Choose one of the below novels, and read it by the end of the summer. Use the summaries* provided below to pick something that will be entertaining and appropriate for you. We want you to relish reading outside on a sunny day or inside on a rainy day, without the interference of written work or annotations. Over the summer, you should relax and enjoy your book. After school starts, you will craft a creative project in order to promote the novel to your peers!

- **A Prayer for Owen Meany** by John Irving: Eleven-year-old Owen Meany, playing in a Little League baseball game in Gravesend, New Hampshire, hits a foul ball and kills his best friend's mother. Owen doesn't believe in accidents; he believes he is God's instrument. What happens to Owen after that 1953 foul is both extraordinary and terrifying. At moments a comic, self-deluded victim, but in the end the principal, tragic actor in a divine plan, Owen Meany is the most heartbreaking hero John Irving has yet created.

- **All the Pretty Horses** by Cormac McCarthy: *All the Pretty Horses* tells of young John Grady Cole, the last of a long line of Texas ranchers. Across the border Mexico beckons—beautiful and desolate, rugged and cruelly civilized. With two companions, he sets off on an idyllic, sometimes comic adventure, to a place where dreams are paid for in blood.

- **Black Boy** by Richard Wright: *Black Boy* is a classic of American autobiography, a subtly crafted narrative of Richard Wright's journey from innocence to experience in the Jim Crow South. An enduring story of one young man's coming of age during a particular time and place, *Black Boy* remains a seminal text in our history about what it means to be a man, black, and Southern in America.

- **Breakfast of Champions** by Kurt Vonnegut: In *Breakfast of Champions*, one of Kurt Vonnegut’s most beloved characters, the aging writer Kilgore Trout, finds to his horror that a Midwest car dealer is taking his fiction as truth. What follows is murderously funny satire, as Vonnegut looks at war, sex, racism, success, politics, and pollution in America and reminds us how to see the truth.

- **Caramelo** by Sandra Cisneros: Every year, Ceyala "Lala" Reyes' family—aunts, uncles, mothers, fathers, and Lala's six older brothers—packs up three cars and, in a wild ride, drive from Chicago to the Little Grandfather and Awful Grandmother's house in Mexico City for the summer. Struggling to find a voice above the boom of her brothers and to understand her place on this side of the border and that, Lala is a shrewd observer of family life. But when she starts telling the Awful Grandmother's life story, seeking clues to how she got to be so awful, grandmother accuses Lala of exaggerating. Soon, a multigenerational family narrative turns into a whirlwind exploration of storytelling, lies, and life. Like the cherished rebozo, or shawl, that has been passed down through generations of Reyes women, *Caramelo* is alive with the vibrations of history, family, and love.

- **Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close** by Jonathan Safron Foer: Nine-year-old Oskar Schell is an inventor, amateur entomologist, Francophile, letter writer, pacifist, natural historian, percussionist, romantic, Great Explorer, jeweller, detective, vegan, and collector of butterflies. When his father is killed in the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Centre, Oskar sets out to solve the mystery of a key he discovers in his father's closet. It is a search which leads him into the lives of strangers, through the five boroughs of New York, into history, to the bombings of Dresden and Hiroshima, and on an inward journey which brings him ever closer to some kind of peace.

- **Meridian** by Alice Walker: The second novel written by Alice Walker, preceding *The Color Purple* is a heartfelt and moving story about one woman's personal revolution as she joins the Civil Rights Movement. Set in the
American South in the 1960s it follows Meridian Hill, a courageous young woman who dedicates herself heart and soul to her civil rights work, touching the lives of those around her even as her own health begins to deteriorate. Hers is a lonely battle, but it is one she will not abandon, whatever the costs. This is classic Alice Walker, beautifully written, intense and passionate.

- *Sula* by Toni Morrison: This rich and moving novel traces the lives of two black heroines from their close-knit childhood in a small Ohio town, through their sharply divergent paths of womanhood, to their ultimate confrontation and reconciliation.

  Nel Wright has chosen to stay in the place where she was born, to marry, raise a family, and become a pillar of the black community. Sula Peace has rejected the life Nel has embraced, escaping to college, and submerging herself in city life. When she returns to her roots, it is as a rebel and a wanton seductress. Eventually, both women must face the consequences of their choices. Together, they create an unforgettable portrait of what it means and costs to be a black woman in America.

- *Summer* by Edith Wharton: A naive girl from a humble background meets an ambitious city boy, and a torrid romance ensues. Despite her pride, independence, and honesty, Charity Royall feels shadowed by her past—especially in her ardent relationship with the educated and refined Lucius Harney. Can passion overcome the effects of heredity and environment?

  With its frank treatment of a woman's sexual awakening, *Summer* created a sensation upon its 1917 publication. Edith Wharton — the author of *Ethan Frome* and a peerless observer and chronicler of society — completely shattered the standards of conventional love stories with this novel's candor and realism. The Pulitzer Prize-winning author declared *Summer* a personal favorite among her works, and liked to refer to it as "the Hot Ethan." Over a century later, it remains fresh and relevant.

- *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* by Mark Hadden: Christopher John Francis Boone knows all the countries of the world and their capitals and every prime number up to 7,057. He relates well to animals but has no understanding of human emotions. He cannot stand to be touched. And he detests the color yellow.

  Although gifted with a superbly logical brain, for fifteen-year-old Christopher everyday interactions and admonishments have little meaning. He lives on patterns, rules, and a diagram kept in his pocket. Then one day, a neighbor's dog, Wellington, is killed and his carefully constructive universe is threatened. Christopher sets out to solve the murder in the style of his favourite (logical) detective, Sherlock Holmes. What follows makes for a novel that is funny, poignant and fascinating in its portrayal of a person whose curse and blessing are a mind that perceives the world entirely literally.

- *The Invention of Wings* by Sue Monk Kidd: Hetty “Handful” Grimke, an urban slave in early nineteenth century Charleston, yearns for life beyond the suffocating walls that enclose her within the wealthy Grimke household. The Grimke’s daughter, Sarah, has known from an early age she is meant to do something large in the world, but she is hemmed in by the limits imposed on women.

  Kidd’s sweeping novel is set in motion on Sarah’s eleventh birthday, when she is given ownership of ten year old Handful, who is to be her handmaid. We follow their remarkable journeys over the next thirty five years, as both strive for a life of their own, dramatically shaping each other’s destinies and forming a complex relationship marked by guilt, defiance, estrangement and the uneasy ways of love.

- *The Kitchen God’s Wife* by Amy Tan: Winnie and Helen have kept each other's worst secrets for more than fifty years. Now, because she believes she is dying, Helen wants to expose everything. And Winnie angrily determines that she must be the one to tell her daughter, Pearl, about the past—including the terrible truth even Helen does not know. And so begins Winnie's story of her life on a small island outside Shanghai in the 1920s, and other places in China during World War II, and traces the happy and desperate events that led to Winnie's coming to America in 1949.
The Street by Ann Petry: The Street tells the poignant, often heartbreaking story of Lutie Johnson, a young black woman, and her spirited struggle to raise her son amid the violence, poverty, and racial dissonance of Harlem in the late 1940s. Originally published in 1946 and hailed by critics as a masterwork, The Street was Ann Petry's first novel, a beloved bestseller with more than a million copies in print. Its haunting tale still resonates today.

The Witches of Eastwick by John Updike: Toward the end of the Vietnam era, in a snug little Rhode Island seacoast town, wonderful powers have descended upon Alexandra, Jane, and Sukie, bewitching divorcées with sudden access to all that is female, fecund, and mysterious. Alexandra, a sculptor, summons thunderstorms; Jane, a cellist, floats on the air; and Sukie, the local gossip columnist, turns milk into cream. Their happy little coven takes on new, malignant life when a dark and moneyed stranger, Darryl Van Horne, refurbishes the long-derelict Lenox mansion and invites them in to play. Thenceforth scandal flits through the darkening, crooked streets of Eastwick and through the even darker fantasies of the town’s collective psyche.

Water for Elephants by Sara Gruen: An atmospheric, gritty, and compelling novel of star-crossed lovers, set in the circus world circa 1932, by the bestselling author of Riding Lessons.

When Jacob Jankowski, recently orphaned and suddenly adrift, jumps onto a passing train, he enters a world of freaks, drifters, and misfits, a second-rate circus struggling to survive during the Great Depression, making one-night stands in town after endless town. A veterinary student who almost earned his degree, Jacob is put in charge of caring for the circus menagerie. It is there that he meets Marlena, the beautiful young star of the equestrian act, who is married to August, the charismatic but twisted animal trainer. He also meets Rosie, an elephant who seems untrainable until he discovers a way to reach her.

Beautifully written, Water for Elephants is illuminated by a wonderful sense of time and place. It tells a story of a love between two people that overcomes incredible odds in a world in which even love is a luxury that few can afford.

*All summaries from Goodreads.com

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