

Dear Northwest Middle School Parents/ Guardians,

In an effort to keep our NISD students in a “thinking mode” throughout the summer and begin the year with the rigor and challenges of our district curriculum, students are encouraged to read one or more novels from the following district approved grade level list.

Your child is encouraged to choose one or more novels from the following approved district selections:

Sixth Grade

Buried Alive: How 33 Miners Survived 69 Days Deep Under the Chilean Desert by Elaine Scott
An Elephant in the Garden by Michael Morpurgo
Flora and Ulysses by Kate DiCamillo
The Fourth Stall by Chris Rylander
Heart of a Samurai by Margi Preus
How They Croaked: The Awful Ends of the Awfully Famous by Georgia Bragg
Inside Out and Back Again by Thanhha Lai
The Missing Book 1: Found by Margaret Peterson Haddix
The One and Only Ivan by Katherine Applegate
Waiting for Normal by Leslie Connor
Wings of Fire- The Dragonet Prophecy by Tui T. Sutherland

Seventh Grade:

The Boy in the Striped Pajamas by John Boyne
An Elephant in the Garden by Michael Morpurgo
Every Other Day by Jennifer Barnes
Shipbreaker by Palo Bacigalupi
Unwind by Neil Schusterman
Lincoln’s Grave Robbers by Steve Sheinkin
Unwanted by Lisa McMann
Not a Drop to Drink by Mindy McGinnis
Okay for Now by Gary D. Schmidt
Legend by Marie Lu
Countdown by Debra Wiles
Dark Water Rising by Marian Hale
Cinder by Marissa Meyer
Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio by Peg Kehret
Phineas Gage by John Fleischman
Rot & Ruin by Jonathan Mabry

Eighth Grade: *Berlin Boxing Club* by Robert Sharenow
 Fever, 1793 by Laurie Halse Anderson
 Full Tilt by Neal Shusterman
 Hush Hush by Becca Fitzpatrick
 I Never Had It Made by Jackie Robinson
 I'll Be There by Holly Goldberg Sloan
 Monster by Walter Dean Myers
 Okay for Now by Gary D. Schmidt
 Red Kayak by Priscilla Cummings
 Ungifted by Gordon Korman

Sincerely,

Northwest ISD Middle School Teachers

Story Summaries

6th

***Buried Alive: How 33 Miners Survived 69 Days Deep Under the Chilean Desert*, Elaine Scott (Non-Fiction)**

In August 2010, thirty-three miners were buried alive, two thousand feet below the surface of the earth. After seventeen tense days, just as hope was nearly gone, rescuers made contact with the men. Joy broke out around the world- all thirty-three men were alive! But it would be long weeks before they emerged from the mine. What did the miners feel, trapped in the steamy darkness so far underground? What did they eat? How did they get along? And most important, how did they survive in those seventeen days when death lingered so near, and after, during the long wait for rescue? This amazing true story about problem-solving, community, and real-life heroes is made kid-friendly by veteran non-fiction writer Elaine Scott. It will inspire for years to come.

***An Elephant in the Garden*, Michael Morpurgo (Historical Fiction)**

Lizzie and Karl's mother is a zoo keeper; the family has become attached to an orphaned elephant named Marlene, who will be destroyed as a precautionary measure so she and the other animals don't run wild should the zoo be hit by bombs. The family persuades the zoo director to let Marlene stay in their garden instead. When the city is bombed, the family flees with thousands of others, but how can they walk the same route when they have an elephant in tow, and keep themselves safe? Along the way, they meet Peter, a Canadian navigator who risks his own capture to save the family. As Michael Morpurgo writes in an author's note, *An Elephant in the Garden* is inspired by historical truths, and by his admiration for elephants, "the noblest and wisest and most sensitive of all creatures." Here is a story that brings together an unlikely group of survivors whose faith in kindness and love proves the best weapon of all.

***Flora and Ulysses*, Kate DiCamillo (Fantasy/ Graphic Novel)**

It begins, as the best superhero stories do, with a tragic accident that has unexpected consequences. The squirrel never saw the vacuum cleaner coming, but self-described cynic Flora Belle Buckman, who has read every issue of the comic book *Terrible Things Can Happen to You!*, is the just the right person to step in and save him. What neither can predict is that Ulysses (the squirrel) has been born anew, with powers of strength, flight, and misspelled poetry – and that Flora will be changed too, as she discovers the possibility of hope and the promise of a capacious heart. From #1 *New York Times* best-selling author Kate DiCamillo comes a laugh-out-loud story filled with eccentric, endearing characters and featuring an exciting new format – a novel interspersed with comic-style graphic sequences and full-page illustrations, all rendered in black-and-white by up-and-coming artist K. G. Campbell.

***The Fourth Stall*, Chris Rylander (Realistic Fiction)**

Do you need something? Mac can get it for you. He and his best friend and business manager, Vince. Their methods might sometimes run afoul of the law, or at least the school code of conduct, but if you have a problem, if no one else can help, and if you can pay him, Mac is on your side. His office is located in the East Wing boy's bathroom, fourth stall from the high window. And business is booming. Or at least it was, until this particular Monday. Because this Monday is when Mac and Vince find out that the trouble with solving everyone else's problems is there's no one left to solve yours. The school setting; fast-paced, cinematic, and funny story; and engaging voice make *The Fourth Stall* a perfect classroom read.

***Heart of a Samurai*, Margi Preus (Historical Fiction)**

In 1841, a Japanese fishing vessel sinks. Its crew is forced to swim to a small, unknown island, where they are rescued by a passing American ship. Japan's borders remain closed to all Western nations, so the crew sets off to America, learning English on the way. Manjiro, a fourteen-year-old boy, is curious and eager to learn everything he can about this new culture. Eventually the captain adopts Manjiro and takes him to his home in New England. The boy lives for some time in New England, and then heads to San Francisco to pan for gold. After many years, he makes it back to Japan, only to be imprisoned as an outsider. With his hard-won knowledge of the West, Manjiro is in a unique position to persuade the shogun to ease open the boundaries around Japan; he may even achieve his unlikely dream of becoming a samurai.

***How They Croaked: The Awful Ends of the Awfully Famous*, Georgia Bragg (Non-Fiction)**

The text shares the sometimes gruesome details of the deaths of nineteen famous historical figures, including King Tut, Pocahontas, George Washington, Edgar Allan Poe, and Marie Curie with "easy-to-digest" details and unique illustrations.

***Inside Out and Back Again*, Thanhha Lai (Historical Fiction/ Poetry)**

Inside Out and Back Again is a *New York Times* bestseller, a Newbery Honor Book, and a winner of the National Book Award! Inspired by the author's childhood experience of fleeing Vietnam after the Fall of Saigon and immigrating to Alabama, this coming-of-age debut novel told in verse has been celebrated for its touching child's-eye view of family and immigration. For all the ten years of her life, Hà has only known Saigon: the thrills of its markets, the joy of its traditions, and the warmth of her friends close by. But now the Vietnam War has reached her home. Hà and her family are forced to flee as Saigon falls, and they board a ship headed toward hope. In America, Hà discovers the foreign world of Alabama: the coldness of its strangers, the dullness of its food . . . and the strength of her very own family. This moving story of one girl's year of change, dreams, grief, and healing received four starred reviews, including one from Kirkus which proclaimed it "enlightening, poignant, and unexpectedly funny." An author's note explains how and why Thanhha Lai translated her personal experiences into Hà's story.

***The Missing Book 1: Found*, Margaret Peterson Haddix (Science Fiction)**

One night a plane appeared out of nowhere, the only passengers aboard: thirty-six babies. As soon as they were taken off the plane, it vanished. Now, thirteen years later, two of those children are receiving sinister messages, and they begin to investigate their past. Their quest to discover where they really came from leads them to a conspiracy that reaches from the far past to the distant future—and will take them hurtling through time. In this exciting new series, bestselling author Margaret Peterson Haddix brings an element of suspense that will keep readers on the edge of their seats.]

***The One and Only Ivan*, Katherine Applegate (Literary Fiction)**

Winner of the 2013 Newbery Medal and a #1 *New York Times* bestseller, this stirring and unforgettable novel from renowned author Katherine Applegate celebrates the transformative power of unexpected friendships. Inspired by the true story of a captive gorilla known as Ivan, this illustrated novel is told from the point-of-view of Ivan himself. Having spent 27 years behind the glass walls of his enclosure in a shopping mall, Ivan has grown accustomed to humans watching him. He hardly ever thinks about his life in the jungle. Instead, Ivan occupies himself with television, his friends Stella and Bob, and painting. But when he meets Ruby, a baby elephant taken from the wild, he is forced to see their home, and his art, through new eyes.

***Waiting for Normal*, Leslie Connor (Realistic Fiction)**

Twelve-year-old Addie tries to cope with her mother's erratic behavior and being separated from her beloved stepfather and half-sisters when she and her mother go to live in a small trailer by the railroad tracks on the outskirts of Schenectady, New York.

***Wings of Fire- The Dragonet Prophecy*, Tui. Sutherland (Fantasy)**

The story tells about a young dragon without heroic ambitions, learns that a prophecy predicted his four other dragonets demise. He decides to leave his sheltered life and fight for his and the other dragons' freedom. In this fantastic adventure, Clay and his friends leave the mountain and set the dragon world on a course that one could have predicted.

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***The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, John Boyne (Historical Fiction)**

Berlin- 1942: When Bruno returns home from school one day, he discovers that his belongings are being packed in crates. His father has received a promotion and the family must move from their home to a new house far far away, where there is no one to play with and nothing to do. A tall fence running alongside stretches as far as the eye can see and cuts him off from the strange people he can see in the distance. But Bruno longs to be an explorer and decides that there must be more to this desolate new place than meets the eye. While exploring his new environment, he meets another boy whose life and circumstances are very different to his own, and their meeting results in a friendship that has devastating consequences.

***Cinder*, Marissa Meyer (Futuristic Fairytale/ Dystopian)**

Humans and androids crowd the raucous streets of New Beijing. A deadly plague ravages the population. From space, a ruthless lunar people watch, waiting to make their move. No one knows that Earth's fate hinges on one girl. Cinder, a gifted mechanic, is a cyborg. She's a second-class citizen with a mysterious past, reviled by her stepmother and blamed for her stepsister's illness. But when her life becomes intertwined with the handsome Prince Kai's, she suddenly finds herself at the center of an intergalactic struggle, and a forbidden attraction. Caught between duty and freedom, loyalty and betrayal, she must uncover secrets about her past in order to protect her world's future.

***Countdown*, Debra Wiles (Historical Fiction)**

The story of a formative year in 12-year-old Franny Chapman's life, and the life of a nation facing the threat of nuclear war. It's 1962, and it seems everyone is living in fear. Twelve-year-old Franny Chapman lives with her family in Washington, DC, during the days surrounding the Cuban Missile Crisis. Amidst the pervasive threat of nuclear war, Franny must face the tension between herself and her younger brother, figure out where she fits in with her family, and look beyond outward appearances. For Franny, as for all Americans, it's going to be a formative year.

***Dark Water Rising*, Marian Hale (Historical Fiction)**

A poignant coming-of-age novel set during the Galveston Storm of 1900I looked south toward the gulf, trying to keep an eye on the stalking sea. Wild waves rose up like a great hand and wrenched loose the Pagoda's long staircase, sending planks tumbling through the air. With horror I watched the end of one twin building sway and dip into the surf. I yelled at Josiah, but my words disappeared on the wind. I grabbed his arm, pointed, and we stood together, shoulder to shoulder, mouths gaping, watching the impossible. Like a wounded Goliath, the great bathhouse shuddered, folded in on its long legs, and collapsed into the sea. Galveston, Texas, may be the booming city of the twentieth century, but to Seth it is the end of a dream. He wants to be a carpenter like his father, but the family has moved so Seth can become a doctor. Just as things begin to look up for Seth, a storm warning is raised one sweltering afternoon. A north wind always brings change, but no one could have imagined anything like this.

***An Elephant in the Garden*, Michael Morpurgo (Historical Fiction)**

Lizzie and Karl's mother is a zoo keeper; the family has become attached to an orphaned elephant named Marlene, who will be destroyed as a precautionary measure so she and the other animals don't run wild should the zoo be hit by bombs. The family persuades the zoo director to let Marlene stay in their garden instead. When the city is bombed, the family flees with thousands of others, but how can they walk the same route when they have an elephant in tow, and keep themselves safe? Along the way, they meet Peter, a Canadian navigator who risks his own capture to save the family.

***Every Other Day*, Jennifer Barnes (Science Fiction/ Fantasy)**

Every other day, sixteen-year-old high school student Kali transforms into an invincible demon hunter, but when she sees that a popular fellow-student is marked for death in the next twenty-four hours, unfortunately it is the wrong day for Kali.

***Legend*, Marie Lu (Dystopian)**

What was once the western United States is now home to the Republic, a nation perpetually at war with its neighbors. Born into an elite family in one of the Republic's wealthiest districts, fifteen-year-old June is a prodigy being groomed for success in the Republic's highest military circles. Born into the slums, fifteen-year-old Day is the country's most wanted criminal. But his motives may not be as malicious as they seem. From very different worlds, June and Day have no reason to cross paths - until the day June's brother, Metias, is murdered and Day becomes the prime suspect. Caught in the ultimate game of cat and mouse, Day is in a race for his family's survival, while June seeks to avenge Metias's death. But in a shocking turn of events, the two uncover the truth of what has really brought them together, and the sinister lengths their country will go to keep its secrets. Full of nonstop action, suspense, and romance, this novel is sure to move readers as much as it thrills.

***Lincoln's Grave Robbers*, Steve Sheinkin (Mystery/ Historical Fiction)**

A true crime thriller -- the first book for teens to tell the nearly unknown tale of the brazen attempt to steal Abraham Lincoln's body! The action begins in October of 1875, as Secret Service agents raid the Fulton, Illinois, workshop of master counterfeiter Ben Boyd. Soon after Boyd is hauled off to prison, members of his counterfeiting ring gather in the back room of a smoky Chicago saloon to discuss how to spring their ringleader. Their plan: grab Lincoln's body from its Springfield tomb, stash it in the sand dunes near Lake Michigan, and demand, as a ransom, the release of Ben Boyd --and \$200,000 in cash. From here, the action alternates between the conspirators, the Secret Service agents on their trail, and the undercover agent moving back and forth between the two groups. Along the way readers get glimpses into the inner workings of counterfeiting, grave robbing, detective work, and the early days of the Secret Service. The plot moves toward a wild climax as robbers and lawmen converge at Lincoln's tomb on election night: November 7, 1876.

***Not a Drop to Drink*, Mindy McGinnis (Dystopian)**

Teenage Lynn has been taught to defend her pond against every threat: drought, a snowless winter, coyotes, and most important, people looking for a drink. She makes sure anyone who comes near the pond leaves thirsty—or doesn't leave at all. Confident in her own abilities, Lynn has no use for the world beyond the nearby fields and forest. But when strangers appear, the mysterious footprints by the pond, nighttime threats, and gunshots make it all too clear Lynn has exactly what they want, and they won't stop until they get it. . . .

***Okay for Now*, Gary D. Schmidt (Realistic Fiction/ Historical Fiction)**

In this companion novel to *The Wednesday Wars*, Doug struggles to be more than the "skinny thug" that some people think him to be. He finds an unlikely ally in Lil Spicer, who gives him the strength to endure an abusive father, the suspicions of a town, and the return of his oldest brother, forever scarred, from Vietnam. Schmidt expertly weaves multiple themes of loss and recovery in a story teeming with distinctive, unusual characters and invaluable lessons about love, creativity, and survival.

***Phineas Gage*, John Fleischman (Biography/ Non-Fiction)**

Phineas Gage was truly a man with a hole in his head. Phineas, a railroad construction foreman, was blasting rock near Cavendish, Vermont, in 1848 when a thirteen-pound iron rod was shot through his brain. Miraculously, he survived to live another eleven years and become a textbook case in brain science. At the time, Phineas Gage seemed to completely recover from his accident. He could walk, talk, work, and travel, but he was changed. Gage "was no longer Gage," said his Vermont doctor, meaning that the old Phineas was dependable and well liked, and the new Phineas was crude and unpredictable. His case astonished doctors in his day and still fascinates doctors today. What happened and what didn't happen inside the brain of Phineas Gage will tell you a lot about how your brain works and how you act human.

***Rot & Ruin*, Jonathan Mabry (Thriller)**

In the zombie-infested, post-apocalyptic America where Benny Imura lives, every teenager must find a job by the time they turn fifteen or get their rations cut in half. Benny doesn't want to apprentice as a zombie hunter with his boring older brother Tom, but he has no choice. He expects a tedious job whacking zoms for cash, but what he gets is a vocation that will teach him what it means to be human.

***Shipbreaker*, Palo Bacigalupi (Dystopian/ Adventure)**

In America's Gulf Coast region, where grounded oil tankers are being broken down for parts, Nailer, a teenage boy, works the light crew, scavenging for copper wiring just to make quota--and hopefully live to see another day. But when, by luck or chance, he discovers an exquisite clipper ship beached during a recent hurricane, Nailer faces the most important decision of his life: Strip the ship for all it's worth or rescue its lone survivor, a beautiful and wealthy girl who could lead him to a better life... In this powerful novel, award-winning author Paolo Bacigalupi delivers a thrilling, fast-paced adventure set in a vivid and raw, uncertain future.

***Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio*, Peg Kehret (Autobiography/ Memoir)**

In a riveting story of courage and hope, Peg Kehret writes about months spent in a hospital when she was twelve, first struggling to survive a severe case of polio, then slowly learning to walk again.

***Unwanted*, Lisa McMann (Dystopian/ Fantasy)**

All Unwanted expect to die, and Alex is no different. That is the way of the people of Quill. Each year, all the thirteen-year-olds are labeled as Wanted, Necessary, or Unwanted. Wanted get more schooling and train to join the Quillitary. Necessaries do daily tasks to maintain society. Unwanted are sent away for execution. It's hard for Alex to leave behind his twin, Aaron, a Wanted until he realizes he is not to be executed but sent to a magical place called Artimé. There, Alex and his fellow Unwanted are encouraged to embrace and grow their creativity. It's far different than anything he has ever known. A wanted twin, Aaron, and an Unwanted, Alex test the bond of brothers until ultimately they engage in a magical battle.

***Unwind*, Neil Schusterman (Science Fiction)**

Legislation decides that life is protected from birth until age 13. At this time, parents may choose to have their child unwound. Wards of the state and tithes are also unwound. It is a process where they harvest your body parts and give them to another. They do not consider it death but living separately. Connor is one such unwind who also encounters others who struggle for their right to live as they are and not in a separate state. However, not all those scheduled for unwinding rebel. Several tithes must be saved from themselves.

8th

***Berlin Boxing Club*, Robert Sharenow (Historical Fiction)**

Karl Stern has never thought of himself as a Jew; after all, he's never even been in a synagogue. But the bullies at his school in Nazi-era Berlin don't care that Karl's family doesn't practice religion. Demoralized by their attacks against a heritage he doesn't accept as his own, Karl longs to prove his worth. Then Max Schmeling, champion boxer and German hero, makes a deal with Karl's father to give Karl boxing lessons. A skilled cartoonist, Karl never had an interest in boxing, but now it seems like the perfect chance to reinvent himself. But when Nazi violence against Jews escalates, Karl must take on a new role: family protector. And as Max's fame forces him to associate with Nazi elites, Karl begins to wonder where his hero's sympathies truly lie. Can Karl balance his boxing dreams with his obligation to keep his family out of harm's way?

***Fever 1793*, Laurie Halse Anderson (Historical Fiction)**

During the 1793 yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia, sixteen-year-old Matilda Cook gains new strengths. In a mixed atmosphere of mistrust, fear, and caring, Matilda learns to cope with the loss of business, friends, and family. She also learns to deal with the illness herself.

***Full Tilt*, Neal Shusterman (Thriller/ Fantasy/ Science Fiction)**

Sixteen-year-old Blake and his younger brother, Quinn, are exact opposites. Blake is the responsible member of the family. He constantly has to keep an eye on the fearless Quinn, whose thrill-seeking sometimes goes too far. But the stakes get higher when Blake has to chase Quinn into a bizarre phantom carnival that traps its customers forever. In order to escape, Blake must survive seven deadly rides by dawn, each of which represents a deep, personal fear--from a carousel of stampeding animals to a hall of mirrors that changes people into their deformed reflections. Blake ultimately has to face up to a horrible secret from his own past to save himself and his brother--that is, if the carnival doesn't claim their souls first!

***Hush Hush*, Becca Fitzpatrick (Fantasy)**

Hush, Hush by Becca Fitzpatrick is a story about Nora Grey, a sixteen-year-old girl living in Coldwater, Maine. Nora lives in with her mother, Blythe, in an eighteenth century farmhouse located on the outskirts of town. The house, located on Hawthorne Lane, has no neighbors. Nora's father, an accountant, had been murdered in Portland the previous year and the house is the only remaining connection to him. His death has deeply affected Nora in many ways, including the fact that she often feels as if she is being watched. While Nora believes that being watched by her father should make her feel protected, it does not.

***I Never Had It Made*, Jackie Robinson (Autobiography)**

I Never Had It Made recalls Robinson's early years and influences: his time at UCLA, where he became the school's first four-letter athlete; his army stint during World War II, when he challenged Jim Crow laws and narrowly escaped court martial; his years of frustration, on and off the field, with the Negro Leagues; and finally that fateful day when Branch Rickey of the Brooklyn Dodgers proposed what became known as the "Noble Experiment"—Robinson would step up to bat to integrate and revolutionize baseball. More than a baseball story, *I Never Had It Made* also reveals the highs and lows of Robinson's life after baseball. He recounts his political aspirations and civil rights activism; his friendships with Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, William Buckley, Jr., and Nelson Rockefeller; and his troubled relationship with his son, Jackie, Jr.

***I'll Be There*, Holly Goldberg Sloan (Realistic Fiction)**

Emily Bell believes in destiny. To her, being forced to sing a solo in the church choir--despite her average voice--is fate: because it's while she's singing that she first sees Sam. At first sight, they are connected. Sam Border wishes he could escape, but there's nowhere for him to run. He and his little brother, Riddle, have spent their entire lives constantly uprooted by their unstable father. That is, until Sam sees Emily. That's when everything changes. As Sam and Riddle are welcomed into the Bells' lives, they witness the warmth and protection of a family for the first time. But when tragedy strikes, they're left fighting for survival in the desolate wilderness, and wondering if they'll ever find a place where they can belong. Beautifully written and emotionally profound, *I'll Be There* is a gripping story that explores the complexities of teenage passions, friendships, and loyalties.

***Monster*, Walter Dean Myers (Realistic Fiction)**

Sixteen-year-old Steve is on trial for murder and could face the death penalty. During the trial, Steve, an amateur filmmaker, pictures all the events as if he were directing a movie.

***Okay for Now*, Gary D. Schmidt (Realistic Fiction/ Historical Fiction)**

In this companion novel to *The Wednesday Wars*, Doug struggles to be more than the "skinny thug" that some people think him to be. He finds an unlikely ally in Lil Spicer, who gives him the strength to endure an abusive father, the suspicions of a town, and the return of his oldest brother, forever scarred, from Vietnam. Schmidt expertly weaves multiple themes of loss and recovery in a story teeming with distinctive, unusual characters and invaluable lessons about love, creativity, and survival.

***Red Kayak*, Pricilla Cummings (Realistic Fiction)**

First hailed as a hero for his dramatic water rescue of a little boy, thirteen-year-old Brady Parks soon makes a discovery that puts him at the heart of an enormous tragedy. Alone with his dark secret, Brady is ultimately forced to choose between loyalty to his lifelong friends and doing what he knows in his heart is right. Priscilla Cummings weaves a suspenseful, multilayered tale of three teenage boys caught in a wicked web of their own making.

***Ungifted*, Gordon Korman (Realistic Fiction/ Humor)**

From #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Gordon Korman comes a hilarious and heartfelt novel in which one middle-school troublemaker accidentally moves into the gifted and talented program—and changes everything. This funny and touching underdog story is a lovable and goofy adventure with robot fights, middle-school dances, live experiments, and statue-toppling pranks! When Donovan Curtis pulls a major prank at his middle school, he thinks he's finally gone too far. But thanks to a mix-up by one of the administrators, instead of getting in trouble, Donovan is sent to the Academy of Scholastic Distinction, a special program for gifted and talented students. Although it wasn't exactly what Donovan had intended, the ASD couldn't be a more perfectly unexpected hideout for someone like him. But as the students and teachers of ASD grow to realize that Donovan may not be good at math or science (or just about anything), he shows that his *gifts* may be exactly what the ASD students never knew they needed.