

8th Grade Summer Reading Assignments Summer 2026

Due Date: First day of school – August 12, 2026

Students should bring the following assignments on the first day of school:

- 3 books with annotations
- 1 essay on *Johnny Tremain*
- 1 poster on *Captains Courageous*
- 1 page with discussion notes on their book of choice

Books:

- *Johnny Tremain*, by Esther Forbes ISBN: 9780547614328
- *Captains Courageous*, by Rudyard Kipling (Dover Evergreen Classics edition) ISBN: 978-0486407869
- Book of your choice, from the list provided

Assignments (4):

1. Annotate all books:

- Students are to read and annotate all THREE books they read. The books and their annotations are due on the first day of school for a grade in literature.
- Annotation is your opportunity to engage with the author and the story. In essence, it allows you to talk to the novel. Taking part in the conversation with the novel and its characters will help you to remember what you read and improve your understanding of the story. This is done by using a combination of notes and symbols in your book. Below are some key points to remember for annotating. I have also created an annotation guide that you can use for a quick reference.
 - Avoid the use of highlighters and markers as they often bleed through the pages.
 - Observe your text. Good reading isn't fast or perfect - it's slowing down to observe, to see, what is happening in the novel.
 - Trust what you notice! No one knows what is important the first time they read.
 - I'm not asking you to find specific things. Everyone is unique and what you notice, or think is important, might be different from your classmates.
 - "Connections" can be a lot of things. It is important to make connections between the novel and your existing knowledge or experiences. These can include events, thoughts, or characters in the novel, your own experiences, feelings, people you know, or other books you have read.

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- Mark words or phrases. You do NOT need to mark whole sentences, just a word or phrase is enough.
- Use open spaces like the beginning/end of the novel or chapter.
 - Character lists – great for keeping track of who you meet in a chapter
 - Page numbers for important information
 - List themes, plot points, etc. with page numbers
 - Write a short (1 or 2 sentences) summary at the end of each chapter
- Think of a synonym. When you find a word you don't know, think about what the meaning might be, look up the definition, and write down a synonym that you'll remember.

2. *Johnny Tremain*, by Esther Forbes

- **Instructions:** The essay is due on the first day of school. It is a test grade for literature. We will use the essay in our first few lessons, so it is imperative that they students read the novels and complete the essay before school begins. Students are to complete the pre-writing exercise on a separate piece of paper and use it to write their essay response for the prompt below.
- **Required Elements:**
 - Hand-written in the student's best cursive (applies to all steps, from pre-writing to completed essay)
 - Skip lines to allow space for commenting and editing
 - Correct spelling, grammar, and mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, etc.)
 - Citations are used
 - Book information is the last page, titled "Works Cited"
 - Examples from the book are cited using in-text citations
- **Essay Prompt:** In *Johnny Tremain*, Esther Forbes shows how a young, prideful apprentice grows into a responsible and courageous young man during the early days of the American Revolution. Write a four to five paragraph essay analyzing how Johnny changes over the course of the novel.

Your essay must:

- Explain what Johnny is like at the beginning of the novel
- Describe key events or relationships that shape his growth
- Analyze how Johnny's character has changed by the end
- Use at least two pieces of text evidence (quoted or paraphrased) to support your ideas

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- Explain why Johnny's growth matters within the historical setting of the Revolution
- **Pre-writing Exercise:**
 1. What flaws or strengths does Johnny show early in the story
 2. How does his injury change his attitude, choices, or relationships
 3. Which characters influence his development (Rab, the Laphams, the Sons of Liberty)
 4. How does Johnny's understanding of freedom, loyalty, or responsibility deepen
 5. What does Johnny's transformation reveal about growing up during a time of conflict

3. *Captains Courageous*, by Rudyard Kipling

- **Instructions:** Students are to create a "one-pager" book report that combines visual elements and thoughtful reflection to answer the prompt below. They may create it completely from scratch or use a template. I have also included some examples of "one-pagers."
- **Prompt:** The title of the novel is derived from the traditional English ballad "Mary Ambree," which praises "captains courageous." Who are the true "captains" in this novel, and how is courage redefined throughout Harvey's voyage? Use examples from the text to support your answer.
- **Required Elements:**
 - Design Requirements:
 - 22"x28" poster
 - Use color pens, markers, paint, etc., unless black and white is the best design choice
 - Writing must be
 - in ink – no pencil
 - in cursive
 - Everything must be drawn / written by the student's hand – no printed materials allowed
 - Citations are used
 - Book information goes on the back under your heading
 - Examples from the book are cited using in-text citations near the information
 - On the back of your one-pager
 - Full heading
 - Citation for your copy of the novel
 - Title and author of the book prominently displayed on the front
 - Written Reflection:
 - Write a well-developed paragraph answering the essential prompt

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- Identify who the true “captains” are in the story.
- Explain how courage is redefined for Harvey throughout the voyage.
- Provide two specific examples from the novel to support your ideas.
- Connect your answer to at least one of the seven virtues of the Church (Faith, Hope, Charity, Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance).
 - Example: How does Harvey show fortitude as he learns to work, fail, and try again
 - Or how does Disko show justice or prudence in his leadership
- Quote
 - Include at least one meaningful quote that shows a moment of providence, guidance, or unexpected help that connects to or supports one of your examples in the written reflection
 - Remember to use quotation marks and cite the page number
- One-paragraph summary of the plot
 - 6+ sentences
 - Describe the plot and major events of the novel.
- Symbol or Illustration
 - Draw at least one image or symbol that represents courage in the novel
 - Include the page number for reference
- Characters
 - Include the names and descriptions of the main characters in the novel
 - Descriptions can be written or drawn
- Setting
 - Provide the setting of the novel
 - Setting can be written or drawn as part of the design of your poster

4. Book of Choice

- Students will turn in their annotated novel, AND notes they will use for discussion in class
- Students will be graded on their participation in a class discussion
- Discussion notes do not have to be complete sentences, but should include enough information to help the student answer the following questions during class discussion:
 - Discuss the plot, setting, and characters of the novel
 - Identify how the author makes the characters believable
 - Identify how the author reveals what a character is like by what they say, what they do, and what other characters say about them
 - Identify the conflict
 - Identify the setting and its significance to the story
 - How do the main characters change throughout the story
 - What lesson does the main character learn
 - How did the novel make you feel

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- How did you feel about the characters' behavior
- What connections can you make between the novel and your own life (events, people, etc.)
- What connections can you make between the novel and other novels you have read?
- How did the author use words effectively (descriptions, feelings, etc.)

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Johnny Tremain Essay Rubric:

Category	4 – Excellent	3 – Proficient	2 – Developing	1 – Beginning
Thesis & Focus /8	Clear, insightful thesis that directly answers the prompt and stays focused throughout.	Thesis answers the prompt; mostly focused.	Thesis is unclear, weak, or drifts off topic.	No thesis or does not address the prompt.
Text Evidence /8	Uses 2+ strong, relevant pieces of evidence; smoothly integrated and well explained.	Uses required evidence; explanation is mostly clear.	Evidence is weak, unclear, or not well explained.	Little or no evidence; explanations missing.
Analysis & Explanation /8	Shows deep understanding of Johnny’s character growth; explains how events shape him.	Shows understanding of Johnny’s changes; some explanation.	Limited explanation of character growth; mostly summary.	Mostly summary; little or no analysis.
Organization & Structure /8	Clear introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion; ideas flow logically.	Organized with minor lapses in flow or clarity.	Some organization but ideas may feel choppy or out of order.	Disorganized; difficult to follow.
Conventions (Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation) /8	Few or no errors; writing is clear and polished.	Some errors but meaning is clear.	Frequent errors that distract from meaning.	Many errors; difficult to understand.

Total Score: _____ / 40

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Captains Courageous Poster Rubric:

Category	4 – Excellent	3 – Proficient	2 – Developing	1 – Beginning
Poster Requirements (Size, color, filled space, handwriting) /8	Poster is 22"x28", fully colored, no visible white space, all text handwritten in neat cursive.	Meets size; mostly colored; minimal white space; cursive mostly neat.	Some requirements missing (white space, limited color, uneven cursive).	Many requirements missing; little color; large white spaces; handwriting unclear.
Plot Summary (One paragraph) /4	Clear, complete paragraph summarizing major events; accurate and well-written.	Mostly clear and accurate; minor details missing.	Summary is incomplete, vague, or confusing.	Missing or mostly inaccurate.
Character List (Names + descriptions) /4	Includes all major characters with accurate, thoughtful descriptions.	Includes most major characters with mostly accurate descriptions.	Missing characters or descriptions are unclear.	Very few characters listed; descriptions inaccurate or missing.
Setting /2	Clearly identifies and describes the major settings of the novel.	Identifies settings with minor detail missing.	Setting is vague or incomplete.	Missing or incorrect.
Written Reflection (Prompt response + 2 examples + virtue connection) /10	Fully answers prompt; identifies true "captains"; explains how courage is redefined; includes 2 strong examples; clearly connects to a Catholic virtue.	Answers prompt; includes 2 examples; virtue connection mostly clear.	Partially answers prompt; only 1 example or weak virtue connection.	Does not answer prompt; no examples; no virtue connection.
Quote With Page Number /4	Strong quote showing courage; correctly punctuated; includes page number.	Quote fits topic; page number included.	Quote is weak or missing page number.	No quote or incorrect format.
Symbol or Illustration (With page reference) /4	Creative, detailed symbol/illustration representing courage; includes page reference.	Symbol/illustration relates to courage; page reference included.	Symbol unclear or missing page reference.	Missing or unrelated to courage.
Conventions (Spelling, grammar, mechanics) /4	No errors; writing is polished and easy to read.	Few minor errors; meaning clear.	Several errors that distract from meaning.	Many errors; difficult to understand.

Total Score: _____ / 40