

Parent's Guide to: 6th Grade ELA Instructional Materials

**Review and ratings provided by Common Sense Media*

The City of Ember Jeanne DuPrau <i>*Supplemental Material, not part of StudySync</i> ✓ age 8+ ★★★★★ Part fantasy, part mystery, part treasure hunt.	Parents need to know that Jeanne DuPrau's <i>City of Ember</i> is an engaging dystopian sci-fi story about two young teens in a race against time to save their city before the lights in Ember go out forever. This action adventure, set in a post-apocalyptic world, tells a story about learning to work together, conquer fears, and uncover the truth against the odds. DuPrau teaches critical thinking skills by having relatable characters solve a mystery. Young readers will enjoy the drama, intrigue, and healthy friendship that develops between the female and male main characters.
Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief Rick Riordan ✓ age 9+ ★★★★★ Greek myths meet fast-paced adventure in boy-demigod tale.	Parents need to know that <i>The Lightning Thief</i> is the first book by Rick Riordan in a long-running saga that includes five books in the main series, Percy Jackson and the Olympians, five books in a spinoff series, The Heroes of Olympus, and five books in another spinoff series, The Trials of Apollo. Once kids get started with <i>The Lightning Thief</i>, they often blow through all three series. They're that popular. The best time for kids to get rolling is fourth or fifth grade. That's when most kids are ready for a main character like Percy Jackson. He's a sardonically funny 12-year-old with dyslexia and ADHD who is not so great with authority. In <i>The Lightning Thief</i> he finds out his absent father is a Greek god (Greek gods still inhabit the modern world and have affairs with mortals) and that he has powers of his own as a demigod. On a quest, his more heroic qualities come through. He's resilient, resourceful, and brave in the face of danger. There's a lot of mythology to keep straight and some tense monster fights. Usually the monsters turn to dust (though one is beheaded as a trophy), and the demigods get magically healed. There's other action violence as well, especially car accidents and exploding vehicles, and talk of animal abuse and spousal abuse. Percy's mom goes to the Underworld and is heavily mourned. Kids will learn a lot about the Greek idea of the Underworld.

Hoot Carl Hiaasen  age 10+ ★★★★★ Award-winning tale has environmentalism; mature themes.	Parents need to know that Carl Hiaasen's <i>Hoot</i> is a fast-moving, entertaining story that was selected as a Newbery Honor Book in 2003. The central character has a lot of good qualities, including empathy, which makes this a great read for older kids, though some of the heavier issues may need to be unpacked via follow-up conversations. There's bullying, domestic violence, and abusive/neglectful behavior toward children. A kid runs away from home, and another is arrested and put in juvenile detention. Language includes "smart-ass," "bugger," and "damn," and both a teen and adult smoke. Authority figures are portrayed as inept, corrupt, and untrustworthy. The kid heroes sometimes lie, steal, and cut school, albeit for a good cause: saving rare and endangered burrowing owls. Gender roles are reinforced, there are negative comments regarding body size, and Native characters are referred to as "Indians" by White characters. But there are also positive messages about the importance of teamwork, protecting wildlife, and standing up for what you believe in.
Hatchet Gary Paulsen  age 11+ ★★★★★ Hold on tight for an intense tale of survival.	Parents need to know that Gary Paulsen's <i>Hatchet</i> is an intense, fast, exciting read. The main character is a 13-year-old boy whose parents are divorced. He survives a plane crash in the Canadian wilderness en route to visit his father and must use the hatchet his mother once gave him to stay alive. Many kids report that this is the first school-assigned book they fell in love with.
A Wrinkle in Time Madeleine L'Engle  age 9+ ★★★★★ Classic sci-fi story still inspires and gets kids thinking.	Parents need to know that <i>A Wrinkle in Time</i> is one of the great works of literature for kids. Besides being an exciting story, its messages of individuality, nonconformity, friendship and courage have inspired generations of readers. This is a wonderful book for kids who've ever felt "different" or lonely or who have wrestled with loss. It celebrates the power of individuality, bravery, and love.

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry Mildred D. Taylor  age 11+  Compelling tale of family facing racism in '30s Mississippi.	Parents need to know that Mildred D. Taylor's Newbery Award-winning <i>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry</i> is a lyrical, compelling story of 9-year-old narrator, Cassie Logan, and her family in Depression-era Mississippi. The story builds to a fiery climax and features violence motivated by racial prejudice. A family is threatened by a white neighbor and by fire; a mob threatens people; three men are set on fire; children are whipped by teacher and parents; a teen boy is beaten by some older men; one man is shot; and there are vague references to rape. It's a meaningful tale of one family's struggle to keep their small piece of land and maintain their dignity under extremely challenging circumstances.
Touching Spirit Bear Ben Mikaelson	<i>Touching Spirit Bear</i> by Ben Mikaelson is a middle school novel about a troubled teen who learns accountability, healing, and forgiveness through a restorative justice program in the Alaskan wilderness. The book contains mature themes, including violence, child abuse, and graphic injury, but no sexual content. It encourages meaningful discussions about personal responsibility, empathy, resilience, and the possibility of positive change, making it a valuable choice for guided classroom or family conversations.