

Fiction | Nonfiction

by | Pat Miller

Grades
K-2, 3-5

Beat Summer Slump!

If you asked students to write down their top five choices of things to do during summer vacation, you probably wouldn't be surprised to find that few will list recreational reading. Failure to read during the school vacation has led to the well documented Summer Slump in which kids lose more than three months of their school progress, and start the new grade further behind where they were when they finished the previous school year.

Parents may come to you with questions about how to get their kids to read. Typically, librarians suggest summer reading lists provided by their district or made available at one of these sites:

- **Education World: Summer Reading Lists**, www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr244.shtml. This page includes eleven pages of summer reading lists from various school districts and educational organizations.
- **Children's Choices Book List (International Reading Association)**, www.reading.org/Resources/Booklists/ChildrensChoices.aspx. Annotated lists of books selected by children, by year.
- **Teacher's Choices Book List (International Reading Association)**, www.reading.org/Resources/Booklists/TeachersChoices.aspx. These selections by teachers are also annotated.

Librarians may also suggest the local public library's summer reading program. But most parents already know about these resources, and are hoping to find the magic wand that will convert their children from digital device potatoes to hot weather bookworms.



One way to help parents to assist their children in keeping up their reading skills is to involve them in the process. Example speaks louder than exhortation—parents need to evidence reading voluntarily if they expect their children to do the same. Summer is a great time to get the whole family involved in Operation Defeat Summer Slump.

FAMILY INCENTIVES

Parents can select incentives that their children will love, and help them earn that incentive by keeping track of family reading. They can set page goals, book goals, or time goals, and when those goals are reached by the contribution of all members, the whole family can participate in the incentive.

For example, parents can encourage everyone to read nonfiction. Each family member who reads, and those who can be read to, can have a record page like the example at www.librarysparks.com. As family members complete a book or magazine that fits the topic, they record it. Parents can decide

that when X number of sections are completed by each family member, for a family total that is equal to X times the number of readers, then all can earn a family reward. Be sure all know the goal in advance. Both reading or hearing a book read aloud count.

Have students help their parents list events they'd like to attend or activities they'd like to do to celebrate their reading success. Things that get the family out and doing things together should be included. Here are some suggestions:

- Trip to a local creamery, bakery, bottling plant, farmer's market, or other food production field trip
- Gift certificate to book store, Amazon, or other book source
- Water park, theme park, sports stadium, or other family-fun center to culminate the summer
- Coupon for sleepover with friends, play date at park with lunch
- Trip to see family members
- Weekend camping trip—even if it's in the backyard
- Child-chosen reward

It can also be fun for family members to make books of coupons that can be redeemed by reading. When the “cost” of reading a book has been earned, the coupons can be redeemed. The coupon books can be for child from parent, for parent from child, or from sibling to sibling. It would contain handwritten gifts that cost no money, like a day off from cleaning their room or washing the dishes, a pass to watch their TV choices for an evening, and other thoughtful items customized to make family members happy.

Another motivational method to increase family reading is to spell out a favorite treat by reading a book for each letter. For example, ICE CREAM would require a total of eight books/magazines read by the family (everyone must read or hear at least one), and would qualify the readers for a favorite scoop with all the trimmings. Or the word could be TICKETS to a desired movie, sports event, or performance. Family members could have separate rewards, and could keep track with magnetic letters on the refrigerator.

Pick a topic or genre to read about and have every family member read a book about it. Each family member should then share facts, or plot summaries, at a family discussion. For example, a trip to the library could be planned so that everyone gets a mystery. Each person reads his or her mystery, and then discusses what the problem/crime was, who solved it, what some of the clues were, and whether he or she liked the book or guessed the solution in advance.

Send home copies of the forms available at www.librarysparks.com, and encourage students to cool off with a family trip to the public library to download or check out the following titles.

SUMMER NONFICTION

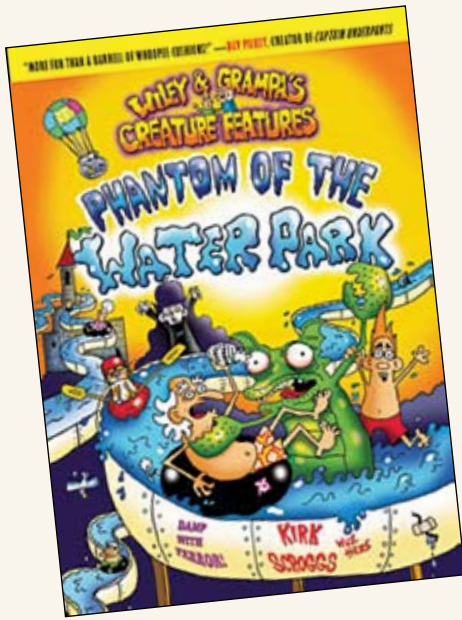
Just because our younger students have lived through a number of summers, don't assume they are summer savvy. Because school is out during most of this season, students are less aware of what it means beyond heat and sunburn. They can learn more about the celebrations, weather, and events of summer in a bevy of nonfiction titles, particularly the Months of the Year series by Weekly Reader Publications.

Books like *It's Sunny Today* and *Are You Ready for Summer?* explain solar energy, how that affects animals and plants, and why children should protect themselves from the sun during the activities enjoyed during this season. Eponymous titles from the publishers listed in the bibliography provide photos from all across the country and the world to see how people enjoy and cope with summer.

Hosting the Olympic Summer Games: Elapsed Time will give students background information on how the Olympic city was chosen, where previous games have been played, and how the games affect their host city. This book uses the games as content for teaching about elapsed time.

SUMMER MYSTERIES

Wiley and his grandfather are enjoying their summer bonding time at the water park until they discover that inhuman creatures are poised for attack in the middle grade book entitled *Phantom of the Water Park*. Trevor discovers that summer school can be hazardous in *Secret of the Summer School Zombies*.



Mike's Mystery is the graphic adaptation of the Boxcar Children's summer trip to visit their aunt. The mystery arises when their friend's house burns down. Look for the Alden children's other graphic summer mystery when they vacation on their own private island in *Surprise Island*.

SUMMER TRAUMA

Sassy is a mini-McGyver, collecting items in her Sparkle Sack that could one day be useful. In *The Birthday Storm*, she travels to Florida for her Grammy's birthday, only to be in the wrong place during a hurricane. Sassy rescues endangered sea turtle eggs and rides out the storm with her family, who comfort and entertain her with stories and songs.

Chrissa is enjoying new friends and practicing with the swim team during the lazy days of summer until someone uses the team's Web site to post cruel messages. *Chrissa Stands Strong* relates how Chrissa and her teammates deal with cyberbullying.

A forest fire traps four friends and their dog when they take a summer hike. They must use courage and quick thinking to escape in *White Cave Escape*. In *Underpants on My Head*, Cleo and her family face the opposite problem on their hiking vacation when they are caught in a freak August snow storm on Mt. Baldy.

Kyna's family drowned in a storm that nearly killed her as well, leaving her to overcome her phobia in her eleventh summer when her adoptive parents rent a cabin on Lake Champlain in *Water Steps*. Twelve-year old Polly Madassa loves *Pride and Prejudice* and *Anne of Green Gables* so much that she strives to imitate their speech. This sum-

mer she is helping her parents in their New Jersey bakery by making deliveries. Her attempts to play matchmaker will keep older readers turning the pages in *Scones and Sensibility*.

SUMMER GHOST STORIES

Summer is prime time for camp outs and sleepovers, whether it's with several "BFFs" or a handful of cousins at Grandma's house. Both benefit from ghost stories, and two new titles make good read alouds at such events.

For humor mixed with the ghosts, try *Dying to Meet You*. The epistolary book, told through newspaper articles, letters, and e-mails, is filled with puns and sprinkled with jokes for the careful reader. Even the characters' names play with words—Seymour Hope, the abandoned but optimistic main character; I. B. Grumply, the anti-social writer who moves in with Seymour; and the friendly ghost of Olive C. Spence, an unpublished, busy, and deceased lady writer. This ghostly comedy plays against a background of writing, literally, and students will enjoy the humor as the three characters concoct a ghost story they hope will be a bestseller.

A ghost story that ratchets up the excitement and action is *The Hanging Hill*. Zack is an eleven-year-old ghost hunter. His adventures are as fast-paced as Indiana Jones as he strives to deal with the many ghosts that haunt the summer theater where his mother's play will be performed.

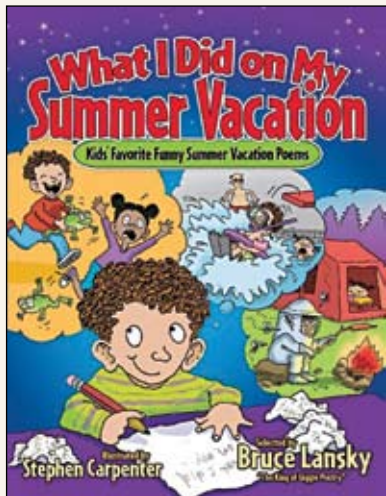


SUMMER PICTURE BOOKS & POETRY

Try different genres this summer. *How Coyote Stole the Summer* is a Native American folk tale about how Coyote retrieves summer from its hiding place in Old Woman's bag. During the sidewalk shimmer of summer, children may not be so grateful that he did.

I Am Extremely Absolutely Boiling is a typical complaint, and the name of the television episode and book based on Lauren Child's characters. Their summer is not working out as planned, nor is a young boy's bedtime when his below-bed monster takes a vacation in *I Need My Monster*.

No need to ignore poetry this summer. *What I Did on My Summer Vacation: Kids' Favorite Funny Summer Vacation Poems* contains forty humorous poems that touch on all kinds of summer misadventures from the last day of school until school begins again. *Vacation: We're Going to the Ocean: Poems* are for a younger age and detail a boy's family trip to the beach.

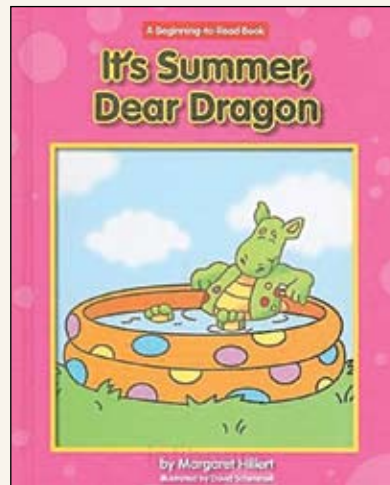


SUMMER CAMP

Summer Camp Secrets contains three short novels about some of the best and worst of summer camp. Sixth grader *Jemma Hartman*, *Camper Extraordinaire* is looking forward to summer camp with her best friend until they are joined by Tammy's obnoxious and possessive cousin. Jemma's changed relationship with Tammy causes her to widen her circle of friends. It's not all drama and heartache, as the girls join other campers in the fun of outdoor activities.

The Riot Brothers, Wilbur and Orville, don't need the scheduled events of summer camp to

have fun. In the middle grade chapter book, *Take the Mummy and Run: The Riot Brothers Are on a Roll* as they pass the summer building their own water park and hunting for a lost mummy.



Younger children don't need a formal summer camp to have fun. A boy and his pet dragon enjoy the simple things of summer like swimming, ball games, fireworks, and picnics in *It's Summer, Dear Dragon*. The photographs in *Splish, Splash, and Blue* will cool childish imaginations as they look for blue things at the water park.

The playground is a summer stand-by. Students of city or suburb will enjoy reading about *The Summer Playground*, and may be inspired to go to their local playground for some summer play of their own.

Day events fill the summer with fun, but the warm nights when children can stay up later offer their own opportunities, like fireworks and lighting bugs. Look for suggestions for summer fun in *Summer Wonders*. They can read about the summer antics of their favorite on-screen characters in Disney's *Minnie's Summer Vacation* and *Scooby-Doo! and the Weird Water Park*.

BEAT THE HEAT AND SUMMER SLUMP

Compile a Summer Reading List if your district doesn't already have one or publicize those online. Get students involved by asking them to suggest their favorite books, series, or characters for each grade level. Share your summer lists with your local public libraries.

Some librarians allow students to check out a number of books at the end of the year to keep over the summer. Others open for a few hours

each week to allow students access to the collection. Challenge yourself to read a number of those children's and adult books that are piled on your bedside table or desk. Keep track, and treat yourself in the waning days of the vacation to something to recognize and reward your keeping up with reading. Happy summer!

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Pat Miller is a library media specialist in a suburban school district near Houston, Texas. She is the author of the upcoming *Library Monkeys (UpstartBooks)* and *Squirrel's New Year's Resolution (Albert Whitman)*; the *Stretchy Lesson Plan series*, the *Stretchy Library Lessons series*, *We're Going on a Book Hunt*, and *A Pet for Every Person*, all from *UpstartBooks*; and *Reaching Every Reader from Linworth*. Visit www.patmillerbooks.com or e-mail Pat at gpatmiller@gmail.com.