

Revising summer reading

Assigning work over school breaks aggravates socioeconomic inequalities, discourages students

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For as long as I can remember, I've loved to read. The arrangement of words has always struck me as distinctly beautiful art, and I've often found myself intoxicated by the intricate and sprawling worlds that authors can craft more so than any other medium. Getting the opportunity to delve into another world, live another life and examine the world around me through a different lens is sometimes the only thing that can provide me a sense of solace and refuge amid the banality of everyday life. If there's one thing though that has significantly diminished my appreciation for reading as time has gone on, it's summer reading.

Year after year, students are required to complete assigned reading as well as additional assignments about the books. The difficulty of such assignments depends on whether they plan to take AP, on-level, or advanced English the following school year. Assigned summer reading is designed to combat a phenomenon called "summer learning loss," which is the idea that the average student loses roughly 17-34% of the learning they gained the previous school year during the summer, according to the *American Education Research Journal's* study "School's Out: The Role of Summers in Understanding Achievement Disparities." Though the reasoning behind why summer reading is required in schools is valid, it also causes problems which far outweigh any progress it may make in achieving its desired purpose.

Ever since I was young, reading has sparked a fire in me of passion and fascination, the intensity of which few things have been able to come close. As I've gotten further into my education, however, that spark has progressively flickered out to the point where it only comes in dribs and drabs when I'm reading. The reason for this decline is that I'm constantly being forced to read material and books for school that I find uninteresting.

If you're anything like me, summer is that rare time where one is able to recapture their love of reading by having the freedom to choose what to read, instead of that selection being predetermined. Required summer reading robs those with an inherent passion for reading of the opportunity to explore the literature of their interest, specifically through them being forced to endure the dull monotony of school-required summer reading books.

Required summer reading also seeks to exacerbate economic disparities. Not every school has the resources to provide the summer reading books they assign to all the students that require them, and the simple fact of the matter is that not all families can afford to buy books. Not all children also have library cards, access to devices on which digital books can be read or the means to get to a library to borrow books. Assigned summer reading ultimately just serves to further demonstrate the

socioeconomic inequalities

prevalent throughout our educational system.

Summer reading also teaches students to regard reading as a chore. One of the main goals that schools hope to accomplish with required summer reading, in addition to preventing "summer learning loss" in students, is to foster a love of reading in their students. As a result of assigning books for students to read instead of letting them choose books that they think they will enjoy, schools are instead instilling in kids the idea that reading is merely a "school-centered activity."

Furthermore, most kids don't even read the books assigned to them and end up going to absurd lengths to memorize the plots of the books. Ultimately, the efforts they make to game the system just so they'll do well on whatever assessments or assignments they're given about the books take longer than it would to just read them.

Although I don't love the idea of summer reading as a concept, I am able to

acknowledge why schools across the country require it.

Its primary purpose, which is to ensure that students retain the learning that they gained the previous school year, is extremely

important. Summer reading, however, needs to be improved by allowing students to choose what books they want to read, so long as they match the types of books they'll be reading in their English classes the following year in terms of difficulty level.

Additionally, schools need to implement a plan that ensures that kids who don't have the resources to procure the summer reading books they want to read can do so. Only then will summer reading fulfill its intended purpose, which is to cultivate a love of reading in kids and to teach them to regard it as more than just something they have to do for school.

“Required summer reading robs those with an inherent passion for reading.”

What are your opinions on summer reading assignments?

“I love to read in general, but whenever I'm forced to read a book, I automatically have a bad mindset associated with it.”

— sophomore Sadie Swinney

“I think they're kind of pointless as students generally just refer to Spark Notes, not reading.”

— senior Kate Shackelford

“They take up time in summer, which is supposed to be a break from school.”

— junior Ellie Knoll

“I think they are very valuable for my son, but not everyone has the same resources.”

— McCallum parent Stacey Richardson



Graphic by Sophie Leung-Lieu.