

Students, parents, and/or guardians:

As we move into fourth quarter, we will start our next literacy text. Different from previous reading assignments, the class as a whole will not read one text; rather, students will be placed into book groups. Each book group will focus on one of the five following novels, as determined by student preference and parent/guardian approval. Students will work with members of their book groups to read and discuss the selected novel.

Each novel is an award-winning, young adult novel that has been selected with the intention to build awareness, perspective, and empathy in young adult readers. While each of the novels is considered to be age-appropriate for eighth-grade readers, some of the novels do deal with mature topics. Therefore, the eighth-grade literacy team wanted students and parents/guardians to review the book options together, enabling each student to select the text that is most appropriate and interesting for him/her. Below, a summary of each text is provided, providing insight into the topics and content of the text. In addition, sources such as commonsensemedia.org can provide additional information about the specific language, violence, drinking, etc. content in each text.

After reviewing the options, students will rank their top two preferences for book groups, In addition, we ask that each parent/guardian sign-off on your student's text selections.

***Luna* by Julie Anne Peters**

Luna follows the life of sixteen-year-old Regan as she keeps the secret of her older sister Luna's transgender identity. During the day, Luna pretends to be an average senior boy named Liam. But at night, Luna is allowed to be her true self. After years of 'transforming' only at night, Luna confides in her sister that she wants to transition into a full-time female. Luna asks Regan to help her with her transitioning and, although she agrees, she finds herself worried about Luna and her safety. The novel follows Regan as she makes sense of her sister's decision. Despite the tensions and the negativity weighing on her choice, Luna fights for her right to be the person she feels that she was meant to be. Alongside her, Regan learns to stand her ground, to think more of herself, and discovers the person she wants to be. Luna is a sensitive, realistic look at a topic that is still very much misunderstood and too often silenced. Ultimately, Luna is a story of acceptance and self-love and about being true to yourself regardless of the cost.

***Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson**

"Speak up for yourself--we want to know what you have to say." From the first moment of her freshman year at Merryweather High, Melinda knows this is a big fat lie, part of the nonsense of high school. She is friendless, outcast, because she busted an end-of-summer party by calling the cops, so now nobody will talk to her, let alone listen to her. As time passes, she becomes increasingly isolated and practically stops talking altogether. Only her art class offers any solace, and it is through her work on an art project that she is finally able to face what really happened at that terrible party: she was raped by an upperclassman, a guy who still attends Merryweather and is still a threat to her. Her healing process has just begun when she has another violent encounter with him. But this time Melinda fights back, refuses to be silent, and thereby achieves a measure of vindication. In Laurie Halse Anderson's powerful novel, an utterly believable heroine with a bitterly ironic voice delivers a blow to the hypocritical world of high school. She speaks for many a disenfranchised teenager while demonstrating the importance of speaking up for oneself. Melinda's slow healing process is a realistic and compelling one, and readers will cheer for her when she finally does use her voice.

***The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore**

"The chilling truth is that his story could have been mine. The tragedy is that my story could have been his."

Two kids named Wes Moore were born blocks apart within a year of each other. Both grew up fatherless in similar Baltimore neighborhoods and had difficult childhoods; both hung out on street corners with their crews; both ran into trouble with the police. How, then, did one grow up to be a Rhodes Scholar, decorated veteran, White House Fellow, and business leader, while the other ended up a convicted murderer serving a life sentence? Wes Moore, the author of this fascinating book, sets out to answer this profound question. In alternating narratives that take readers from heart-wrenching losses to moments of surprising redemption, *The Other Wes Moore* tells the story of a generation of boys trying to find their way in a hostile world.

***A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah**

This is how wars are fought now: by children, hopped-up on drugs and wielding AK-47s. Children have become soldiers of choice. In the more than fifty conflicts going on worldwide, it is estimated that there are some 300,000 child soldiers. Ishmael Beah used to be one of them. What is war like through the eyes of a child soldier? How does one become a killer? How does one stop? Child soldiers have been profiled by journalists, and novelists have struggled to imagine their lives. But until now, there has not been a first-person account from someone who came through this hell and survived.

In *A Long Way Gone*, Beah, now twenty-five years old, tells a riveting story: how at the age of twelve, he fled attacking rebels and wandered a land rendered unrecognizable by violence. By thirteen, he'd been picked up by the government army, and Beah, at heart a gentle boy, found that he was capable of truly terrible acts. This is a rare and mesmerizing account, told with real literary force and heartbreaking honesty.

***Mockingbird* by Kathryn Erskine**

Caitlin has Asperger's. The world according to her is black and white; anything in between is confusing. Before, when things got confusing, Caitlin went to her older brother, Devon, for help. But Devon was killed in a school shooting, and Caitlin's dad is so distraught that he is just not helpful. Caitlin wants everything to go back to the way things were, but she doesn't know how to do that. Then she comes across the word closure-- and she realizes this is what she needs. And in her search for it, Caitlin discovers that the world may not be so black and white after all. The book's message is a poignant one: Every character is trying to overcome grief, develop empathy, and show tolerance for others. Ultimately, the entire community learns that problems and frustrations can be avoided "by getting inside someone's head," and better understanding him.

NAME: _____

PREFERENCE #1 _____

PREFERENCE #2 _____

PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE _____