

Summer Reading & Literacy Engagement **Hillside Public Schools, K–12**

A MESSAGE TO OUR HILLSIDE FAMILIES:

THE JOY OF SUMMER READING

This summer, reading is an invitation for our Hillside students to imagine, explore, and grow.

Whether reading at home, outside in the neighborhood, at the library, or with family at bedtime, every moment spent with a book builds confidence and joy. Summer reading is not about completing assignments, it is about becoming a reader who chooses books, connects to stories, and discovers new ideas through literacy.

We encourage families to make reading a daily summer habit filled with choice, curiosity, and conversation. Through books, storytelling, and real-world experiences in our own community, students will:

- Build strong reading habits;
- Strengthen comprehension and vocabulary;
- Stay connected to learning over the summer;
- Develop a lifelong love of reading.

Families are encouraged to visit the Hillside Public Library, one of our valued community partners, to access books and participate in summer literacy events. Students in grades K–12 may also access books through Learning Ally, which provides audiobooks and read-aloud support to help students enjoy and engage with texts throughout the summer.

KINDERGARTEN: Recommended Books

- *The Day You Begin*
- *Last Stop on Market Street*
- *Jabari Jumps*
- *The Pigeon HAS to Go to School!*
- *Eyes That Kiss in the Corners*

 Learning Ally Access
<https://learningally.org>

Hillside Literacy Connections

- Branch Brook Park (Newark) – Story walks
-  [Hillside Public Library – Summer Reading Kickoff \(June 29, 2026 at 5:30 PM\) launches a full summer of free reading activities, storytimes, and literacy programs for children, teens, and families.](#)
- Newark Public Library – Storytime visits

- Turtle Back Zoo – [Observation writing](#)
- South Mountain Reservation – Oral storytelling hikes

KINDERGARTEN 7-Day Repeatable Cycle

Day 1: [Draw and label a story](#)
 Day 2: Act out a story with toys
 Day 3: [Word hunt outdoors](#)
 Day 4: Retell a read-aloud
 Day 5: [Park story \(beginning/middle/end\)](#)
 Day 6: Draw a new ending
 Day 7: Read outdoors and describe

GRADE 1: Recommended Books

- *Mercy Watson to the Rescue*
- *The Name Jar*
- *Alma and How She Got Her Name*
- *Fry Bread*
- *Dragons Love Tacos*

 Learning Ally Access

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Hillside Literacy Connections

-  Hillside Public Library – Summer reading engagement
- Newark Riverfront Park – [storytelling picnics](#)
- Branch Brook Park – sensory writing walks
- Essex County Farmers' Markets – food storytelling

GRADE 1 (7-Day Repeatable Cycle)

Day 1: [Name story](#)
 Day 2: Favorite meal description
 Day 3: Draw funniest part
 Day 4: [Noun walk](#)
 Day 5: Describing words outdoors
 Day 6: Retell with voices
 Day 7: Read outdoors + illustrate

GRADE 2: Recommended Books

- *Because of Winn-Dixie*
- *The Chocolate Touch*
- *Ivy + Bean*
- *Narwhal and Jelly*
- *King & Kayla Series*

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Hillside Literacy Connections

- Turtle Back Zoo – mystery writing
-  Hillside Public Library – Creative writing and reading programs
- South Mountain Reservation – [inference journaling](#)
- [Montclair Film Screenings – book vs film](#)
- Newark Museum of Art – story from art

GRADE 2 (7-Day Repeatable Cycle)

Day 1: [Write a mystery](#)

Day 2: Infer feelings

Day 3: [Summarize story](#)

Day 4: Comic strip

Day 5: [Mystery clues](#)

Day 6: Compare characters

Day 7: New ending

GRADES 3–5: Recommended Books

- *Charlotte's Web*
- *The Wild Robot*
- *Wonder*
- *Front Desk*
- *Hatchet*
- *Fish in a Tree*
- *Brown Girl Dreaming*

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Hillside Literacy Connections

- Newark Public Library Archives
- Branch Brook Park journaling
- South Mountain Reservation writing
- [Essex County Environmental Center science journaling](#)
- 🌟 Hillside Public Library – Summer reading programs and book clubs

GRADES 3–5 (7-Day Repeatable Cycle)

Day 1: [Theme connection](#)
Day 2: Character journaling
Day 3: [Book vs real life](#)
Day 4: Opinion writing
Day 5: Observation walk
Day 6: Letter to author
Day 7: [Hillside connection](#)

GRADES 6–8: Recommended Books

- *The Outsiders*
- *Long Way Down*
- *Restart*
- *The Crossover*
- *Refugee*
- *The Giver*

 Learning Ally Access
<https://learningally.org>

Hillside Literacy Connections

- [Civil Rights walking tours \(regional connections\)](#)
- [Montclair Public Library teen programs](#)
- Branch Brook Park reflection walks

GRADES 6–8 (7-Day Repeatable Cycle)

Day 1: Argument Writing (Share Your Opinion)

Students write a short paragraph stating their opinion and giving at least two reasons to support it.
Students should write a 3–5 sentence paragraph.

Example topics:

- Should students have homework over the summer? Why or why not?
- Should school start later in the morning? Why or why not?

Example response:

“I believe students should not have summer homework because summer is time to rest and recharge. Students also learn through experiences like reading, traveling, and spending time with family. Summer break helps students come back to school more focused and ready to learn.”

How families can help:

Ask: “What do you think? Why do you feel that way?”

**Day 2: Real-World Conflict Connection**

Students connect a conflict from a book to a real-life situation. **Students should write a 3–5 sentence paragraph.**

Example:

A disagreement between characters in a book → conflicts between friends during group work or sports.

Example response:

“This is similar to when classmates disagree during a group project. In both situations, people may have different opinions about how to complete a task. The conflict can cause frustration, but it can be solved by talking and listening. In real life and in books, communication helps solve problems.”

Family support:

Ask: “Have you ever seen something like this happen in real life?”

**Day 3: Multiple Perspectives**

Students retell the same event from two different points of view. **Students should write a 3–5 sentence paragraph.**

Example:

One student feels left out of a group project, while another feels they did most of the work.

Example response:

“One student felt left out because they were not included in decisions. Another student felt they did most of the work and were not appreciated. Both students experienced the same situation differently. This shows that people can see events in different ways depending on their role.”

Family support:

Ask: “How might each person see the situation differently?”

**Day 4: Symbolism in Stories**

Students identify objects or events in a story and explain what they might represent. **Students should write a 3–5 sentence paragraph.**

Examples:

- Storm = conflict or challenges
- Journey = growth or change
- Closed door = obstacle

Example response:

“The storm in the story represents the problems the character is facing. It shows that the character is going through a difficult time. As the storm gets stronger, the challenges also increase. This helps the reader understand the character’s emotional struggle.”

Family support:

Ask: “What do you think that might stand for?”



Day 5: Interview + Summary

Students interview someone and write a short summary of what they learned. **Students should write a 3–5 sentence paragraph.**

Example questions:

- What was your favorite subject in school?
- What is something you learned from your childhood?

Example summary:

“I interviewed my aunt and learned that her favorite subject in school was reading. She enjoyed reading stories and books with her classmates. She said reading helped her become a better writer. I learned that school experiences can shape what people enjoy as adults.”

Family support:

Encourage your child to take notes while listening.



Day 6: Reflection or Spoken Word

Students express their thoughts through a short poem, journal entry, or speech.

Students should write a 3–5 sentence paragraph (or equivalent poem).

Example prompts:

- What does friendship mean to you?
- A time I felt proud...
- What I learned this year...

Example response:

“I feel proud when I help others because it makes me feel useful and kind. Helping someone can make their day better. It also makes me want to continue doing good things. Being kind is something I value in my life.”

Family support:

Encourage your child to read it aloud.

**Day 7: Current Event Connection**

Students connect a news story to something they've read or learned.

Students should write a 3–5 sentence paragraph.

Example:

A community cleanup event → themes of responsibility or teamwork in a book.

Example response:

“A community cleanup event connects to themes of responsibility and teamwork in literature. In many books, characters work together to solve problems and improve their communities. The real-life event shows people doing the same thing. This demonstrates how lessons from books can be applied in the real world.”

Family support:

Ask: “How does this connect to something you've read or experienced?”

**GRADES 9–12: Recommended Books**

- *The Hate U Give*
- *Dear Martin*
- *Fahrenheit 451*
- *Just Mercy*
- *1984*



Learning Ally Access

<https://learningally.org>

**Hillside Literacy Connections**

- [Free and low cost literacy activities](#)
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**Additional Summer Literacy Supports & Research-Based Practices****Digital Access****Amplify Boost Reading (Grades K–6)**

Amplify Boost Reading will remain available to Hillside students throughout the summer. Students can access the program using their district credentials through Clever.

Boost Reading provides personalized, adaptive literacy practice that strengthens foundational reading skills, builds vocabulary, and improves comprehension. Regular use helps students stay engaged in learning, maintain academic progress, and reduce summer learning loss (“summer slide”).



Excite Reading Summer Activity Packet (Grades K–2)

Students in grades K–2 can continue building literacy skills this summer using the Excite Reading Summer Activity Packet. This resource includes engaging supports such as monthly reading calendars and goals, the A–Z Book Chat, a Retelling Hand to support family discussions, and creative extensions like designing a book cover.

Students should access Excite Reading resources through Clever using their district credentials and use the Summer Activity Packet to guide their independent reading experiences throughout the summer.

Student Login: <https://launchpad.learningally.org/excite>

LearningAlly (Grades K-12)

[Learning Ally](#) is available to all Hillside students throughout the summer, providing access to a robust library of human-read audiobooks, including grade-level texts, popular titles, and literary classics. Students may listen independently or follow along with printed text to support comprehension and engagement.

This resource strengthens reading stamina, expands vocabulary, improves comprehension, and fosters a lifelong love of reading.



Summer Reading Together

Students and families are also encouraged to participate in [Summer Reading Together](#), a complementary resource designed to promote shared reading experiences, build reading confidence, and keep students engaged in literacy activities throughout the summer months.



Support for Multilingual Learners (MLL/ELL)

Throughout the summer, students who are learning English will continue to benefit from research-based instructional supports that strengthen reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. These supports include visuals, vocabulary development, sentence frames, and structured language routines that help students access books and summer literacy activities with confidence.

Families can learn more about these strategies through the NJDOE Multilingual Learner resources:

<https://www.nj.gov/education/bilingual/> and Sheltered Instruction (SIOP) overview:

<https://www.colorincolorado.org/sheltered-instruction-observation-protocol-siop>



Family Literacy Corner: The Importance of Reading at Home

Reading 15–20 minutes per night helps students:

- Build vocabulary and comprehension
 - Reduce summer learning loss
 - Strengthen reading confidence
 - Support long-term academic achievement
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Additional Summer Literacy Supports & Community Resources

Hillside Public Library Summer Reading Challenge (Ages Birth–17)

The Hillside Public Library offers a free Summer Reading Challenge from June 29 through August 17, encouraging children and teens to read at least 30 minutes daily. Students earn prizes for every 10 days of reading, and all reading counts—including books, magazines, graphic novels, e-books, and audiobooks.

The library also offers a wide range of free, family-friendly programs throughout the summer, including storytimes, bilingual literacy activities, teen art workshops, science programs, cultural events, chess and board games, and a Summer Reading Finale celebration. Registration is required for all programs.

Learn More: www.HillsidePL.org

Summer Reading Kickoff: June 29, 2026

Summer Reading Finale: August 17, 2026