

Character Based Literacy Middle School Reading List: Cycle I

Title Author		LEXILE
Quarter 1: Responsibility Requires Action		
<i>Tuck Everlasting</i> Natalie Babbitt	The Tuck family have become ageless by drinking from a magic spring. When ten-year-old Winnie Foster and a greedy evil stranger discover their secret, the Tucks are determined to prevent a disaster. This selection is excellent for use in literature circles and theme study.	770L
<i>The Breadwinner</i> Deborah Ellis	Since the Taliban took over Afghanistan, 11-year-old Parvana has rarely been outdoors. Barred from attending school, shopping at the market, or even playing in the streets of Kabul, the heroine of <i>The Breadwinner</i> is trapped inside her family's one-room home. That is, until the Taliban hauls away her father and Parvana realizes that it's up to her to become the "breadwinner" and disguise herself as a boy to support her mother, two sisters, and baby brother.	630L
<i>Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key</i> Jack Gantos	Joey Pigza is out of control because he has attention deficit disorder (ADD). After injuring another student, Joey finally gets the right professional help and starts to regain control of his actions. The story is told from Joey's point of view and is useful to introduce a discussion about ADD or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).	970L
Quarter 2: Change Requires Effort		
<i>Miracle's Boys</i> Jacqueline Woodson	Set in contemporary Harlem, this novel tells of three African American brothers who are left alone after their mother's death. They struggle to make a better life for themselves despite overwhelming odds and the threat of gang violence. Their dreams, hopes, and love for one another ultimately pull them together.	660L
<i>Taste of Salt</i> Frances Temple	Seventeen-year-old Djo (a victim in the real-life 1991 firebombing of a boys' shelter) is remembered by Jeremie, a girl who cares for him in the hospital after he has been beaten in an unprovoked attack. A coming of age for these two characters occurs in the midst of the cruel injustices that wracked the poverty-stricken nation of Haiti before Jean-Bertrand Aristide's rise to power in 1991. Human rights violations are depicted.	650L
<i>Popcorn Days and Buttermilk Nights</i> Gary Paulsen	Carley recalls the extraordinary summer when, as a troubled fourteen-year-old, he first came to northern Minnesota to stay with his blacksmith Uncle David and gained not only new skills but also a new sense of himself.	950L
Quarter 3: Leadership Requires Engagement		
<i>The Call of the Wild</i> Jack London	The Call of the Wild is a short adventure novel by Jack London published in 1903 and set in Yukon, Canada during the 1890s Klondike Gold Rush, when strong sled dogs were in high demand. The central character is a dog named Buck. The story opens at a ranch in the Santa Clara Valley of California when Buck is stolen from his home and sold into service as a sled dog in Alaska. He progressively reverts to a wild state in the harsh climate, where he is forced to fight to dominate other dogs. By the end, he sheds the veneer of civilization and relies on primordial instinct and learned experience to emerge as a leader in the wild.	990L
<i>The Mighty Miss Malone</i> Christopher Paul Curtis	"We are a family on a journey to a place called wonderful" is the motto of Deza Malone's family. Deza is the smartest girl in her class in Gary, Indiana, singled out by teachers for a special path in life. But it's 1936 and the Great Depression has hit Gary hard, and there are no jobs for black men. When her beloved father leaves to find work, Deza, Mother, and her older brother, Jimmie, go in search of him, and end up in a Hooverville outside Flint, Michigan. Jimmie's beautiful voice inspires him to leave the camp to be a performer, while Deza and Mother find a new home, and cling to the hope that they will find Father. The twists and turns of their story reveal the devastation of the Depression and prove that Deza truly is the Mighty Miss Malone.	750L
<i>The Boy on the Wooden Box</i>	"Much like <i>The Boy In the Striped Pajamas</i> or <i>The Book Thief</i> ," this remarkable memoir from Leon Leyson, one of the youngest children to survive the Holocaust on Oskar Schindler's list, "brings to readers a story of bravery and the fight for a chance to live" (VOYA).	1000L

Leon Leyson	<p>This, the only memoir published by a former Schindler's list child, perfectly captures the innocence of a small boy who goes through the unthinkable. Leon Leyson (born Leib Lezjon) was only ten years old when the Nazis invaded Poland and his family was forced to relocate to the Krakow ghetto. With incredible luck, perseverance, and grit, Leyson was able to survive the sadism of the Nazis, including that of the demonic Amon Goeth, commandant of Plaszow, the concentration camp outside Krakow.</p> <p>Ultimately, it was the generosity and cunning of one man, Oskar Schindler, who saved Leon Leyson's life, and the lives of his mother, his father, and two of his four siblings, by adding their names to his list of workers in his factory—a list that became world renowned: Schindler's list.</p> <p>Told with an abundance of dignity and a remarkable lack of rancor and venom, <i>The Boy on the Wooden Box</i> is a legacy of hope, a memoir unlike anything you've ever read.</p>	
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Quarter 4: Justice Requires Restraint

Shadow Spinner Susan Fletcher	Marjan, thirteen years old, tells how she gets enmeshed in the dangerous intrigue of the Sultan's harem while she serves Queen Shaharazad. Marjan is called upon to secure information outside the palace walls to please the master, husband of the queen. Danger, however, awaits her inside the palace walls as well.	710L
HUSH Jacqueline Woodson	This intriguing story tells of a devastating situation. A middle-class African American family is forced to enter the federal witness protection program after the father decides to testify against two policemen who killed an innocent boy. The family must leave a comfortable and familiar life. Just as Evie learns to cope with her new name and all new names and biographical details, she must also learn that her parents aren't as capable of readjusting as circumstances require. Useful in units on family life, social problems, and moral responsibility.	640L
Framed in Fire David Patneau	Peter Larson has an increasingly hostile relationship with his verbally abusive stepfather, Buck, and some scuffles at school, but is basically a good kid. While he deals with his ambivalent feelings toward his parents, his younger half-brother, Lincoln, reports having visions of events in their lives. The youngster's ability to "see" a fire at a neighbor's house helps to avert a disaster, but in the commotion, Lincoln falls down the stairs and Buck accuses Peter of deliberately trying to harm the toddler. The next stop for Peter is the Resthaven Psychiatric Facility.	530L

Quarter 5: Courage Requires Fortitude

Bridge to Terabithia Katherine Paterson	Jess and Leslie become special friends as they create a magical secret world that they call Terabithia. But when a tragic accident causes Leslie's death, Jess is forced to face life alone. This junior novel confronts many of the issues teens face and is great for literature circles. This selection depicts emotional intensity.	810L
Parvana's Journey Deborah Ellis	This sequel to <i>The Breadwinner</i> easily stands alone. After her father's death, 13-year-old Parvana, disguised as a boy, wanders alone through war-torn Afghanistan looking for her mother and siblings who had disappeared in the tumult of the Taliban takeover of Mazar-e-Sharif. Early in her journey, Parvana comes across a baby, the only survivor in a bombed village. She takes him along, as both a burden and comforting company.	640L
Beardance Will Hobbs	In the sequel to <i>Hobbs's Bearstone</i> , Cloyd Atcitty returns to the high country with his rancher friend Walter. But whereas the elderly man is searching for a lost cache of Spanish gold, Cloyd is hoping to find a family of grizzly bears that has been sighted. The previous novel ended with Cloyd believing that he had failed to save what could have been the last of the Colorado grizzlies, and he clings to the belief that its mate and cubs may be alive. Eventually, his search for the bears and his commitment to their survival becomes a journey of self-discovery.	890L

Quarter 6: Integrity Requires Wholeness

Stuck in Neutral Terry Truman	A fourteen-year-old boy with cerebral palsy is unable to communicate and longs to make contact with others. Through his words, the reader learns that Shawn is bright, funny, occasionally sarcastic, and astonishingly optimistic. Shawn begins to believe that his self-absorbed father is planning to kill him to end his pain. Told in first-person narrative	820L
If You Come Softly Jacqueline Woodson	This novel presents a gently told story of an interracial romance between Jeremiah, a fifteen-year-old African American, whose parents have just separated, and Ellie, an upper-middle-class Jewish girl. The story is told in alternating chapters by Ellie and Jeremiah. The comments about race and racism will strike a chord with black	570L

	readers and open the eyes of white readers.	
<i>The Skin I'm In</i> Sharon G. Flake	Thirteen-year-old Maleeka, uncomfortable because her skin is extremely dark, meets a new teacher with a birthmark on her face. She learns how to value who she is and to accept what she looks like.	670L

Character Based Literacy Middle School Reading List: Cycle II

<i>Title</i> <i>Author</i>		LEXILE
Quarter 1: Responsibility Requires Action		
<i>Island of the Blue Dolphins</i> Scott O'Dell	This novel tells the tale of Karana, an Indian girl living on an island off the coast of California. As her tribe evacuates, she suddenly jumps off the ship when she realizes that her brother has been left behind. The story is a survival tale with a female Robinson Crusoe for its heroine. Karana's solitude and bitterness at the loss of her brother is tempered by the restorative power of nature as she struggles to survive.	1000L
<i>Esperanza Rising</i> Pam Munoz Ryan	This novel tells of a Mexican girl's fall from riches and her immigration to California in the 1930s. The story highlights her awareness of Mexico's post-revolution tensions, the rivalry with Oklahoma Dust Bowl victims, and struggles of Mexican workers trying to organize themselves to ask the U.S. government for better living conditions. California author and setting.	750L
<i>Iqbal</i> Francesco D'Adamo	When young Iqbal is sold into slavery at a carpet factory, his arrival changes everything for the other overworked and abused children there. It is Iqbal who explains to them that despite their master's promises, he plans on keeping them as his slaves indefinitely. But it is also Iqbal who inspires the other children to look to a future free from toil...and is brave enough to show them how to get there. This moving fictionalized account of the real Iqbal Masih is told through the voice of Fatima, a young Pakistani girl whose life is changed by Iqbal's courage.	730L
Quarter 2: Change Requires Effort		
<i>Riding Freedom</i> Pam Munoz Ryan	Charley (Charlotte) Parkhurst ran away from an orphanage in the mid-nineteenth century, posed as a boy, moved to California as a stagecoach driver, and fooled everyone by her appearance. Based on a true story, this book about Charley's life has interesting connections to California history. California author and setting.	720L
<i>Where the Red Fern Grows</i> Wilson Rawles	This story of a young boy's childhood in the Ozarks features his intense relationship with two coon hounds and the many adventures they have while hunting. The story follows Billy from the time he only dreams of having dogs to the moment one of them is killed while saving its master.	700L
<i>Jesse</i> Gary Soto	To escape a home dominated by his alcoholic stepfather, 17-year-old Jesse abruptly leaves high school, moves into an apartment with his older brother, and takes classes at Fresno City College. It is 1968, and the brothers face both the threat of being drafted and the daily grind of their poverty. Racial and class prejudice limit their employment opportunities to field labor, and they pick melons, oranges, or cotton, depending on the season.	900L
Quarter 3: Leadership Requires Engagement		
<i>The Lightning Thief</i> Rick Riordan	After learning that he is the son of a mortal woman and Poseidon, god of the sea, twelve-year-old Percy is sent to a summer camp for demigods like himself, and joins his new friends on a quest to prevent a war between the gods.	NA
<i>The Girl Who Owned a City</i> O.T. Nelson	When a plague sweeps over the earth killing everyone except children under twelve, ten-year-old Lisa organizes a group to rebuild a new way of life.	660L
<i>The Westing Game</i> Ellen Raskin	A bizarre chain of events begins when sixteen unlikely people gather for the reading of Samuel W. Westing's will. And though no one knows why the eccentric, game-loving millionaire has chosen a virtual stranger—and a possible murderer—to inherit his vast fortune, one thing's for sure: Sam Westing may be dead...but that won't stop him from playing one last game!	750L

Quarter 4: Justice Requires Restraint		
Maniac Magee Jerry Spinelli	Maniac is an "on-his-own" kid searching for a place that he can call home. When he sees no difference between the people of the East Side and the West Side, others begin to realize that Jeffrey "Maniac" Magee is truly the "stuff" from which legends are made.	820L
Nothing but the Truth Avi	Ninth-grader Philip hums in his homeroom during the playing of the National Anthem, bringing him a suspension that gains national media attention. The story, told in the form of school memos, news clips, interviews, and diary entries, exposes how media misinformation can change lives.	NA
My Brother Sam is Dead James Lincoln Collier & Christopher Collier	The Meeker family is torn apart during the American Revolutionary War when one son joins the rebel forces and the rest of the family try to remain neutral in a divided town.	770L
Quarter 5: Courage Requires Fortitude		
Nightjohn Gary Paulsen	Nightjohn, an enslaved African American, risks severe punishments by teaching a young slave girl to read. This short novel is an excellent book to read aloud, provides an introduction to slavery, and depicts human rights violations. The book has a sequel titled SARNY.	770L
Sarny Gary Paulsen	The Civil War is over, and Sarny has been released from the shackles of slavery. This sequel to Gary Paulsen's acclaimed novel, <i>Nightjohn</i> , follows Sarny as she searches for her children after the war. Hope comes from surprising places, and soon Sarny finds herself in New Orleans, working, teaching, and building her life anew.	840L
Joey Pigza Loses Control Jack Gantos	When Joey Pigza meets his dad, Carter, for the first time in years, he meets a grown-up version of his old hyperactive self. When his dad wants to teach him how to be a winner and how to take control of his own life, Joey is willing to do whatever his dad says, even though he fears it will do him more harm than good. The book is a sequel to <i>Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key</i> .	800L
Quarter 6: Integrity Requires Wholeness		
Bronx Masquerade Nikki Grimes	Grimes features the voices of 18 urban youths who share their innermost feelings in their open mike poetry presentations. Set in a Bronx high school, the book features characters developed through short monologues paired with self-revealing poetry.	670L
Seedfolks Paul Fleischman	When a young Vietnamese girl plants some bean seeds in a vacant lot because she misses her family, the beginnings of a community project emerge. Other people from the neighboring buildings add their contributions. Short vignettes about lonely lives that become meaningful are woven together in this unique story. California author.	710L
Surviving the Applewhites Stephanie S. Tolan	A troubled teen is sent to live with an eccentric family in this funny, contemporary story. Humorous style and characterization make this an excellent read-aloud novel	820L

Character Based Literacy Middle School Reading List: Cycle III

<i>Title</i> <i>Author</i>		<i>LEXILE</i>
Quarter 1: Responsibility Requires Action		
<i>Lupita Mañana</i> Patricia Beatty	To help her poverty-stricken family, thirteen-year-old Lupita enters California as an illegal alien to work. She is constantly on the watch for la migra (immigration officials).	760L
<i>Freak the Mighty</i> Roman Philbrick	A very unusual and special friendship exists between oversized, learning-disabled Max and his new friend, Freak, a classmate whose birth defects have limited the growth of his body but not the power of his brain or his capacity to care about others. Together they become an unbeatable team, fighting time and the narrow attitudes of others.	1000L
<i>The Outside Shot</i> Walter Dean Myers	Recruited by a small Midwestern college to play basketball, Lonnie Jackson, a Harlem boy has many new experiences, including working with a child who needs physical therapy and dealing with corruption in college sports. Lonnie has one year to learn how to make it as a "college man". It's his outside shot at a bright future. Does he have what it takes?	NA
Quarter 2: Change Requires Effort		
<i>The Maze</i> Will Hobbs	Troubled teen Rick Walker breaks out of Blue Canyon Youth Detention Center and becomes a stowaway in a pickup headed into Utah's canyons. The pickup driver, Lon, oversees a condor-release project and soon has Rick caring as much about the freedom of the birds as he does about his own. Connections may be made to science, ecology, and environmental issues.	720L
<i>Frindle</i> Andrew Clements	When he decides to turn his fifth-grade teacher's love of the dictionary around on her, clever Nick Allen invents a new word and begins a chain of events that quickly move beyond his control.	830L
<i>I am the Cheese</i> Robert Cormier	Imagine discovering that your whole life has been a fiction, your identity altered, and a new family history created. Suddenly nothing is as it once seemed; you can trust no one, maybe not even yourself.	810L
Quarter 3: Leadership Requires Engagement		
<i>The View from Saturday</i> E.L. Konigsburg	It was a surprise to a lot of people when Mrs. Olinski's team won the sixth-grade Academic Bowl contest at Epiphany Middle School. It was an even bigger surprise when they beat the seventh grade and the eighth grade, too. And when they went on to even greater victories, everyone began to ask: How did it happen?	870L
<i>Mud City</i> Deborah Ellis	Parvana's best friend, Shauzia, has escaped the misery of her life in Kabul, only to end up in a refugee camp in Pakistan. She still dreams of seeing the ocean and eventually making a new life in France, but it's hard to imagine when she is living in the Widows' Compound of a muddy, crowded refugee camp outside Peshawar. Shauzia finally decides to leave the camp and try her luck on the streets, But life as a street kid is dangerous and terrifying, even with the advantages of a strong will, brave spirit, and good luck. This is a powerful and human story of a feisty, driven girl who tries to take control of her own life.	740L
<i>Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice</i> Philip Hoose	On March 2, 1955, an impassioned teenager, fed up with the daily injustices of Jim Crow segregation, refused to give her seat to a white woman on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Instead of being celebrated as Rosa Parks would be just nine months later, fifteen-year-old Claudette Colvin found herself shunned by her classmates and dismissed by community leaders. Undaunted, a year later she dared to challenge segregation again as a key plaintiff in <i>Browder v. Gayle</i> , the landmark case that struck down the segregation laws of Montgomery and swept away the legal underpinnings of the Jim Crow South.	1000L

Quarter 4: Justice Requires Restraint		
<i>Number the Stars</i> Lois Lowry	In 1943, during the German occupation of Denmark, ten-year-old Annemarie learns how to be courageous when she helps to shelter her Jewish friend from the Nazis. Readers will feel the tension and danger as the Danes help their Jewish friends escape to safety.	670L
<i>The Cay</i> Theodore Taylor	In 1942 an elderly black man and a young white boy are victims of a shipwreck and are stranded on a Caribbean island. In the day-to-day struggle to survive, the differences between age and youth, black and white, and innocence and experience become secondary to the characters' need to understand each other and transcend their differences. This story uses the dialectic language of the setting and of the day. California author.	860L
<i>Nelson Mandela</i> Barry Denenberg	South Africa has become known as the home of the world's most famous former political prisoner. A prisoner who emerged to become an internationally respected statesman. This is his story and the story of his country.	950L
Quarter 5: Courage Requires Fortitude		
<i>The Phantom Tollbooth</i> Norton Juster	Milo, a very bored boy, drives his toy car through a tollbooth that mysteriously appears in his bedroom and arrives in the Kingdom of Wisdom. There he learns the importance of words and numbers, patience and responsibility.	1000L
<i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i> Mildred Taylor	Set in Mississippi during the 1930s, this modern classic portrays the struggles of the Logan family, determined to retain the land they own in the face of threats, harassment, and prejudice. It is told from young Cassie's point of view. Language and violent actions reflect the time. This selection contains connections to eighth-grade history/social science.	920L
<i>Wringer</i> Jerry Spinelli	The annual pigeon shoot provides the young boys of the community the opportunity to prove their fortitude and manhood by serving as "wringers." Palmer La Rue isn't sure he wants the opportunity or if he believes in the long-held tradition. However, not participating can have consequences, too.	690L
Quarter 6: Integrity Requires Wholeness		
<i>The Giver</i> Lois Lowry	Jonas lives in a seemingly utopian society. He is about to experience the Ceremony of Twelve to determine his role in life. Little does he know that he will discover the secret memories of his dystopian society. The story depicts human rights violations with mature themes and emotional intensity and is a good selection for literature circles.	760L
<i>Lisa, Bright and Dark</i> John Neufeld	Lisa is smart, attractive, and seemingly successful, so her parents and teachers are unwilling to admit that she is struggling with a mental illness. She has "light" days when everything is normal and "dark" days that push her further into herself where no one can reach her. Lisa's friends listen to her and keep her from being consumed by the darkness that threatens to engulf her.	760L
<i>Goodbye, Vietnam</i> Gloria Whelan	When they realize that grandmother faces arrest in present-day Vietnam for following the old religion and practicing healing, the Vinh family decides to flee their small rice-growing village in the Mekong Delta and escape by sea to Hong Kong. With his skills as a mechanic, the father has secured their passage on a small boat. In a first-person narrative, 13-year-old Mai relates their odyssey.	810L