

Joliet Township High Schools “Highly Recommended Reads” for the summer of 2021

Punching the Air by Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam

Amal Shahid has always been an artist and a poet. But even in a diverse art school, because of a biased system he's seen as disruptive and unmotivated. Then, one fateful night, an altercation in a gentrifying neighborhood escalates into tragedy. “Boys just being boys” turns out to be true only when those boys are white. Suddenly, at just sixteen years old, Amal is convicted of a crime he didn't commit and sent to prison. Despair and rage almost sink him until he turns to the refuge of his words, his art. This never should have been his story. But can he change it? With spellbinding lyricism, award-winning author Ibi Zoboi and prison reform activist Yusef Salaam tell a moving and deeply profound story about how one boy is able to maintain his humanity and fight for the truth in a system designed to strip him of both.

Darius the Great Is Not Okay by Adib Khorram

Darius Kellner speaks better Klingon than Farsi, and he knows more about Hobbit social cues than Persian ones. He's a Fractional Persian—half, his mom's side—and his first-ever trip to Iran is about to change his life. Darius has never really fit in at home, and he's sure things are going to be the same in Iran. His clinical depression doesn't exactly help matters, and trying to explain his medication to his grandparents only makes things harder. Then Darius meets Sohrab, the boy next door, and everything changes.

Efrén Divided by Ernesto Cisneros

Efrén Nava's Amá is his Superwoman—or Soperwoman, named after the delicious Mexican sopes his mother often prepares. Both Amá and Apá work hard all day to provide for the family, making sure Efrén and his younger siblings Max and Mía feel safe and loved. But Efrén worries about his parents; although he's American-born, his parents are undocumented. His worst nightmare comes true one day when Amá doesn't return from work and is deported across the border to Tijuana, México.

Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot by Mikki Kendall

In her searing collection of essays, Mikki Kendall takes aim at the legitimacy of the modern feminist movement, arguing that it has chronically failed to address the needs of all but a few women. Drawing on her own experiences with hunger, violence, and hypersexualization, along with incisive commentary on politics, pop culture, the stigma of mental health, and more, Hood Feminism delivers an irrefutable indictment of a movement in flux.

Fresh Ink: An Anthology edited by Lamar Giles

Thirteen accomplished YA authors deliver a label-defying anthology that includes ten short stories, a graphic novel, and a one-act play from Walter Dean Myers. This collection addresses topics like gentrification, acceptance, untimely death, coming out, and poverty and ranges in genre from contemporary realistic fiction to adventure and romance.

The Black Friend: On Being a Better White Person by Frederick Joseph

Speaking directly to the reader, Frederick Joseph calls up race-related anecdotes from his past, weaving in his thoughts on why they were hurtful and how he might handle things differently now. Each chapter features the voice of at least one artist or activist, including Angie Thomas, April Reign, Jemele Hill and eleven others. Touching on everything from cultural appropriation to power dynamics, “reverse racism” to white privilege, microaggressions to the tragic results of overt racism, this book serves as conversation starter, tool kit, and invaluable window into the life of a former “token Black kid” who now presents himself as the friend many readers need.

The Dark Matter of Mona Starr by Laura Lee Gulledge

Sometimes, the world is too much for Mona Starr. She’s sweet, geeky, and creative, but it’s hard for her to make friends and connect with other people, and her depression seems to take on a vivid, concrete form. She calls it her Matter. The Matter seems to be everywhere, telling Mona she’s not good enough and that everyone around her wishes she’d go away. But with therapy, art, writing, and the persistence of a few good friends, Mona starts to understand her Matter and how she can turn her fears into strengths. Heartfelt, emotionally vulnerable, and visually stunning, *The Dark Matter of Mona Starr* is a graphic novel about battling your inner doubts and fears—and finding your creative genius.