

Dear Students and Parents,

Hard to believe but we are once again counting the days to the summer break!

In the essay "Summer Bummer" (follow link) written by legendary satirist, Joe Queenan, he bemoans the drudgery of imposed reading over vacation. He recalls his own attempts of plodding through assigned classics by noted authors, hating every minute of it.

Take a moment to read it, you will laugh too!

At JKHA MS, we try to juggle student interest, diversified reading ability and significance of the selection all the while keeping our eye on the lasting value and impact on the reader. In addition, the research compels us to enhance our selections for summer reading. As a result, last year we expanded our selections to include a non fiction essay that can be downloaded from the JKHA website

The research on reading fluency suggests that there is an advantage in including multiple genres to increase reading fluency and reading diversity. Eclectic reading enhances a student's reading comprehension and improves test readiness.

This year's requirements also include a vocabulary list for each grade that students need to define and be able to use; the summer reading selections, essays, and vocabulary list will be included in the testing in English class in the fall. See the link for the vocabulary lists below.

Copies of the essays and the vocabulary lists will be available upon request in the Middle School office.

Grade 6 [The Boy in the Striped Pajamas](#) by David Boyne
[The Cay](#) by Theodore Taylor
Neat_v_Sloppy essay

Grade 7: [Tangerine](#) by Edward Bloor
[Hatchet](#) by Gary Paulsen
Fish Cheeks essay

Grade 8: [If I Should Die Before I Wake](#) by Han Nolan
[The Outsiders](#) by S. E. Hinton
Homeless 8th grade essay

Vocabulary Summer List-grades 6-8

Joe Queenan shares with his readers his son's appreciation for the novels of his youth. His son, now a college Classics major, tells him that he finally understands the importance of those long ago readings as he revisits them the second time around. His son expresses that in order to really understand a book you need to read in innocence so that you can understand it as an adult.

Thank you for your continued support throughout the school year and we hope that you return to school rested, refreshed, and ready to meet the challenges of the new school year.

Sincerely,

Diane J. Bohs, English Chairperson

Cc: Barbara Deutsch, Principal, JKHAMMS

Links: "Summer Bummer" by Joe Queenan

Essays for Grades 6-8

Vocabulary Lists for Grades 6-8

Summer Bummer

By JOE QUEENAN

The gnashing of teeth never stopped the year my 15-year-old son brought home “A Tale of Two Cities” as his summer reading assignment. According to him, the backbreaking obligation to read Charles Dickens blighted June, ravaged July and obliterated August. Thus, at back-to-school night in September, when his teacher informed parents that their children were gifted, a joy to work with and loved Dickens, I knew she was lying. My kid hated “A Tale of Two Cities.” And he wasn’t alone.

For as long as anyone can remember, well-meaning pedagogues have been sabotaging summer vacations by forcing high schoolers to read “Lord of the Flies,” “All the King’s Men” and “A Separate Peace.” These books may be the cornerstones of our civilization, but they’re certainly no fun. One reason the average American male reads only one book a year may be the emotional trauma suffered in trying to hack his way through “Wuthering Heights” at the age of 14. I myself have never recovered from going toe-to-toe with “The Return of the Native” as a teenager, not only because Thomas Hardy’s bleak vision and lugubrious prose made me feel bleak and lugubrious, but also because it was my first exposure to the boundless cruelty of which adults are capable.

If my teachers had had an ounce of human decency in them they might have assigned us “Macbeth” or Caesar’s “Gallic Wars,” figuring that the merry carnage would at least hold the boys’ interest for a while. Or they could have saddled us with “The Stranger,” which had the mitigating charm of being glib and pretentious and would thus have kept the kids who were obviously going to end up at Bard happy. But by insisting that we write a full report on an uncompromisingly depressing 19th-century novel by a writer who never allowed a single ray of sunshine to brighten his work, the powers-that-be at Cardinal Dougherty High School were merely taunting the student body.

“Don’t mess with us, for there is no torment too beastly for us to contemplate,” they seemed to be saying. “If you even once complain about how boring and irrelevant ‘The Return of the Native’ is, next summer we’ll make you read ‘Daniel Deronda.’ Just try us, punks.”

Forty years after being pistol-whipped by Thomas Hardy, I am amazed that the summer reading list continues to exist. In a society that has dispensed with every other laudable cultural more, it bewilders me that students still allow adults to wreck their summer vacations by forcing them to feast on the passé cheekiness of “The Catcher in the Rye” or on mind-numbing kitsch like “The Alchemist.” I’m not saying it is necessarily a bad thing that schools require students to read books during the summer: culture, like vitamins, works best when imposed rather than selected. I am simply recording my amazement that in an age when urban high schools use weapons detectors to check for handguns, educators still make kids read “The Red Badge of Courage.”

And yet, the system seems to work. Recently, I conducted an informal survey among high school students I know, asking them to evaluate the books they had read over the past few summers. The results floored me. Even though today's pandering, smorgasbord-style reading lists regularly include works by such non-Nobelists as Dean Koontz and David Baldacci, the kids I talked to had mostly spent the past few summers reading books that could only be described as "good."

Though they were not always bubbling with enthusiasm, they generally used no phrase more abusive than "Well, it was interesting" to describe "Lord of the Flies" or "Beowulf." One college-bound senior, Margaret Staudter, told me she actually enjoyed "Middlemarch," even though it took her all summer to finish it.

"What I didn't enjoy was writing all the chapter summaries to prove that I'd read it," she said. "'Middlemarch' has something like 86 chapters."

Other students were slightly less upbeat, but still reported enjoying the assigned books, if only because they got to read them in peace without having to examine them in the autopsy style that is the hallmark of the high school literature class. Of course, there was always the possibility that the kids were lying, merely telling an adult what he wanted to hear out of fear that any negative comments would be reported to the authorities.

But even if this were true, in the end I came to grudgingly admire what English teachers were trying to achieve. The theory seemed to be that smart students would eventually outgrow featherweight homilies like "To Kill a Mockingbird" and move on to something meatier like Chinua Achebe or Nadine Gordimer, whereas if you could get less gifted students to read anything, you were ahead of the game. In this sense, fleeting favorites like "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" and Harper Lee's saccharine, historically implausible novel about the Nicest White Man Ever serve as a vital bridge between books that amuse and books that astound. When I was 16, I thought "A Farewell to Arms" was a classic; then I read "The Sun Also Rises" and realized that it wasn't. No one ever gets to Balzac and Proust without first going through Camus.

My only unresolved beef about summer reading lists is their cavalier juxtaposition of the immortals and the knuckleheads, as if [William Shakespeare](#) and Wally Lamb were in the same weight class. While minor books can ultimately lure readers to the mountaintops, so-so or crummy books — well represented on many of the lists I have seen — only lure readers to more so-so or crummy books. There is a direct line from "Slaughterhouse-Five" to "War and Peace," from "The Red Pony" to "The Red and the Black." But Dean Koontz leads no farther than James Patterson. "Sister Carrie" paves the way for "Anna Karenina"; "Carrie" paves the way for "Cujo."

Even my son, now a classics major in college, seemed to realize that summer reading was, on balance, a valuable experience.

“I hated ‘A Tale of Two Cities’ until I got to the end,” he told me recently. “I wasn’t interested in the characters, and I didn’t believe the history. But then when I got to Sydney Carton up there on the scaffold, I thought, ‘Wow, what a great ending.’ I really liked it the second time I read it.”

“You reread ‘A Tale of Two Cities’?” I gasped in disbelief.

“Yes,” he replied. “It wasn’t as good as ‘Great Expectations,’ but those last 25 pages were amazing.”

This admission impelled me to re-evaluate everything I’d ever believed about summer reading. For 40 years I’d been cursing the day my high school English teacher was born, convinced that the months I’d wasted reading “The Return of the Native” had left indelible scars on my psyche. But if my son’s experience held true, perhaps it was merely a case of my being too young to appreciate Hardy’s genius when first exposed to it. Determined to clear up the matter, I picked up a copy of Hardy’s rustic masterpiece and gave Dorset’s most famous author a second chance to prove me wrong. On Page 6 I happened upon this sentence:

“To recline on a stump of thorn in the central valley of Egdon, between afternoon and night, as now, where the eye could reach nothing of the world outside the summits and shoulders of heathland which filled the whole circumference of its glance, and to know that everything around and underneath had been from prehistoric times as unaltered as the stars overhead, gave ballast to the mind adrift on change, and harassed by the irrepressible New.”

That’s when I took it back to the library. Thomas Hardy wrecked the summer of ’66; there’s no way in hell he’s wrecking the summer of ’07.

Joe Queenan is the author of “Queenan Country: A Reluctant Anglophile’s Pilgrimage to the Mother Country.”

Neat People vs. Sloppy People Response Essay by Jennifer Riddle

In Suzanne Britt's essay, "Neat People vs. Sloppy People," the author gives her definition of neat people and sloppy people. She says that neat people are "meaner and lazier than sloppy people." They care more about the results than the process itself. They are wasteful and insensitive. Sloppy people, on the other hand, "...carry in their mind's eye a heavenly vision, a precise plan, that is so stupendous, so perfect, it can't be achieved in this world or the next." I believe that these definitions convey a sense of irony because we tend to believe just the opposite of neat and sloppy people in real life.

I have always thought that being neat with my belongings, with my appearance, and even with my handwriting is a desirable attribute. Being neat makes me more productive. I can accomplish more in my life by being neat and organized. However, I consider sloppy behaviors such as a cluttered house, a messy office, or a disheveled appearance as a sign of laziness and lack of caring for myself or my surroundings. Being sloppy makes me less productive. I can't possibly get ahead in life if I can't even control my space. The ironic definitions in Britt's essay made me wonder: is it possible that I have it all backwards? Do neat people actually attempt to control their surroundings at the expense of really experiencing life? And, do sloppy people experience life more fully by allowing their external environment to be disorganized?

If this is the case, I would prefer to be a sloppy person. I would much rather enjoy and experience life than be caught up in "organizing" it to the point of not actually taking pleasure in the little things. I want family mementos around me. I want pictures and postcards to remind me of vacations. I want to have childhood birthday cards and family scrapbooks that bring to mind times spent with my loved ones. I want to be able to appreciate my "organized" clutter and embrace it as a symbol of the experiences I have had in my life.

Maybe I am still confused about the true definitions of neat people vs. sloppy people. I do know that I was entertained by the ideas presented in Britt's essay. The positive adjectives generally used to describe neat people were applied to sloppy people and the negative aspects of being neat were brought to light in a different way also. I am willing to consider that sloppiness is not as terrible as I might have once thought. I can even embrace my sloppiness as a way to express my creativity. I think each of us may embody both neat and sloppy characteristics...and, in the end, that is okay with me.

7th grade Essay

“Fish Cheeks”

by Amy Tan

I fell in love with the minister’s son the winter I turned fourteen. He was not Chinese, but as white as Mary in the manger. For Christmas I prayed for this blond-haired boy, Robert, and a slim new American nose.

When I found out that my parents had invited the minister’s family over for Christmas Eve dinner, I cried. What would Robert think of our shabby *Chinese* Christmas? What would he think of our noisy *Chinese* relatives who lacked proper American manners? What terrible disappointment would he feel upon seeing not a roasted turkey and sweet potatoes but *Chinese* food?

On Christmas Eve I saw that my mother had outdone herself in creating a strange menu. She was pulling black veins out of the backs of fleshy prawns. The kitchen was littered with appalling mounds of raw food: a slimy rock cod with bulging fish eyes that pleaded not to be thrown into a pan of hot oil. Tofu, which looked like stacked wedges of rubbery white sponges. A bowl soaking dried fungus back to life. A plate of squid, their backs crisscrossed with knife markings so they resembled bicycle tires.

And then they arrived—the minister’s family and all my relatives in a clamor of doorbells and crumpled Christmas packages. Robert grunted hello, and I pretended he was not worthy of existence.

Dinner threw me deeper into despair. My relatives licked the ends of their chopsticks and reached across the table, dipping them into the dozen or so plates of food. Robert and his family waited patiently for platters to be passed to them. My relatives murmured with pleasure when my mother brought out the whole steamed fish. Robert grimaced. Then my father poked his chopsticks just below the fish eye and plucked out the soft meat. “Amy, your favorite,” he said, offering me the tender fish cheek. I wanted to disappear.

At the end of the meal my father leaned back and belched loudly, thanking my mother for her fine cooking. “It’s a polite Chinese custom to show you are satisfied,” explained my father to our astonished guests. The minister managed to muster up a quiet burp. I was stunned into silence the rest of the night.

After everyone had gone, my mother said to me, “You want to be the same as American girls on the outside.” She handed me an early gift. It was a miniskirt in beige tweed. “But inside you must always be Chinese. You must be proud you are different. Your only shame is to have shame.”

And even though I didn’t agree with her then, I knew that she understood how much I had suffered during the evening’s dinner. It wasn’t until many years later—long after I had gotten over my crush on Robert—that I was able to fully appreciate her lesson and the true purpose behind our particular menu. For Christmas Eve that year, she had chosen all my favorite foods.

****8th grade Essay****

Homeless

by Anna Quindlen

Her name was Ann, and we met in the Port Authority Bus Terminal several Januarys ago. I was doing a story on homeless people. She said I was wasting my time talking to her; she was just passing through, although she'd been passing through for more than two weeks. To prove to me that this was true, she rummaged through a tote bag and a manila envelope and finally unfolded a sheet of typing paper and brought out her photographs.

They were not pictures of family, or friends, or even a dog or cat, its eyes browned in the flashbulb's light. They were pictures of a house. It was like a thousand houses in a hundred towns, not suburb, not city, but somewhere in between, with aluminum siding and a chain-link fence, a narrow driveway running up to a one-car garage, and a patch of backyard. The house was yellow. I looked on the back for a date or a name, but neither was there. There was no need for discussion. I knew what she was trying to tell me, for it was something I had often felt. She was not adrift, alone, anonymous, although her bags and her raincoat with the grime shadowing its creases had made me believe she was. She had a house, or at least once upon a time had had one. Inside were curtains, a couch, a stove, and potholders. You are where you live. She was somebody.

I've never been very good at looking at the big picture, taking the global view, and I've always been a person with an overactive sense of place, the legacy of an Irish grandfather. So it is natural that the thing that seems most wrong with the world to me right now is that there are so many people with no homes. I'm not simply talking about shelter from the elements, or three square meals a day, or a mailing address to which the welfare people can send the check--although I know that all these are important for survival. I'm talking about a home, about precisely those kinds of feelings that have wound up in cross-stitch and French knots on samplers¹ over the years.

Home is where the heart is. There's no place like it. I love my home with ferocity totally out of proportion to its appearance or location. I love dumb things about it: the hot-water heater, the plastic rack you drain dishes in, the roof over my head, which occasionally leaks. And yet it is precisely those dumb things that make it

what it is--a place of certainty, stability, predictability, privacy, for me and for my family. It is where I live. What more can you say about a place than that? That is everything.

Yet it is something that we have been edging away from gradually during my lifetime and the lifetimes of my parents and grandparents. There was a time when where you lived often was where you worked and where you grew the food you ate and even where you were buried. When that era passed, where you lived at least was where your parents had lived and where you would live with your children when you became enfeebled. Then, suddenly, where you lived was where you lived for three years, until you could move on to something else and something else again.

And so we have come to something else again, to children who do not understand what it means to go to their rooms because they have never had a room, to men and women whose fantasy is a wall they can paint a color of their own choosing, to old people reduced to sitting on molded plastic chairs, their skin blue-white in the lights of a bus station, who pull pictures of houses out of their bags. Homes have stopped being homes. Now they are real estate.

People find it curious that those without homes would rather sleep sitting up on benches or huddled in doorways than go to shelters. Certainly some prefer to do so because they are emotionally ill, because they have been locked in before and they are determined not to be locked in again. Others are afraid of the violence and trouble they may find there. But some seem to want something that is not available in shelters, and they will not compromise, not for a cot, or oatmeal, or a shower with special soap that kills the bugs. "One room," a woman with a baby who was sleeping on her sister's floor once told me, "painted blue." That was the crux of it; not the size or location, but pride of ownership. Painted blue.

This is a difficult problem, and some wise and compassionate people are working hard at it. But in the main I think we work around it, just as we walk around it when it is lying on the sidewalk or sitting in the bus terminal--the problem, that is. It has been customary to take people's pain and lessen our own participation in it by turning it into an issue, not a collection of human beings. We turn an adjective into a noun: the poor, not poor people; the homeless, not Ann or the man who lives in the box or the woman who sleeps on the subway grate.

Sometimes I think we would be better off if we forgot about the broad strokes and concentrated on the details. Here is a woman without a bureau.

There is a man with no mirror, no wall to hang it on. They are not the homeless. They are people who have no homes. No drawer that holds the spoons.

Vocabulary- Grade 6	Vocabulary- Grade 7	Vocabulary- Grade 8
Abduct	Abound	Abashed
Abominable	Accelerate	Abdicate
Abstain	Adjacent	Abyss
Adverse	Anecdote	Acme
Affluence	Barren	Adage
Amalgamate	Braggart	Aghast
Amiable	Cache	Apparition
Append	Cosmopolitan	Appease
Balk	Despot	Audacious
Befuddle	Dispense	Awry
Besiege	Dissuade	Banter
Chasten	Entrepreneur	Bludgeon
Clarity	Eradicate	Bolster
Culprit	Firebrand	Calamitous
Dawdle	Fledging	Capacious
Debut	Goad	Caustic
Deluge	Grovel	Cower
Discretion	Havoc	Cryptic
Diversity	Hoard	Deface
Dogged	Iota	Detriment
Encompass	Lethargic	Dexterous
Enigma	Makeshift	Disdain
Enumerate	Malignant	Disgruntled
Epic	Meager	Embody en
Extort	Melancholy	Encroach
Facet	Misdemeanor	Ensue
Forsake	Notorious	Epitaph
Gloat	Oppress	Estrange
Illicit	Oration	Facetious
Illusion	Pall	Falter
Incomprehensible	Paradox	Fiasco
Inept	Pedestrian	Foreboding
Infuriate	Procure	Forthright
Ingenious	Prudent	Frugal
Jovial	Quench	Garnish
Libel	Quibble	Gingerly
Maze	Rant	Glut
Misapprehension	Regime	Haggard
Oaf	Revere	Haughty
Pacify	Sagacious	Impunity
Pantomime	Stalemate	Irascible
Parody	Sullen	Jurisdiction
Plight	Turmoil	Kindred
Prevaricate	Unscathed	Levity
Quash	Vengeance	Malingering
Queue	Vindictive	Mendicant
Ravenous	Void	Myriad
Rendezvous	Wan	Ornate
Repast	Wince	Ostracize
Scant	Wrath	Pallid