Dear Incoming 7th graders,

Welcome to Taft Academic Center! At any point in the summer, choose one of the verse novels that you are excited to read from the reading list. While you are reading, keep track of the following things in any way that works well for you (annotating in the book, post-it notes, journaling, etc.):

1. **Quotes** that you find interesting or significant (make sure to keep track of page numbers)
2. **Questions** that you have while reading. Questions are what keep us reading; what are your wonderings as you read? Ask a family member to help you through the difficult questions if you have any.
3. **Your reading skills**—demonstrate your understanding of the text and knowledge of author’s craft/literary techniques (such as symbolism, metaphor, theme, tone, etc.) by identifying these as you read.
4. **Your reading identity**—pay attention to your strengths and weaknesses as a reader (such as reading habits, pacing, areas of confusion, etc.). Come to the first day of school with an idea of who you are as a reader.

If you do not buy a copy of the book you read, please make arrangements to have access to a copy of the book at the beginning of the school year in order to use it in class (borrow it again from a library, friend, etc.) If you have any questions, please email me at: vmunoz14@cps.edu

I hope you have a great summer and am looking forward to meeting you soon!

Thank you,
Ms. Muñoz

7th Grade Summer Reading List Options

**Alone Together by Sara Donovan** (2018; 248 pages)
Sadie Carter’s life is a mess, as wavy and tangled as her unruly hair. At 15, she is barely surviving the chaos of her large Catholic family. When one sister becomes pregnant and another is thrown out, her unemployed dad hides his depression, and her mom hides a secret. Sadie, the peacekeeper and rule-follower, has had enough. The empty refrigerator, years of hand-me-downs, and all the secrets have to stop. She longs for something more and plans her escape. However, getting arrested was not her plan. Falling in love was not her plan. With the help of three mysterious strangers—a cop, a teacher, and a cute boy—maybe Sadie will find the strength to defy the rules and do the unexpected. Told in verse, Sarah J. Donovan’s debut Alone Together has secrets, romance, struggle, sin, and redemption, all before Sadie blows out her 16 candles. It’s a courageously honest look at growing up in a big family.

**American Ace by Marilyn Nelson** (2016; 128 pages)
Connor’s grandmother leaves his dad a letter when she dies, and the letter’s confession shakes their tight-knit Italian-American family: The man who raised Dad is not his birth father.
But the only clues to this birth father’s identity are a class ring and a pair of pilot’s wings. And so Connor takes it upon himself to investigate—a pursuit that becomes even more pressing when Dad is hospitalized after a stroke. What Connor discovers will lead him and his father to a new, richer understanding of race, identity, and each other.

**Brown Girl Dreaming by Jacqueline Woodson** (2014; 368 pages)
Raised in South Carolina and New York, Woodson always felt halfway home in each place. In vivid poems, she shares what it was like to grow up as an African American in the 1960s and 1970s, living with the remnants of Jim Crow and her growing awareness of the Civil Rights movement. Touching and powerful, each poem is both accessible and emotionally charged, each line a glimpse into a child’s soul as she searches for her place in the world. Woodson’s eloquent poetry also reflects the joy of finding her voice through writing stories, despite the fact that she struggled with reading as a child. Her love of stories inspired her and stayed with her, creating the first sparks of the gifted writer she was to become.

**Caminar by Skila Brown** (2014; 208 pages)
Carlos knows that when the soldiers arrive with warnings about the Communist rebels, it is time to be a man and defend the village, keep everyone safe. But Mama tells him not yet — he’s still her quiet moonfaced boy. The soldiers laugh at the villagers, and before they move on, a neighbor is found dangling from a tree, a sign on his neck: Communist. Mama tells Carlos to run and hide, then try to find her. . . . Numb and alone, he must join a band of guerillas as they trek to the top of the mountain where Carlos’s abuela lives. Will he be in time, and brave enough, to warn them about the soldiers? What will he do then? A novel in verse inspired by actual events during Guatemala’s civil war, Caminar is the moving story of a boy who loses nearly everything before discovering who he really is.

**The Crossover by Kwame Alexander** (2014; 256 pages)
"With a bolt of lightning on my kicks . . . The court is SIZZLING. My sweat is DRIZZLING. Stop all that quivering. 'Cuz tonight I’m delivering," raps twelve-year-old Josh Bell. Thanks to their dad, he and his twin brother, Jordan, are kings on the court. But Josh has more than basketball in his blood—he’s got mad beats, too, which help him find his rhythm when it’s all on the line.

As their winning season unfolds, things begin to change. When Jordan meets a girl, the twins’ bond unravels. Told in dynamic verse, this fast and furious middle grade novel that started it all absolutely bounces with rhythm and bursts with heart.

**Inside Out and Back Again by Thanhha Lai** (2013; 288 pages)
Inspired by the author’s childhood experience as a refugee—fleeing Vietnam after the Fall of Saigon and immigrating to Alabama—this coming-of-age debut novel told in verse has been celebrated for its touching child’s-eye view of family and immigration.

Hà has only ever known Saigon: the thrills of its markets, the joy of its traditions, and the warmth of her friends close by. But now the Vietnam War has reached her home. Hà and her family are forced to flee as Saigon falls, and they board a ship headed toward hope—toward America.

**Jazz Owls: A Novel of the Zoot Suit Riots by Margarita Engle** (2018; 179 pages)
Thousands of young Navy sailors are pouring into Los Angeles on their way to the front lines of World War II. They are teenagers, scared, longing to feel alive before they have to face the horrors of battle. Hot jazz music spiced with cool salsa rhythms calls them to dance with the local Mexican American girls, who
jitterbug all night before working all day in the canneries. Proud to do their part for the war effort, these Jazz Owl girls are happy to dance with the sailors—until the blazing summer night when racial violence leads to murder.

Suddenly the young white sailors are attacking these girls’ brothers and boyfriends. The cool, loose zoot suits they wear are supposedly the reason for the violence—when in reality these boys are viciously beaten and arrested simply because of the color of their skin.

**Long Way Down** by Jason Reynolds (2017; 306 pages)
As Will, fifteen, sets out to avenge his brother Shawn’s fatal shooting, seven ghosts who knew Shawn board the elevator and reveal truths Will needs to know.

**The Sound of Letting Go** by Stasia Ward Kehoe (2014; 400 pages)
For sixteen years, Daisy has been good. A good daughter, helping out with her autistic younger brother uncomplainingly. A good friend, even when her best friend makes her feel like a third wheel. When her parents announce they’re sending her brother to an institution—without consulting her—Daisy’s furious, and decides the best way to be a good sister is to start being bad. She quits jazz band and orchestra, slacks in school, and falls for bad-boy Dave.

But one person won’t let Daisy forget who she used to be: Irish exchange student and brilliant musician Cal. Does she want the bad boy or the prodigy? Should she side with her parents or protect her brother? How do you know when to hold on and when—and how—to let go?

**Under the Mesquite** by Guadalupe Garcia McCall (2011; 224 pages)
Lupita, a budding actor and poet in a close-knit Mexican American immigrant family, comes of age as she struggles with adult responsibilities during her mother's battle with cancer in this young adult novel in verse.

When Lupita learns Mami has cancer, she is terrified by the possibility of losing her mother, the anchor of her close-knit family. Suddenly, being a high school student, starring in a play, and dealing with friends who don't always understand, become less important than doing whatever she can to save Mami's life.

While her father cares for Mami at an out-of-town clinic, Lupita takes charge of her seven younger siblings. As Lupita struggles to keep the family afloat, she takes refuge in the shade of a mesquite tree, where she escapes the chaos at home to write. Forced to face her limitations in the midst of overwhelming changes and losses, Lupita rediscovers her voice and finds healing in the power of words.