

2026 Summer Reading for rising 8th grade ELA

“Let’s Talk Books!”

Welcome to summer reading 2026 for rising 8th graders! This summer you will **read one book that you have never read before**, prepare **a 5-6 minute “critique” about it with an accompanying slide presentation**. A critique is simply a literary way to talk about a book. You will choose from a curated list of seriously amazing books. This list has something for everyone, plenty of superb options. After you read your book, **you will write your critique and prepare a Google Slide presentation to go with it**. On the first day of school, you will join Mrs. Dittmar’s language arts class on Google Classroom and **upload your slideshow**. I can’t wait to hear about your book! Here are the guidelines for your short essay and slides:

Critique: you may handwrite double spaced or type in a Google doc 500–800 words (about 2–3 double-spaced pages 12 pt font) **a five paragraph essay. 25 Pts**

Slides: (25 points)

Create a Google slide presentation using Google Slides. You will share your “book critique” and accompanying slides with the class as a presentation during the first two weeks of school.

Slide #1: Introduction/ Overview (correlates to Paragraph 1: summary)

- Display a picture of the cover of your book as you give us a brief overview of the book.
- Intro should include the title, type of book (fantasy, historic fiction, biography etc), the author, date of publication, publisher.

Slide #2: Setting/Characters/Plot: (correlates to 2nd paragraph of essay)

- Time, place, mood
- List main characters
- What is the problem or main conflict? How does the plot unfold? Try to give enough detail to interest your audience in the book. Use any graphics that show the setting or tone of the book.

Slide #3: Your graphic: correlates to 3rd paragraph: Theme

- What is a message that the author is trying to convey to readers? That is a theme.
- Create a drawing, sketch, cartoon or collage, or 3-D clay or digital graphic artwork that shows one or more of the themes of the book–(big ideas).
- Take a picture of it and upload it to this slide.

Slide #4: Quote: Oral Interpretation of a Passage

- Choose a favorite quote from the book that relates to a theme to read orally to the class.
- Introduce the passage by giving the audience a little background information they need in order to understand the context of the passage.

Slide #5: Conclusion/ Analysis (Correlates to paragraph 5–Conclusion of essay)

- Explain why this book is well-written. You may want to explain how the author uses literary techniques and devices skillfully. What makes this book good? What did you like or dislike? What was Interesting? Would you recommend it to others? Personal reflection with your opinions and review.

Keep in mind that your slides are visual aids to the oral reading of your essay. They shouldn’t be too text heavy (except for your quote). You want your audience listening to your essay, not reading your slides.

BOOK CHOICES:

*= fairly on par for rising 8th grade ** = moderately challenging ***= more challenging (above grade level)

Summer Literature Options with a short synopsis for each book:

1. **The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster – A restless, daydreaming boy named Milo stumbles into a dazzling, topsy-turvy world where puns come alive, numbers wage war, and boredom is the ultimate crime. Quirky.
2. ***Eragon* by Christopher Paolini – A humble farm boy's life explodes into adventure when he discovers a gleaming dragon egg, becoming the last hope against a merciless king in a kingdom teetering on ruin. (fantasy)
3. **The Kidnapped Prince: The Life of Olaudah Equiano* – The gripping true story of an intelligent, courageous African boy torn from his homeland, enslaved, and ultimately rising up to fight for freedom.
4. ***Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls – A young boy in the wild Ozarks saves up to buy then train two fearless coonhounds, forging an unbreakable bond. Dog lovers...
5. ***Moccasin Trail* by Eloise Jarvis McGraw – A rugged boy raised by Crow warriors struggles between his loyalties and his pioneer family's survival.
6. ****Kidnapped* by Robert Louis Stevenson – A bold young hero is betrayed by his scheming uncle, kidnapped, and thrust into a whirlwind of danger across Scotland's treacherous highlands.
7. ***The Westing Game* by Ellen Raskin – Sixteen suspicious heirs are lured into a twisted, high-stakes game to solve a millionaire's murder—but only one can claim the fortune.
8. **Behind Rebel Lines* by Seymour Reit – The true story of fearless Emma Edmonds, a northerner who disguised herself as a man to join the army and then became a spy in the Civil War. Inspiring!
9. ***The Eagle of the Ninth* by Rosemary Sutcliff – A battle-hardened Roman soldier braves the savage wilderness to recover his father's lost legion—and his own shattered honor.
10. **Amos Fortune, Free Man* by Elizabeth Yates – The inspiring true journey of an African prince, enslaved but never broken, who buys his freedom and dedicates his life to liberating others.
11. ***Mara, Daughter of the Nile* by Eloise Jarvis McGraw – A quick-witted slave girl plays a deadly game of double espionage in the cutthroat courts of ancient Egypt. Adventurous with a touch of romance!
12. ***The Breadwinner* by Deborah Ellis – A brave Afghan girl risks everything, disguising herself as a boy to feed her starving family under the Taliban's iron rule.
13. ***Anne of Green Gables*, L.M. Montgomery. An endearing classic!
14. ***Little Britches* by Ralph Moody – A scrappy, determined boy and his family battle droughts, outlaws, and other challenges while carving out a new life on Colorado ranch. Such a great book!
15. **Snow Treasure* by Marie McSwigan – Norwegian children execute a daring, real-life mission, involving stolen gold and Nazis. Based on a true story.
16. ***Indian Captive* by Lois Lenski – The haunting true story of Mary Jemison, a girl ripped from her family and reborn into a Seneca tribe's way of life.

17. ****Rules of the Road** by Joan Bauer – A sharp-witted teen hits the open road with a tough-as-nails businesswoman, discovering courage, friendship, and her own unstoppable grit.
18. ***Owls in the Family**, Every kid needs a pet, but what happens when your pet is an owl, and your owl is terrorizing the neighbourhood? Warm, funny, and bursting with adventure and suspense.
19. ***Maniac Magee** by Jerry Spinelli – A lightning-fast, fearless orphan bridges a racially divided town with his unbelievable, jaw-dropping feats.
20. ****Farewell to Manzanar** by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston – shared through the eyes of their teenage daughter, a Japanese-American family's struggle for dignity inside a California internment camp during WWII.
21. ***Hatchet**, by Gary Paulsen. Thirteen-year-old Brian Robeson is traveling by single-engine plane to visit his father for the first time since his parents' divorce. When the plane crashes, killing the pilot, the sole survivor is Brian. He is alone in the Canadian wilderness with nothing but his clothing, a tattered windbreaker, and the hatchet his mother had given him as a present. Newberry Honor Book.
22. ***Sacagawea** by Joseph Bruchac – The thrilling, true tale of the brave young Shoshone woman who guided Lewis and Clark through untamed wilderness.
23. ****Caddie Woodlawn** by Carol Ryrie Brink – A wild, adventurous tomboy runs free on the Wisconsin frontier, defying expectations and stirring up trouble.
24. ****Bridge to Terabithia** by Katherine Paterson – Two lonely kids craft a breathtaking, secret kingdom—until something alters their magical world.
25. *****Men of Iron** by Howard Pyle – A noble young squire battles treachery and injustice to restore his disgraced father's name in medieval England. For a reader who can handle a challenge!
26. *****Around the World in Eighty Days** by Jules Verne – A wealthy, eccentric Englishman races against the clock in a dizzying global dash full of disasters and narrow escapes. A classic adventure!
27. ****The Sherwood Ring** by Elizabeth Marie Pope – A clever girl uncovers family secrets with the help of mischievous Revolutionary War ghosts in a spine-tingling mystery. A fun favorite of my daughter's!
28. ***I am David. Anne Holm.** a twelve-year-old boy struggles to cope with an entirely strange world as he flees northward to freedom in Denmark, after escaping from the eastern European prison camp where he spent most of his life.
29. ***Number the Stars. Lois Lowry.** As the German troops begin their campaign to "relocate" all the Jews of Denmark, Annemarie Johansen's family takes in her best friend, Ellen, and conceals her as part of the family.
30. ****The Secret Garden**, Francis Hodgson Burnett. When orphaned Mary Lennox comes to live at her uncle's great house on the Yorkshire Moors, she finds it full of secrets. The mansion has nearly one hundred rooms, and her uncle keeps himself locked up. And at night, she hears the sound of crying down one of the long corridors.
31. ***A Wrinkle in Time.** Madeleine L'Engle. The Sci-fi fantasy story is about a teenage girl named Meg Murry, whose father has been missing for several years. Originally on a research mission for the US government, the brilliant scientist (both Meg's parents are brilliant scientists) vanished. While the government says that he is "serving his country", the family is worried, and most of the small town where they live has assumed the worst. Despite their worry, the family insists that the father is coming back someday.
32. ***The Magician's Nephew.** C.S. Lewis. How the Narnia world all begins....
33. ***The Hobbit.** J.R. Tolkien. Reluctant Bilbo Baggins gets convinced to go help some dwarves unseat a dragon.
34. *****Treasure Island.** R.L. Stevenson. Another timeless adventure classic! Pirates...