, in those middle grades, I no longer had someone interested in whether or not I read. When I went to the city library, I didn't know where to start. Too reticent to ask for help, I relied upon recommendations from my friends. They gave me some great titles to read, but I still wonder why none of my teachers were feeding me with authors and titles to challenge my intellect and stimulate my imagination.

Fast forward to the present and I have the fortune to teach at a school that takes reading seriously. My Humanities teaching team makes a point of reserving time for pleasure reading in the weekly 6th-8th-grade schedule. We ask the students to read for 30 minutes every night and to find at least one book to read over every school break. Remembering how lost I felt in the library as a 13-year-old, my mission as a teacher is to be able to make book recommendations to any student on the prowl for a good read. To reluctant or eager readers, across skill levels and genre preferences, I have found opportunities to suggest great books. Reading is a very personal endeavor, however, and playing matchmaker is not as simple as putting a "good book" into the hands of a student. People have very different ideas of what makes a book good, so I need to know a book before I can recommend it. You can read the reviews or the back cover, or you can talk to anyone who has read a book or heard an interview with the author, but I have found that there is only one way to truly experience a book: *read it*.

In between correcting papers, planning, and living life, the thought of trying to fit in extra reading may be daunting, but it doesn't have to be. First, remember that a lot of young adult fiction moves quickly and is easy to pick up and put down. You don't have to be able to provide a full psychological analysis of the characters afterward, you just need to have a good sense of the level of difficulty (both of the writing and

the content), the genre, and how to characterize the plot. Try to put on your "middle school cap" and imagine the thoughts and feelings you had when you were that age. Would you have liked it? If not, can you imagine who would? Even though you may be reading quickly, make sure you are reading closely enough that you don't miss anything important, and if you are going to recommend it, always read the whole book. Second, maintain a list of books you want to read so that you always have one on hand. How do you develop this list? Keep your ears open and ask around. We occasionally have book talks in class so the students can make formal recommendations to each other. I keep paper and a pen handy to write down a) books that sound interesting to me, and b) books that, whether or not





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## FACULTY PRACTICE TEACHERS AS READERS

by Kit Abel Hawkins, Founder & Director

Reading lies at the heart of Arbor School culture: reading time resides in the middle of the day; the Library is in the physical center of our 21-acre campus; and Arbor's faculty members read together to advance their practice or ponder an essential human question. As director of the school, one of my wonderful jobs is to think about just what reading will engage the diverse group of teachers with whom I have the pleasure of working each day. We read before faculty meetings; we read at faculty meetings; we read poetry and prose, cognitive neuroscience and behavioral economics, history and biography, one another's writing and teachers on teaching. We commonly focus our annual retreat on a shared text; we read in solidarity with our oldest students; we read difficult mathematics or a piece of obscure poetry and remember what it is like to be a novice; we read to extend our knowledge of the disciplines we teach.

Articles from various journals or single chapters from books often occupy us for one or two faculty meetings. We might read a piece in advance of a meeting in order to plunge straight into discussion once we have gathered; we might read while we are together, working our way from one paragraph to the next, bit by bit, interpolating talk with reading and cogitation. Alfred North Whitehead's "Aims of Education" is an essay that we read every few years. It requires careful reading and reflection before coming under discussion. One dictum after another ("You may not divide the seamless coat of learning." "If you want to understand anything, make it yourself.") provokes penetrating conversations about what we are after as teachers and how we are to get there. The chapter in Nel Noddings's *The Challenge to Care* in which she writes about school settings is another piece that we read and discuss periodically. It serves to keep us mindful of the centrality of caring relationships in teaching and learning, as well as in curriculum and in school-wide connections like our buddy pairs.

At Arbor we frequently choose to focus our faculty development for the whole year on one element of the curriculum. When we last took math as our focus, each staff member selected one of five different books to read in small groups. (*Knowing and Teaching Elementary School Mathematics* by Liping Ma, *The Number Sense* by Stanislas Dehaene, *Nature's Numbers* by Ian Stewart, *Math: An American Phobia* by Marilyn Burns, and *Lesson Study: a Japanese Approach to Improving Mathematics Instruction* by Fernandez & Yoshida). After several weeks of reading and discussion in those small groups, we came back together to begin the give-and-take that helps deepen learning and prompt new reflections. In the process, the teachers who read Liping Ma's book convinced us that we all needed to read it. We committed to a lengthy examination of our own math understandings and referenced her book liberally in the process. It is a staple now in our teacher-training program and a book that teachers new to the school read over the summer. When we spent a year thinking primarily about writing instruction, we turned to Lucy Calkins's *The Art of Teaching Writing* and Donald Graves's *A Fresh Look at Writing to Writing Down the Bones* by Natalie Goldberg and *Coming to Know* by Nancie Atwell. *Writing the Australian Crawl* by poet William Stafford led us not only to examine ourselves as teachers of poetry but to work at writing as poets ourselves, in part through faculty meetings devoted to writing workshops with local poets.

Sometimes our year is dedicated not to an intellectual discipline but to an idea. This year we are working to deepen our understanding of the role of attention and effort in learning. Pairs of readers took chapters of Willingham's *Why Students Don't Like School* to read and study and then brought the central ideas of the chapters to

the rest of us. Week after week we learned how to apply current understandings from cognitive neuroscience to daily classroom realities. Carol Dweck's *Mindset* served as a common teacher text in the course of our further studies. It became clear to us that our parents needed to hear the book's central message, so we shared one of its chapters with all the parents in the school and held a forum in a family home for its discussion.

While reading about teaching and learning typifies our reading together as a group, at the time of the annual faculty retreat, I have sometimes chosen to bring a piece of literature to the fore. One year, we all read Coetzee's *Disgrace*. Set in South Africa, the novel portrays the demise and redemption of a single man, the particular then serving as a metaphor for the possibilities confronted by a riven nation. It was a powerful experience for us, inspiring our deepest sympathies and greatest hopes. No less powerful was the year in which our consideration of storytelling and dramatic retellings led us to use the first night of our retreat in an oral reading of Seamus Heaney's then-new translation of "Antigone." The thespians on the staff took the major roles while the rest of us lifted our voices as members of the Chorus. Read on a late fall evening while our country was beginning to wage war, the play spoke to us of loyalty and courage, of simultaneous duty to oneself and to the polity, of revenge and forgiveness. And we decided to read *To Kill a Mockingbird* as our 6th, 7th, and 8th graders did, inviting their parents to do the same. We celebrated our sharing of the text with a community discussion that began with a keynote speech by Mark Mathabane, author of *Kaffir Boy*. Our students impressed both their parents and their teachers with their deep and empathetic understanding of the themes Harper Lee evoked so strikingly.

Perhaps the simplest of our reading practices centers on little snippets of shared text: poems. We begin each week together as a school with a poem, and faculty meetings may likewise begin with a poem. We have been favored with visits from poet Naomi Shihab Nye three times in the course of our 21 years as a school. Each time she worked with every student in the school, serving as the quintessential writing workshop leader. Parents busily typed the children's poems as they spilled from pencils and pens onto looseleaf. And Naomi read to us and sang with us, gracing us with her presence and leaving us with her words. We know some of her poems by heart and turn to them often. There may be no better way to mark time together than with a poem. As a parting gift, we give you Naomi's "Kindness:"

*Before you know what kindness really is  
you must lose things,*

*feel the future dissolve in a moment  
like salt in a weakened broth.*

*What you held in your hand,  
what you counted and carefully saved,  
all this must go so you know*

*how desolate the landscape can be  
between the regions of kindness.*

*How you ride and ride  
thinking the bus will never stop,  
the passengers eating maize and chicken  
will stare out the window forever.*

*Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,  
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho  
lies dead by the side of the road.*

*You must see how this could be you,  
how he too was someone  
who journeyed through the night with plans  
and the simple breath that kept him alive.*

*Before you know kindness as the deepest  
thing inside,*

*you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.  
You must wake up with sorrow.*

*You must speak to it till your voice  
catches the thread of all sorrows  
and you see the size of the cloth.*

*Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,  
only kindness that ties your shoes  
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and  
purchase bread,*

*only kindness that raises its head  
from the crowd of the world to say  
it is I you have been looking for,  
and then goes with you everywhere  
like a shadow or a friend.*

— Naomi Shihab Nye

from *The Words Under the Words: Selected Poems*  
(used by permission)

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#### A few favorite poems:

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Dylan Thomas, "Fern Hill"

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Denise Levertov, "Variation  
on a Theme by Rilke" and  
"Celebration"

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William Stafford, "Assurance"  
and "The Way It Is"

---

Philip Levine, "Gospel"

---

William Carlos Williams,  
"Metric Figure"

---

John Updike, "Hoeing"

---

Seamus Heaney, "The Swing"

---

W.S. Merwin, "Echoing Light"

---

Diane Ackerman,  
"School Prayer"

---

William Wordsworth, "The  
World Is Too Much with Us"

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Mary Oliver, "At the Lake"  
and "Winter at Herring Cove"

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Charles Wright,  
"Body & Soul"

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Ezra Pound, "The Tree"

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Ted Hughes, "There Came  
a Day"

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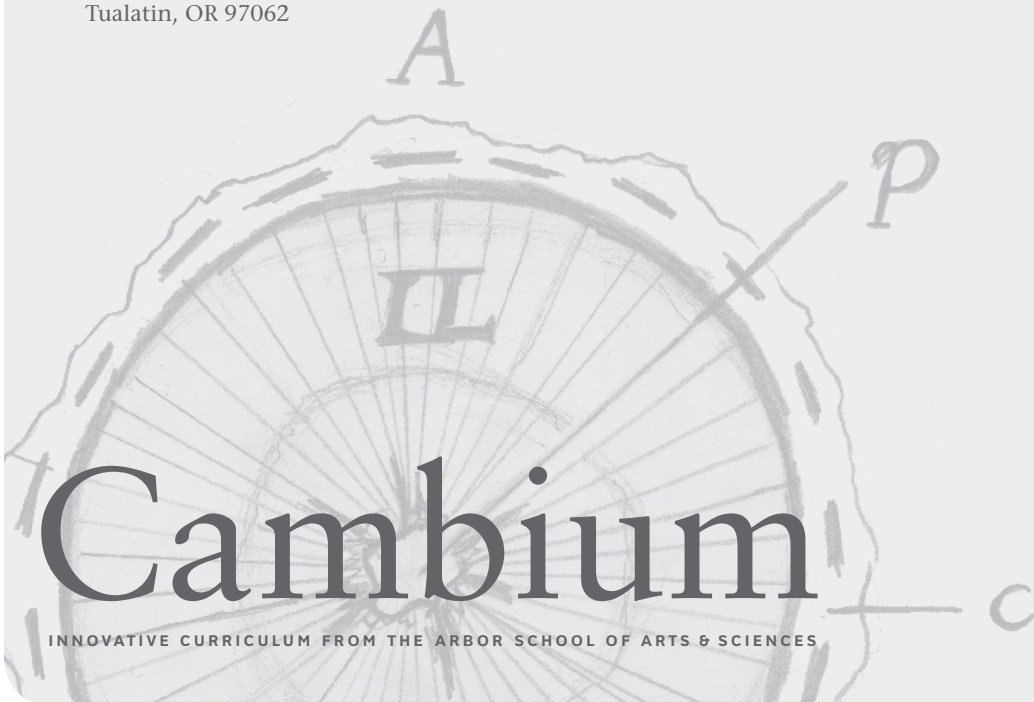
Gail Mazur, "Young Apple  
Tree, December"

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ARBOR SCHOOL  
OF ARTS & SCIENCES

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INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM FROM THE ARBOR SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES

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*Masthead by Jake Grant, after an 1890 botanical illustration.*

*The Arbor School of Arts & Sciences is a non-profit, independent elementary school serving grades K-8 on a 20-acre campus near Portland, OR. Low student-teacher ratios and mixed-age class groupings that keep children with the same teacher for two years support each child as an individual and foster a sense of belonging and community. An Arbor education means active engagement in learning, concrete experiences, and interdisciplinary work. For more information on the Arbor philosophy, please visit [www.arborschool.org](http://www.arborschool.org).*

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Maddie settles in for a good read

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