



What Will They Read and Write This Summer?

Are you looking to strengthen middle school students' reading in ways that are engaging, targeted, and authentic? This takeaway provides ideas and resources shared during [What Will They Read and Write This Summer?](#) — a virtual Huddle hosted by the 21st CCLC NTAC in May 2026. The Huddle showed how to use tools in the 21st CCLC NTAC's [Literacy Toolkit](#) to motivate students, broaden access to a variety of text types, and support fluency and language development in short program blocks during out-of-school time (OST) summer programs. Your peers chimed in!

Bright Ideas From Your Peers

Interest Detective: Invite students to share favorite creators, movies, music, games, hobbies, and interests. Knowing what matters to students helps you offer reading materials and activities that connect to their experiences.

From Screen to Page: Use students' favorite movies, comics, manga, anime, and graphic novels as gateways to reading. Introduce books that inspired popular films or comics to help students see connections between stories they love and new texts to explore.

Story Magnet: Select high-interest books that connect to students' lives and emotions. Books like the ones below can spark discussions and build literacy skills. "A good book is a magnet to pull students into the text and enables them to find the joy in storytelling."

- **Bridge to Terabithia** by Katherine Paterson — Explores friendship, loss, and resilience (*ages 9-14*)
- **Diary of a Worm** by Doreen Cronin — Links literacy activities to gardening and environmental learning (*ages 3-8*)
- **Flowers for Algernon** by Daniel Keyes — Promotes critical thinking and discussion about growth, choices, and consequences (*ages 14+*)
- **The Great Gilly Hopkins** by Katherine Paterson — Examines belonging, relationships, and foster care (*ages 9+*)
- **The Magic Belt Series** — Provides phonics-based, high-interest texts for struggling readers (*ages 8-12*)

Campfire Reading: Create a special reading ritual. Set aside daily time for shared reading in a special setting — such as around a pretend campfire — so reading becomes an anticipated event rather than an assignment.

Character Voices: Read a passage. Then have students perform it in the voice and style of a favorite character or performer. This encourages rereading, builds fluency, and deepens understanding of perspectives.

Reading Passport: Create a reading passport that encourages students to explore different genres, topics, authors, or experiences over the summer. It adds choice, challenge, and a sense of accomplishment to reading goals.



Career Connections: Help teens explore future opportunities by reading and analyzing real job descriptions. They can examine responsibilities, qualifications, and workplace expectations while building reading comprehension and career awareness.

Action Tips

- Start with student interests to boost engagement.
- Use authentic texts (e.g., recipes, maps, instructions) to make literacy purposeful.
- Build on what students already know and care about.
- Make reading social (e.g., through group service projects, games, the arts).
- Incorporate performance and play to deepen learning.
- Pair literacy with hands-on activities, such as baking, gardening, or sports.
- Choose texts that spark emotion and discussion.
- Offer choice to build ownership and motivation.
- Ask open-ended questions to deepen thinking.
- Establish fun, consistent literacy routines.



Resources

- [Literacy Toolkit](#) — This free resource from the 21st CCLC NTAC includes 23 tools and a user guide to help you infuse literacy into OST program activities.
- [Literacy Group](#) — Swap ideas with other 21st CCLC professionals in this virtual group in the 21st CCLC NTAC Knowledge Network. For instructions on how to access the Knowledge Network, go to <https://21stcclcntac.org/prof-learning-portal>.
- [Like Happy Dreams: Integrating Visual Arts, Writing, and Reading](#) — This foundational paper by Ann Alejandro describes ways to use visual arts as a prewriting strategy to boost literacy and expression.

For example: Each student gets a stack of blank cards. As they view paintings, they write a word on each card related to something they like in each painting. On the back of each card, they draw a picture related to that word. Then each student writes their own story about the paintings, using their own stack of cards.



“Words are not things to be feared — they’re things to be owned, and students can manipulate and have fun with them.”

— Dr. Dennis Creedon, Interim CEO, Philadelphia Arts in Education Partnership

This resource was developed in 2026 by the Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) National Technical Assistance Center (NTAC), funded under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Department) and administered by Synergy Enterprises, Inc. under Cooperative Agreement No. 287E230009 with the Department’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the Department or the Federal government. This resource is in the public domain and is available at 21stcclcntac.org. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted.

