

Frederica Academy Upper School Summer Reading 7th Grade Common Read

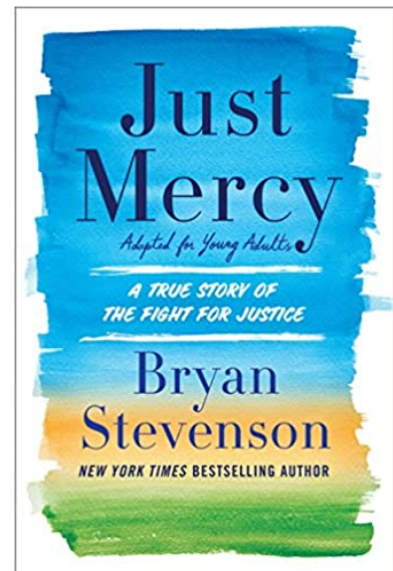
Summer reading is an important part of the curriculum in the Frederica Academy Middle School. Not only does it provide us with a common ground on which to stand at the beginning of the school year, it also keeps young minds active and engaged during the summer. This year, students and faculty will be immersed in the legal world that Stevenson, a Harvard trained lawyer, creates as he explores our criminal justice system. His relentless search for justice serves as an inspiration for all of us.

From Amazon.com:

Bryan Stevenson was a young lawyer when he founded the Equal Justice Initiative, a legal practice dedicated to defending those most desperate and in need: the poor, the wrongly condemned, and women and children trapped in the farthest reaches of our criminal justice system. One of his first cases was that of Walter McMillian, a young man who was sentenced to die for a notorious murder he insisted he didn't commit. The case drew Bryan into a tangle of conspiracy, political machination, and legal brinksmanship—and transformed his understanding of mercy and justice forever.

Just Mercy is at once an unforgettable account of an idealistic, gifted young lawyer's coming of age, a moving window into the lives of those he has defended, and an inspiring argument for compassion in the pursuit of true justice.

Winner of the Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction • Winner of the NAACP Image Award for Nonfiction • Winner of a Books for a Better Life Award • Finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize • Finalist for the Kirkus Reviews Prize • An American Library Association Notable Book



Book: *Just Mercy (Adapted for Young Adults): A True Story of the Fight for Justice* (ISBN 978-0525580034)

Rationale: One of the hardest questions with which students perpetually wrestle in their personal lives is one of equity; what is fair or just for them or those with whom they interact. As children mature into adolescence and then into adulthood questions of justice grow more and more complicated as students learn about and engage with more and more of the culture in which they are raised as well as the world around them. While what is fair may not always seem as clear as it once did, that does not minimize how necessary a practice it is to always consider and question what is the right thing to do and whether or not justice has been administered.

Bryan Stevenson in his story, *Just Mercy*, examines how criminal justice can be more clearly and effectively administered. While some may have already passed judgment on others, Stevenson--through his organization, The Equal Justice Initiative--investigates cases where justice has not been properly carried out.

Students will discuss *Just Mercy* at the start of the school year. These questions guide your reading and understanding of the text. Assignments and assessments will be given at the discretion of the instructor.

- There are countless examples in *Just Mercy* of courts refusing to review new evidence or grant new trials, stating that it is too late for new information. What do you believe contributes to indifference toward claims of innocence? Should people with claims of innocence have their cases reviewed in a timelier manner? Should victims' family members be involved in the review? Do you believe our legal system operates under the principle of innocent until proven guilty? Please share examples that support your argument.
- Why was Walter McMillian transferred from county jail to death row after his arrest? Why might investigators and police officers impose this kind of treatment? Why did the judge decide to move the trial to Baldwin County after Walter's lawyers requested a change of venue? How might this type of change impact jury selection and the outcome of a trial?
- Why was Judge Reed forced to impose a harsh sentence on Trina Garnett, despite stating that "this is the saddest case [he'd] ever seen"? What is the purpose of mandatory minimum sentences? Do you believe there should be additional protections for young people sent to prison? What dangers and challenges do incarcerated young people face when they are placed in adult prisons? What treatment do you think young people believed to be dangerous should receive?
- How are families and communities impacted by the criminal justice system when their loved ones are accused of crimes? Do you believe that there should be services for families to deal with the hurt and confusion that results? Why does Bryan Stevenson believe that people are willing to ignore evidence and logic in a criminal case?
- Discuss the changes Bryan Stevenson witnesses in the corrections officer who transported Avery Jenkins to and from prison. What does Bryan mean when he writes, "We all need mitigation at some point"? Can you think of a time when mitigation may have been helpful in your own life?
- What factors prevent mitigating evidence, information about a person's background and upbringing that may reduce punishment for an offense, from being presented at trial? Why would a judge or a jury lack interest in significant, compelling mitigating evidence? Do you believe Herbert Richardson's sentence would have been different if evidence was presented on his history of abuse, mental illness, PTSD, and military service?
- There are many examples of police traumatizing communities of color throughout the book. Why do you think Walter McMillian's supporters had to go through a metal detector and past a German shepherd at his trial? What historical traumas are perpetuated by the criminal justice system today?
- Why does Bryan Stevenson encourage us to be stonecatchers? What does he believe causes us to hurl stones at other people? How can we do more to support people who are accused or convicted of crimes? Do you believe that mercy can "break the cycle of victimization and victimhood, retribution and suffering"?

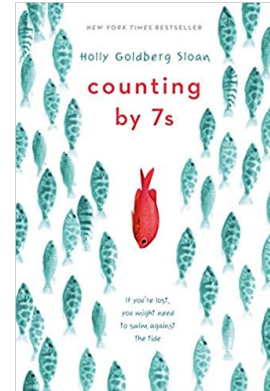
7th Grade Summer Reading 2021

Mandatory 2nd Book

Choose one of the following books that you have *not* previously read to read this summer in addition to *Just Mercy*. Read the novel and be prepared to discuss it during the first weeks of school.

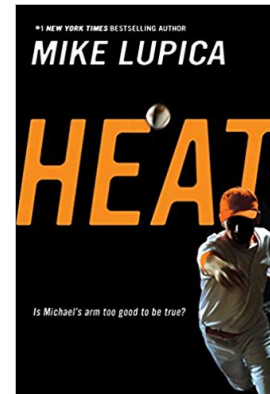
Counting by 7s by Holly Goldberg Sloan

Willow Chance is a twelve-year-old genius, obsessed with nature and diagnosing medical conditions, who finds it comforting to count by 7s. It has never been easy for her to connect with anyone other than her adoptive parents, but that hasn't kept her from leading a quietly happy life . . . until now. Suddenly Willow's world is tragically changed when her parents both die in a car crash, leaving her alone in a baffling world. The triumph of this book is that it is not a tragedy. This extraordinarily odd, but extraordinarily endearing, girl manages to push through her grief. Her journey to find a fascinatingly diverse and fully believable surrogate family is a joy and a revelation to read.



Heat by Mike Lupica

Michael Arroyo has a pitching arm that throws serious heat along with aspirations of leading his team all the way to the Little League World Series. But his firepower is nothing compared to the heat Michael faces in his day-to-day life. Newly orphaned after his father led the family's escape from Cuba, Michael's only family is his seventeen-year old brother Carlos. If Social Services hears of their situation, they will be separated in the foster-care system—or worse, sent back to Cuba. Together, the boys carry on alone, dodging bills and anyone who asks too many questions. But then someone wonders how a twelve-year-old boy could possibly throw with as much power as Michael Arroyo throws. With no way to prove his age, no birth certificate, and no parent to fight for his cause, Michael's secret world is blown wide open, and he discovers that family can come from the most unexpected sources.



The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins

In the ruins of a place once known as North America lies the nation of Panem, a shining Capitol surrounded by twelve outlying districts. The Capitol is harsh and cruel and keeps the districts in line by forcing them all to send one boy and one girl between the ages of twelve and eighteen to participate in the annual Hunger Games, a fight to the death on live TV. Sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen, who lives alone with her mother and younger sister, regards it as a death sentence when she is forced to represent her district in the Games. But Katniss has been close to dead before - and survival, for her, is second nature. Without really meaning to, she becomes a contender. But if she is to win, she will have to start making choices that weigh survival against humanity and life against love.

