

Name _____ Class Periods _____

Contemporary Issues in America: Rank these books in order of your preferences: 1 is your first pick; 7 is your last pick.

<p>1. <i>Posted</i> by John David Anderson (cell phone ban): Grade 3-7. When cell phones are banned at Branton Middle School, Frost and his friends Deedee, Wolf, and Bench come up with a new way to communicate: leaving sticky notes for each other all around the school. It catches on, and soon all the kids in school are leaving notes—though for every kind and friendly one, there is a cutting and cruel one as well.</p>	
<p>2. <i>Zane and the Hurricane</i> by Rodman Philbrick (hurricane recovery): Grade 5-8. Parents need to know that <i>Zane and the Hurricane: A Tale of Katrina</i>, by Newbery Honor-winning author Rodman Philbrick, uses the narratives of many Hurricane Katrina survivors as the foundation of the harrowing, inspiring tale of a 12-year-old New Hampshire boy and his beloved dog who get caught up in the disaster. Reflecting real-life events, Zane encounters many dangers, from the floodwaters to gun-toting vigilantes to the local drug lord, but also finds love, kindness, and friendship in the most unexpected places. One character's mother is always in rehab, and drugs are not presented positively (no drug use is shown). The story does have some scary scenes (including snakes in the flood and the local drug lord trying to kidnap Zane's friend), and raises provocative issues, from race to complete infrastructure collapse, that affected the people caught up in the disaster. There's no strong language or sexual content.</p>	
<p>3. <i>Lily and Dunkin</i> by Donna Gephart (transgender): Ages 10-18. Parents need to know that <i>Lily and Dunkin</i> is a wonderfully written story about the start-and-stop friendship between an eighth-grader who is transgender and another who's struggling with mental illness. The bullies of one become the new friends of the other in this gently written story.</p>	
<p>4. <i>All American Boys</i> by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely (police) Age 12 and up.: Parents need to know that <i>All American Boys</i>, by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely, is an eye-opening view of a brutal assault by a police officer on an innocent 16-year-old boy as seen through the alternating perspectives of the abused and a teen witness to his beating. It was named a 2016 Coretta Scott King Author Honor Book. There's racial tension, and violence includes a boy beaten by an adult (with severe injuries described), fights between boys, and threats. There's also positive activism in the face of brutality, which should inspire tweens and teens. Some strong language includes "s--t" and f--k."</p>	
<p>5. <i>The Someday Birds</i> by Sally J. Pia (autism): Grades 3-7. Parents need to know that Sally J. Pia's debut novel <i>The Someday Birds</i> is narrated by a 12-year-old boy named Charlie, whose father has returned from the conflict in Afghanistan with a critical head injury. Charlie, who lost his mother when he was very young, is on the autism spectrum. The story is narrated through his point of view, giving readers insights into what facial cues mean to someone who can't recognize expressions, for example. Emotionally charged with references to war, injury, and loss, this book is also upbeat and hopeful. And -- bonus -- as the story unfolds, kids will pick up lots of information about birds and their habitats, as well as cultural and historical information.</p>	
<p>6. <i>Goodbye Days</i> by Jeff Zentner (texting while driving): Age 14 and up. Parents need to know that <i>Goodbye Days</i> is award-winning author Jeff Zentner's second contemporary novel, also set in Tennessee and also about a group of artistic close friends. The book tells the story of 17-year-old Carver Briggs, who feels responsible for the deaths of his three closest friends, his entire squad of besties who perished in a car accident on the way to pick him up from work. Given the nature of the narrative and age of the teens (they were about to start their senior year), it's age-appropriate that some of the language is strong and the content includes discussions of death, mental illness, sexual identity/orientation, race/racism, partying, and love. There's also a strong messages about the dangers of texting while driving.</p>	
<p>7. <i>Small as an Elephant</i> by Jennifer Richard Jacobson. Ages 10 and up. Ever since Jack can remember, his mom has been unpredictable, sometimes loving and fun, other times caught in a whirlwind of energy and "spinning" wildly until it's over. But Jack never thought his mom would take off during the night and leave him at a campground in Acadia National Park, with no way to reach her and barely enough money for food. Any other kid would report his mom gone, but Jack knows by now that he needs to figure things out for himself - starting with how to get from the backwoods of Maine to his home in Boston before DSS catches on.</p>	

Contemporary Global Issues: Rank these books in order of your preferences: 1 is your first pick; 7 is your last pick.

<p>1. <i>The Last Leopard</i> by Lauren St. John: Grade 4–7—In this third book about Martine and her amazing gift for healing animals, the 11-year-old, her grandmother, and her friend Ben leave their South African home for Zimbabwe. They are going to help her grandmother's friend, who has had an accident, but the trip turns into much more. A giant leopard said to be in hiding in the hills near the ranch where they are staying desperately needs Martine's help. Many legends surround the creature, and the place of his death is ostensibly where a long-hidden treasure will be found.</p>	
<p>2. <i>What Elephants Know</i> by Eric Dinerstein (family, animal rights, traditions, Nepal): Grade 4-7. Abandoned in the jungle of the Nepalese Borderlands, two-year-old Nandu is found living under the protective watch of a pack of wild dogs. From his mysterious beginnings, fate delivers him to the King's elephant stable, where he is raised by unlikely parents—the wise head of the stable, Subba-sahib, and Devi Kali, a fierce and affectionate female elephant.</p>	
<p>3. <i>Refugee</i> by Alan Gratz: Grade 4-7. Parents need to know that <i>Refugee</i> by Alan Gratz is a historical novel that braids the stories of three young refugees in three different time periods and settings: 1938 Berlin, 1994 Cuba, and 2015 Syria. The circumstances of all the kids and families are dire, and their journeys are fraught with imminent danger. The publisher recommends this book for kids starting at age 9, but due to the level of violence and peril, we recommend it for 10 and up. Though all three protagonists survive for the length of the story, all lose family members. But the book isn't gratuitously violent. It paints a vivid picture of the plight of refugees, and the kids and families seem both real and relatable, making this a good book for sparking family discussion.</p>	
<p>4. <i>An Uninterrupted View of the Sky</i> by Melanie Crowder (access to education, other prison systems): Grade 7 and up. It's 1999 in Bolivia and Francisco's life consists of school, soccer, and trying to find space for himself in his family's cramped yet boisterous home. But when his father is arrested on false charges and sent to prison by a corrupt system that targets the uneducated, the poor, and the indigenous majority, Francisco's mother abandons hope and her family. Francisco and his sister are left with no choice: They must move into the prison with their father. There, they find a world unlike anything they've ever known, where everything—a door, a mattress, protection from other inmates—has its price.</p>	
<p>5. <i>A Girl Called Problem</i> by Katie Quirk (Tanzania, girls and education): Grade 6-9. Thirteen-year-old Shida, whose name means “problem” in Swahili, certainly has a lot of problems in her life — her father is dead, her depressed mother is rumored to be a witch, and everyone in her rural Tanzanian village expects her to marry rather than pursue her dream of becoming a healer. So when the village's elders make a controversial decision to move their people to a nearby village, Shida welcomes the change. Surely the opportunity to go to school and learn from a nurse can only mean good things.</p>	
<p>6. <i>Now is the Time for Running</i> by Michael Williams (Zimbabwe, soccer, civil war, 240 pages): Age 12 and up. Just down the road from their families, Deo and his friends play soccer in the dusty fields of Zimbabwe, cheered on by Deo's older brother, Innocent. It is a day like any other . . . until the soldiers arrive and Deo and Innocent are forced to run for their lives, fleeing the wreckage of their village for the distant promise of safe haven. Along the way, they face the prejudice and poverty that await refugees everywhere, and must rely on the kindness of people they meet to make it through. But when tragedy strikes, Deo's love of soccer is all he has left. Can he use that gift to find hope once more?</p>	
<p>7. <i>A Time to Dance</i> (verse) by Padma Venkatraman (India, prosthetic limb, doctors changing lives, dancing, 336 pages): Age 12 and up. Despite the pressure from her parents to become an engineer, Veda dreams of being a dancer. She studies the classical Indian dance, Bharatanatyam, and has reached the competition finals. Impressed with her graceful lines and skill, the judges award her first place, and Veda is ecstatic. After posing for pictures, she is injured in an accident on the way home and her leg has to be amputated below the right knee. Devastated, she lies in her hospital bed devoid of hope until one day her doctor introduces her to a specialist from America. He sparks optimism in her because he understands that she needs to dance.</p>	

Book Selection and Parental Permission

Dear Parents/Guardians,

We are preparing for our third quarter reading project, Contemporary Issues in America and the World, a literature and informational text reading project. We need your help finalizing book group selections. Last year, students, parents, and teachers have curated these lists from over 40 options to these 14 by voting, offering feedback, and re-voting on books that are engaging and age-appropriate. I believe this final list has something for everyone with a range of topics and lexiles. Even though discretion is used in choosing age-appropriate books of literary merit, it is possible that some books may contain elements that an individual parent deems inappropriate for his/her child. Topics could include social issues, coming-of-age topics, mature vocabulary, as well as moral and ethical dilemmas. While literature and book groups can support readers in understanding these topics with sensitivity, some may just not be a good fit for your child. If you choose to have your student opt out of a particular book, that is completely up to you, and I will honor your decision when setting up groups. I have asked students to rank their preferences, so please discuss this with your child and use the permission slip on the other side of this letter to indicate your wishes.

About the Project

The project is approved and funded by our school district's grant program, one-Five Foundation/Kathy Buesching Memorial Mini-Grant. Here is an excerpt of the approved proposal:

The Common Core anchor standards for reading ask for a "range of reading" and a "range of level of text complexity." The rationale for this standard is the belief that readiness for college and careers in today's society require students to read texts from diverse cultures. The word "culture" denotes customs, arts, and social institutions of nations, people, and social groups. Students can only gain what the Common Core calls a "foundation" of learning when "the curriculum is intentionally and coherently structured to develop rich content knowledge within and across grades." This grant is that intentional curriculum -- a curriculum that includes the content of teen contemporary books that represent diverse teen lives (national and global) in cooperative book groups with further inquiry and public presentations of learning (and additional questions).

Here are the Instructional Goals/Objectives based on the Common Core State Standards:

- Students will read a range of texts in cooperative groups considering how diverse teens are represented in five books.
- Students will practice close reading, tracking themes within and across texts, and noting how story elements interact through annotations and by making claims supported by text evidence on blogs.
- Students will practice speaking and listening in a variety of contexts: book groups and formal presentations.
- Students will research into the topics explored in each book to check the credibility of the fictional account of the issue (compared with informational texts).
- Students will develop and present a group presentation with project findings demonstrating formal presentation skills.

About Book Selection

Consider what settings, ideas, characters, and life experience that the student would like to explore through literature with the benefit of a reading group for support. To assist in providing guidance on an appropriate age range, please consult this website: <https://fab.lexile.com/>. To assist with additional guidance for recommended age and potential mature content, please use this website: <http://www.compassbookratings.com/reviews/index.php/review/psearch/rating>.

According to the District 15 Board of Education Policy Manual (6:230), "The (Learning Resource Center) includes an organized collection of resources available to students and staff to supplement classroom instruction, foster reading for pleasure ... as appropriate to students of all abilities in the grade levels served....Materials should be selected on the basis of encouraging the growth of knowledge and developing literary, cultural and aesthetic appreciation, and ethical standards...There should be opportunities for free selection of materials based on the student's interest as well as guided selection of materials appropriate to specific planned learning experiences." District residents with complaints about library resource center materials should complete the appropriate objection form and use the Uniform Complaint Procedure. LEGAL REF.: 23 Ill. Admin. Code §1.420(o). CROSS REF.: 2:260 (Uniform Complaint Procedure), 6:60 (Curriculum Content), 6:170 Title I Programs), 6:210 (Instructional Materials)

Sincerely,

Dr. Donovan, 7th grade Reading and Writing

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Dr. Wilson, Principal

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Student Selections and Parental Permissions

Contemporary Issues in America

I, _____, have shown my parents my preferences, and we have discussed my selections (and done further research online if needed) to be sure that the book is appropriate for me at this time in my reading life. Please check one of the following and sign.

Our family would **especially like** our student to read the following (circle the corresponding number):

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Our family prefers that our student **does not read** the following (mark an X over the corresponding number):

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Student Name _____ Date _____

Parent Signature _____ Date _____

Contemporary GLOBAL Issues

I, _____, have shown my parents my preferences, and we have discussed my selections (and done further research online if needed) to be sure that the book is appropriate for me at this time in my reading life. Please check one of the following and sign.

Our family would **especially like** our student to read the following (circle the corresponding number you):

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Our family prefers that our student **does not read** the following (mark an X over the corresponding number):

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Student Name _____ Date _____

Parent Signature _____ Date _____

Please return to Dr. Donovan.