

Parent's Guide to: 7th Grade ELA Instructional Materials

**Review and ratings provided by Common Sense Media*

The Maze Runner James Dashner <i>*Supplemental Material, not part of StudySync</i>  age 13+  Teens are the pawns of evil adults in violent dystopia.	Parents need to know that the scenes of violence are stronger in this book and more graphic than those of, say, <i>The Hunger Games</i>, partly because at times it is adults murdering children, and not from a distance or out of sight. The teens stranded in the Maze have their memories wiped, but they are still aware on some level that they are being held captive and endangered by adults, not monsters or other children. Some of the teens in the Maze go insane from the fear, the attacks, or in one case, the memory of the world he had left behind. Main characters are conscientious and risk their lives to save others.
Before the Ever After Jacqueline Woodson <i>*Supplemental Material, not part of StudySync</i>  age 10+  Tween copes with father's illness in touching verse novel.	Parents need to know that <i>Before the Ever After</i>, by Jacqueline Woodson (<i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i>), won the 2021 Coretta Scott King (Author) Book Award. It's a novel in verse narrated by a 12-year-old boy who witnesses his professional football player father's physical and mental decline from chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a progressive degenerative condition that can result from repeated blows to the head. The book explores the boy's feelings of confusion and worry and could be helpful for any kid going through a family health crisis.
Jungle Book Rudyard Kipling  age 8+  Mowgli and more in timeless, suspenseful tales.	Parents need to know that Rudyard Kipling's book of short stories <i>The Jungle Book</i> is far less whimsical (and musical) than Disney's classic animated film, and it includes stories with different central characters besides Mowgli, the "mancub" raised by wolves and befriended by Baloo the bear. However, in part because of the charming movie, Mowgli's stories are probably the best loved and best known pieces in the collection. These wonderful stories, which alternate with lyrical poems about the characters, depict a complex and sometimes dangerous natural world in which creatures must respect the "ways of the jungle" in order to coexist. Creatures hunt and kill each other in suspenseful scenes, but almost all violent acts happen "offscreen." In one scene, Mowgli uses his wits to trick an adversary into being killed by a stampeding herd of cattle; the

<i>Jungle Book Continued</i>	animal's death is not shown, but Mowgli is later described skinning the animal. In general, animals talk about killing others for food. <i>The Jungle Book</i> has been made into a number of film and TV versions, and a sequel to the book, <i>The Second Jungle Book</i>, contains more stories about Mowgli and other jungle creatures. 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.
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone JK Rowling  age 8+  Magical start of the fantastic boy-wizard series.	Parents need to know that <i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</i> is the first book in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series about an orphan boy who begins his studies at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The novel respects kids' intelligence and motivates them to tackle its greater length and complexity, play imaginative games, and try to solve its logic puzzles. Book 1 is the lightest in the series, but it still has some scary stuff for sensitive readers: a three-headed dog, an attacking troll, a violent life-size chess board, a hooded figure over a dead and bleeding unicorn, as well as a discussion of how Harry's parents died years ago and how he was raised by an aunt and uncle who neglected him. Some adult wizards drink, especially Hagrid, who drinks to excess more than once. There's little diversity at Hogwarts beyond a few students of color, but women have prominent roles at the school, and the smartest kid in class is Hermione, a girl. The 2015 lavishly illustrated, larger-format edition features a new cover (different from the original U.S. cover pictured here) and more than 100 full-color illustrations by Jim Kay (<i>A Monster Calls</i>) that depict shimmering ghosts amid breathtaking scenes of Hogwarts, character portraits, and pages from magical textbooks.
Tangerine Edward Bloor  age 11+  Soccer player's ominous story about family trauma, friends.	Parents need to know that <i>Tangerine</i> by Edward Bloor, first published in 1997, is an atmospheric coming-of-age novel that follows a soccer player, Paul Fisher, as his family moves to a new city full of strange events, such as daily lightning strikes, a sinkhole, and more. Despite its middle grade readability, the book has mature themes about violence, bullying, and family-derived trauma. There are multiple deaths and mentions of blood.

<i>Tangerine Continued</i>	Language includes one-off mentions of "pissed off," "ass," and "butthead," and characters make homophobic and racist comments (e.g., "You his boyfriend or somethin'?"). A soccer player vomits on the field. The novel centers around Paul's upper-middle-class White family, but the supporting characters are diverse, and the story examines racial and socioeconomic inequality. Paul is also legally blind, and his thick glasses are frequently mentioned (and given mean-spirited nicknames), but Paul rejects the label, so he isn't exactly a role model for disability representation. Despite the book's ominous tone and grim conclusions about family, there are positive takeaways about standing up for yourself and others.
A Long Walk to Water Linda Sue Park  age 11+ ★★★★★ Touching take on Lost Boys of Sudan, based on true story.	Parents need to know <i>A Long Walk to Water</i> by Newbery Medal-winning author Linda Sue Park (<i>A Single Shard</i>) blends fact and fiction to tell a story of the civil war in Sudan (1983–2005), in which more than 20,000 so-called Lost Boys became displaced and/or orphaned. There are bombings, burnings, and people with guns and machetes. Protagonist Salva, who's 11 when his story begins in 1995, knows that sometimes boys are forced to fight. Walking from his village to a refugee camp, he suffers greatly from thirst and hunger. His friend's eaten by a lion, he sees people who have died from dehydration in the desert, and he watches his uncle get shot to death. Another man is hit in the head with the butt of a gun. A boy is shot and another is killed by a crocodile after refugees are forced in the water by soldiers -- 1,000 refugees die that day. Readers will learn through the alternating story of Nya, an 11-year-old Sudanese girl in 2008, about people trying to solve problems in that country after the civil war, some with nonprofits that come to build wells in villages, and they learn how fresh water can lead to schools, markets, and more.
Barrio Boy Ernesto Galarza	<i>Barrio Boy</i> by Ernesto Galarza is an autobiographical novel that tells the story of a young boy's immigration from Mexico to the United States and his experiences adapting to a new culture. The book explores themes of family, education, perseverance, cultural identity, and the immigrant experience. It contains minimal mature content, with occasional references to poverty and

<i>Barrio Boy Continued</i>	discrimination, making it a thoughtful and age-appropriate choice for middle school readers that encourages discussions about empathy, resilience, and diversity.
The Giver Lois Lowry  age 11+ ★★★★★ Riveting, expertly crafted novel shows utopia's flaws.	Parents need to know that Lois Lowry's <i>The Giver</i> is a thoughtful and original novel that examines a flawed utopian society. In the world of the book, a "Receiver" holds all of the community's memories connected with pain, love, and desire so that no other people experience those feelings. <i>The Giver</i> is the first of a four-volume series, and it won the 1994 Newbery Medal. Lowry adapted it for an excellent graphic novel in 2019, and it was made into a 2014 film. The novel has a few disturbing scenes, such as when Jonas experiences the suffering of a wounded soldier, and when he learns that his community euthanizes unwanted people. There are also mild references to sexual desire ("stirrings"). <i>The Giver</i> is an excellent and thought-provoking example of a dystopian novel.
Stargirl Jerry Spinelli  age 10+ ★★★★★ A must-read for middle-schoolers to discuss.	Parents need to know that Stargirl is a sort of supernatural character who is difficult to encapsulate, despite her classmates' repeated attempts to pigeonhole her. Few parents will have objections to the content, but there is one scene in particular where Stargirl's peers verbally attack her on a television show. A romantic relationship also develops between the two main characters, but it's completely innocent.
An American Plague: The True and terrifying story of the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1973 Jim Murphy	<i>An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793</i> by Jim Murphy is a nonfiction account of the devastating yellow fever outbreak in Philadelphia and the people who faced the crisis with courage and determination. The book explores themes of history, public health, resilience, and community responsibility. It includes descriptions of illness, death, and the realities of a deadly epidemic, but no sexual content, making it an engaging and educational choice for middle school readers while encouraging discussions about science, history, and perseverance.

