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### **Page Turners: Books for Children**

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#### **Clever Crow**

Written by **Chris Butterworth**

Illustrated by **Olivia Lomenech Gill**

Candlewick, 2024

ISBN: 978-1-5362-5362-3542-5

This beginning informational book is packed full of fascinating facts about crows. While crows may lack the flashiness of some of their other feathered counterparts, they are clearly birds to be reckoned with. Presented in free verse, the book highlights the pervasiveness of crows, along with their comparatively large brain size, their outstanding memories, and their abilities to solve problems. The well-written content is accompanied by beautifully rendered illustrations. Don't miss the clever end pages; the opening ones depict a large range of crow eggs and the closing ones show the corresponding birds that hatch from the eggs. A brief glossary and ideas for extending learning are included. Ages 3-8.

#### **Girls on the Rise**

Written by **Amanda Gorman**

Illustrated by **Loveis Wise**

Viking Books for Young Readers, 2025

ISBN: 978-0593624180

From the youngest ever presidential inaugural poet, Amanda Gorman, comes a passionate and powerful book that celebrates girls and girlhood. Focusing not just on physical beauty but also on strength of character, this book's simple poetic language and colorful illustrations come together to highlight the diversity and potential of today's girls. The book honors the variety of identities, experiences, challenges and joys that girls across the world can face, while also celebrating the potential girls have as a collective. This book is a powerful one not only for the girls in our life, but also for all adults and children who aim to support all young learners in living up to their potential. This book would be a wonderful read-aloud in an elementary classroom setting and would encourage children to return to it to re-read while appreciating the illustrations in all their detail. Ages: 5-10.

### **The Light Within You**

Written by Namita **Moolani Mehra**

Illustrated by **Kamala Nair**

Two Lions, 2023

ISBN: 978-1542039123

*The Light Within You* follows Diya who recently moved from India as she travels back to celebrate Diwali and reunite with her beloved grandmother, Nani. While Diya struggles to fit into her new environment, she feels warm, happy and at home in India with her loving Nani. During the trip, Diya and her family celebrate Diwali and more importantly Diya learns important lessons about the light inside of her that can shine bright even when she feels the outside world is dark. In this tale of love and connection across many miles, young readers also learn about Diwali as the festival of lights. An author's note, glossary and inclusion of a Diwali affirmation extend the learning about this festive holiday. Ages 4-8.

### **No More Señora Mimi**

Written by **Meg Medina**

Illustrated by **Brittany Cicchese**

Candlewick, 2024

ISBN: 978-1-5362-1944-9

Each day, Señora Mimi babysits Ana. Ana loves going to Señora Mimi's, where she plays, goes on excursions, visits with baby Nelson, and plays with Pancho, a lovable dog. But, things are changing. Ana is excited that her abuela is coming to live with her family. Now, she won't need a babysitter because Abuela will be there to take care of her. Ana's enthusiasm evolves into a bittersweet moment when she begins to see nuances of what this change means. She realizes that her daily routine will change, as will her relationship with Señora Mimi. Comfort comes when Ana realizes she does not have to say goodbye to Señora Mimi. Things will change, but they will still be part of one another's lives. The book closes with a reassuring image of Ana in the park, happily surrounded by Abuela, Señora Mimi, baby Nelson, and Pancho. The book provides a tender look at the significant roles that caregivers play in the lives of children. Ages 4-8.

### **Rebellion 1776**

Written by **Laurie Halse Anderson**

Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books, 2025

ISBN: 978-1416968269

From the bestselling young adult author Laurie Halse Anderson comes a Meticulously researched and deeply moving historical fiction novel that immerses readers in the turmoil of the American Revolution. *Rebellion 1776* follows 13-year-old Elsbeth Turner, a courageous girl fighting to survive amid the chaos of war and a deadly smallpox epidemic. As tensions rise between Patriots and Loyalists, Elsbeth faces another battle—public fear of inoculation, which could mean the difference between life and death. Torn between protecting her family and standing up for what she believes in, Elsbeth's journey is one of resilience, sacrifice, and self-discovery. Anderson masterfully blends rich historical detail with an emotionally gripping narrative, offering young readers a powerful story about bravery in the face of uncertainty.

Rebellion 1776 is an unforgettable tale of survival and hope, perfect for fans of historical fiction and stories of young people shaping history. Ages 10-14.

**Revolutionary Mary: The true story of one woman, the Declaration of Independence, and America's fight for freedom**

Written by **Karen Blumenthal** and **Jen McCartney**

Illustrated by **Elizabeth Baddeley**

Roaring Brook Press, 2025

ISBN: 978-1-62672-311-5

This vibrant biography of Mary Katherine Goddard tells the story of her life in colonial America and her role in supporting the American Revolution. The authors highlight her fearlessness as a printer of pamphlets, handbills, and articles at a time when few women did so and in which it could be considered treasonous to the British government. The illustrations are frequently depicted in sepia tones, with a sense of the urgency and fervor of the profession captured in “newsprint pages” that appear to be scattered around the text. When tasked with printing the Declaration of Independence broadside that would be published in Maryland, Mary Katherine Goddard bravely signed her full name as printer, alongside the esteemed delegates, and in doing so, cemented her legacy as a revolutionary in her own right. Her story would be a positive addition to the study of the people of colonial America and the American Revolution. Ages 4-8.

**Rocket Ship, Solo Trip**

Written by **Chiara Colombi**

Illustrated by **Scott Magoon**

Viking Books for Young Readers, 2024

ISBN: 978-0593326930

Embarking on new adventures can be scary for anyone. Rocket ship is no different. As she embarks on her first solo trip, she is worried about launching into space on her own, but she knows she has an important job to do in delivering a satellite that will help everyone on earth see the beauty of space. As she approaches take off, she realizes that while she must venture out alone, she has the support of her rocket boosters and the love of ground control. We can all learn an important lesson about taking the first step on a new adventure from this space inspired tale. As ground control reminds rocket ship and all of us to find one small step to lead the way. Readers are reminded that the love and support of others will help us to be brave. Children who love space will especially enjoy this rhyming book with important life lessons. Ages 3-5.

**Sunrise on the Reaping (A Hunger Games Novel)**

Written by **Suzanne Collins**

Scholastic Press, 2025

ISBN: 978-1546171461

In *Sunrise on the Reaping*, Suzanne Collins returns to Panem with a gripping prequel set 24 years before *The Hunger Games*. The novel follows 18-year-old Haymitch Abernathy, the sharp-witted, rebellious victor of the 50th Hunger Games. As Haymitch is thrust into the brutal Quarter Quell, he must rely on his intellect and resourcefulness to survive while uncovering the dark

machinations of the Capitol. Collins masterfully weaves tension, political intrigue, and emotional depth, offering readers a deeper understanding of Haymitch’s hardened exterior in the original trilogy. Through his journey, *Sunrise on the Reaping* explores themes of power, survival, and the moral cost of rebellion. This compelling addition to the *Hunger Games* universe will keep young adult readers enthralled while shedding light on the origins of Panem’s resistance and the personal sacrifices made in the fight for freedom. Fans of the series will not want to miss this riveting tale. Ages 12+.

### **There Was a Shadow**

Written by **Bruce Handy**

Illustrated by **Lisk Feng**

Enchanted Lion Books, 2024

ISBN: 978-1-59270-406-4

Shadows can be literal and metaphorical, as captured in this thoughtful book for early readers. The sweeping illustrations, which contrast pastels alongside the many shades of black and gray that shadows represent, span both pages as the poetic text describes the many types of shadows that children encounter in their daily lives. These include shadows that shorten and lengthen with the seasons, sun, and moonlight, as well as those that represent worry, comfort, or memories of long ago. This is an ideal read-aloud to spark conversations around the science of shadows and light, and one which can also support a rich dialogue about feelings and emotions. Ages 5-7.

### **To See an Owl**

Written & Illustrated By: **Matthew Cordell**

Random House, 2025

ISBN: 978-0593649893

A new picture book by the Caldecott Medal-winning author of *Wolves in the Snow*, this text offers a glimpse into the patience and persistence required to fully appreciate nature. Following a young girl’s passion into the world of birds, the book charmingly documents her many attempts to see an owl in the wild. But, as she says, “Owls are not easy to see. Because owls do not want to be seen.” Inspired by her teacher and joined by her mother on multiple birding experiences, the narrator shares factual information about these nocturnal creatures while also reminding children that it can take time for our dreams to come true. Young ornithologists and naturalists will appreciate the trials and triumphs of the budding birder as she explores the woods in search of the elusive creature. Ages 5-8.



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## Emerging Scholars

### Supporting the Mental Health of School Children During the Summer Months

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Brigny Objio is a second-year student at Florida State University, pursuing a Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and an Educational Specialist degree. She holds a B.S. in Psychology with a minor in Law Enforcement Operations and has clinical experience with children, adolescents, and adults. Her research interests include children's mental health, access to care, and the intersection of psychology with legal and forensic systems. Brigny is passionate about culturally responsive, trauma-informed work with underserved communities and plans to pursue a Psy.D. in Clinical Psychology.

Susana Garcia is a first-year student in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling master's program at Florida State University. She received a Bachelor of Music Therapy from Florida Gulf Coast University and is a board-certified music therapist. Her research interests include accessibility, stigma, and disparities in mental health care; Hispanic populations within the military; and trauma and resiliency in underrepresented and marginalized communities, specifically Latin communities. She hopes to pursue a PhD in Counseling Psychology.

Dr. Tiffany Wilson currently serves as an Associate Teaching Professor and Counselor Education Program Coordinator at Florida State University. Prior to working in academia, Dr. Wilson worked as a high school counselor and a licensed career development coordinator in North Carolina public schools. She also worked as a therapist in various clinical settings. In addition to being a Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor and Licensed School Counselor, Dr. Wilson is also a National Certified Counselor, a Certified Clinical Trauma Professional, a Board Certified Tele-mental Health Professional, and a Qualified Supervisor.

## Abstract

The summertime, though a time for children to relax from the stresses that come with attending school, also poses a challenge for maintenance of their mental health due to loss of routine and regular social interaction, increased access to electronics, and the possible exposure to unsafe environments and food insecurity. This manuscript explores research discussing the risks that students may encounter through the loss of school-based supports and structure including higher rates of mental illness, increased social isolation and increased sedentary behavior. Content includes strategies stakeholders may consider and employ to best support students' mental health, such as leveraging community programming, ensuring continued access to mental health

services and encouraging outdoor play throughout the summer months. Accessibility of summer support strategies is considered as well as options appropriate for children across the economic spectrum are provided.

*Keywords:* Summer Break, Children, Mental Health, Accessibility, Structure

## **Supporting the Mental Health of School Children During the Summer Months**

The summer holidays provide a wonderful reprieve from homework, classes and waking up early for most students. Simultaneously, the summer months may pose unique obstacles to students' mental health when considering the lack of structure and routine school provides, as well as the loss of access to school-based mental health care services. This gap in service may be especially felt by students facing financial barriers to receiving private mental health care in the summer, those without mental health care providers in their vicinity and by other relevant stakeholders who may not otherwise know how to support their children's mental health throughout these months. This manuscript examines the prospective effects of the mental health of children during the summer months. Content provides different approaches for parents and guardians, educators, communities and policymakers to support children's mental health and overall well-being during the summer months.

### **Understanding the Risks**

#### **Loss of Structure and Routine**

Stakeholders should be aware of the concerns surrounding a sudden loss in structure and its possible adverse effects on the emotional and mental state of children. While children are in their academic year, structured routines help regulate their activities, sleep, and even meals, overall supporting their well-being. The end of the academic year disrupts this routine. Children's mental health tends to decline following the summer holidays (Kromydas et al., 2022), which is supported by a trend of elementary-aged children to exhibit less healthy behaviors on weekends compared to weekdays (Brazendale et al., 2017). Children do well with structure and routine, as it promotes overall social-emotional and mental wellness, meaning a loss of these elements may negatively affect them (Selman & Dilworth-Bart, 2023).

#### **Reduced Social Interaction**

Children rely on the school year which allows them to benefit from an environment that facilitates daily social interactions. Regular social interaction through the summer endorses greater self-perception, social-emotional outcomes and mental health in children and adolescents, particularly those from disadvantaged communities (Eglitis et al., 2024). Negative emotions like loneliness and isolation can be heightened during the summer months due to the lack of a structured social environment. Without caretakers, communities, and relevant stakeholders facilitating opportunities for social engagement, children may more strongly feel the ramifications of this summer isolation.

### **Limited Access to Mental Health Services**

Though a school's primary function is to be a place of learning, it simultaneously serves to monitor and support students' mental health. A report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2016) found approximately 15% of teens, or 3.7 million teens, ages 12-17 received school-based mental health care services, rising from 12.1% in 2009, or 2.9 million teens. During summer break, however, these students may lose access to these mental health services, which may impact those living in rural areas or lower socio-economic status (SES) more disproportionately due to traveling long distances for care and inability to afford care or inability to accommodate parents' working schedules, respectively (Graves et al., 2024; Hodgkinson et al., 2016). The inability to access initial or continued mental health care could present negative consequences on the mental well-being of children and adolescents.

### **Increased Screen Time and Sedentary Behavior**

Though summer breaks are typically pictured as being a time for children to be outdoors and with friends, it also provides more opportunities for increased interactions with electronic devices. Without the structure and schedule of school, smartphones, video gaming consoles and systems, and television could see increased use by children, contributing to higher screen-times in the summer as well as sedentary behavior (Brazendale et al., 2018). These behaviors are associated not only with elevated rates of obesity, but also with increased findings of mental illness, including mood disorders and depressive symptoms (Muppalla et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). The content a child consumes matters as well. Fast-paced, violent content has been linked with antisocial and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder-related behaviors (Muppalla et al., 2023). Stakeholders should be aware of and monitor screen-time and sedentary behavior due to their correlation with negative mental and physical health outcomes.

### **Food Insecurity and Unsafe Environments**

In 2020, approximately 14.8% of U.S households with children faced food insecurity, marking a notable rise from the previous year (Hales & Coleman-Jensen, 2022). Some children rely on school for a nutritious meal. For some children, schools ensure daily access to meals and a safe and consistent routine. While children are on summer break, the inconsistency and instability of some households, especially underprivileged children, results in exposure to unsafe environments and increased food insecurity. This lack of access to reliable nutrition has been linked to adverse mental health outcomes in children, including heightened risks of depression, anxiety and behavioral challenges (Nagata et al., 2018). Additionally, the absence of school-mandated reporting when children are out of school leaves them more vulnerable to abusive, unsafe home environments. Baron et al. (2020) found a 27% drop in reported child abuse and neglect cases in Florida during the early months of COVID-19-related school closures, emphasizing the critical role school personnel assume in identifying and reporting abuse. This suggests that reports of child maltreatment do not decrease due to a lack of incidents, but more so because of an absence of school oversight.

## **Strategies for Supporting Mental Health During the Summer**

### **Promote Routine and Daily Structure**

Children need a reliable and consistent routine. A 2023 systematic review by Selman & Dilworth-Bart found family routines become associated with positive developmental outcomes in children, including improvements in cognitive function and emotional regulation. Stable environments, including routines and daily structure, enhance children's mental health through provisions securing safety which provide feelings of security, as well as increased emotional and social support (Yang et al., 2025). Important daily routines may include having daily schedules with specific times for tasks such as physical activities and set meal and bed times. Overall, these actions foster not only the stability, safety and security that children need for healthy development, but also the opportunity to incorporate routine bonding activities, healthy practices and open communication.

### **Facilitate Social Connections**

Social interaction is crucial in children's emotional development and mental health. Research by Zhao and Gibson (2022) found that children who demonstrated stronger peer-play abilities at age three were significantly less likely to experience mental health difficulties, including behavioral and emotional problems, by age seven. These effects persisted even after accounting for variables such as socioeconomic background and parenting factors, further emphasizing the importance of early and consistent peer interactions. Children's early positive peer interactions remain critical toward their later mental health. Teperdei et al. (2023) demonstrated that the quality and quantity of peer relationships were positively associated with children's life satisfaction and academic motivation, suggesting that children who feel a stronger connection to peers are more likely to thrive emotionally and cognitively. To foster these connections during summer, caregivers encourage participation in community-based programs, schedule regular play dates, or support virtual connections with friends and family. These intentional efforts help maintain a child's sense of belonging and support their overall well-being in times when they do not have a regular routine.

### **Ensure Access to Mental Health Resources**

Children's access to mental health resources is imperative, especially in the summer where mental health support may be lacking or more challenging to access. Though this may be difficult due to previously mentioned barriers, there are options to promote mental health care access when school-based services are not available. Social workers are available at some public libraries, which is especially valuable to those from lower SES due to libraries being available to patrons of all economic statuses (Soska & Navarro, 2020). For those in rural areas or facing obstacles related to physically seeking care due to geographic location or disability, virtual mental health care (telehealth) may be an option. Telehealth mental health care removes worries of travel, loss of income due to taking time off work, and is found to be generally feasible and accepted by clients in treating various mental health concerns (Doarn et al., 2020). Moreover, an additional, and perhaps more accessible, resource during the summer months could be a child's pediatrician. Pediatricians may perform mental health screenings during routine visits during the



summer and can even provide some forms of treatment such as psychoeducation, recommend or begin evidence-based practices such as promoting better sleep and nutrition, or even prescribe pharmacological treatment when necessary (Arruda et al., 2023). Though pediatricians' primary roles are not to be a mental health care provider, parents and children may find that mental health practices may still be integrated into some doctor visits, which may be a boon for those in need of basic services without access to additional resources.

### **Encourage Physical Activity and Outdoor Play**

Dobbins et al. (2021) found that school-based physical activity programs may help boost both the number of children participating in moderate to vigorous exercise and the duration of their engagement, emphasizing the important ways schools encourage active lifestyles. Without the stability and reliable routine that school provides children, families may need to be more intentional about encouraging children to stay active. Physical activity is integral in framing children's mental health. Recent research by Yang et al. (2025) suggests that regular physical activity can help lessen the negative effects of sedentary behavior on both the physical and mental health of children. Encouraging and motivating outdoor play, sports, movement-based hobbies or active summer programs can help reduce stress, boost confidence and support social and emotional development during the summer months. Simple ways to incorporate physical movement and encourage outdoor play include visiting local parks, seeking out trails or going for walks as a family, or joining local outdoor recreation groups.

### **Limit Screen Time and Encourage Creative Activities**

With the risks of excessive screen time in mind, it is in the best interest of children to limit their access to screens and instead, encourage partaking in more creative activities. Not only does participating in creative activities promote time away from screens, but it positively endorses problem-solving and higher self-esteem, especially in adolescence (Moreno & Del Mar Molero Jurado, 2023). Higher levels of self-esteem may be important in dealing with stressors, providing a protective factor against increased stress. Creative activities can also take many forms, which makes them accessible to those across different levels of SES and those with differences in access to resources such as physical space (e.g., living in an apartment in the city versus a house with a large backyard). Accessible activities may include reading, community clubs, crafting, or even more passive activities such as music-listening. These behaviors support not only higher rates of self-esteem, but also prosocial behaviors, decreased inattention, and healthy behaviors such as lower use of alcohol and cigarettes (Social Biobehavioral Research Group, 2023).

### **Support Emotional Expression and Communication**

Fostering emotional expression and communication during the summer requires more than structured activities; it calls for meaningful conversations. Bell et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of everyday language as a powerful role in shaping children's emotional understanding. Using words like, "sad," "excited," "worried," helps children build the vocabulary and awareness needed to recognize, interpret and express their own feelings. Using this kind of language supports empathy and perspective-taking, skills often developed through peer interaction during the school year. During summer, when those interactions may decrease,

caregivers and community members can fill the gap by engaging children in conversations that explore feelings, intentions and motivations.

### **Leverage Community Programs**

Community programs can be an effective way to get children out of the house, away from screens, and to maintain their interest and participation. These programs may be offered by municipalities or cities, universities, or institutions and provide grade-level or interest-specific camps, such as a film camp for young movie aficionados (Smith & Marquez, 2021; Young & Stockman, 2023). Other alternatives such as summer learning programs exist. For example, programs may be both academically and socially beneficial, offering a way to reduce loss of learning during the summer and prepare children and teens for the upcoming school year and as well as providing children with the opportunity to build and practice foundational social skills (Afterschool Alliance, 2021). Participation in social activities such as summer camps or other community programming is not only beneficial to mental health, but also physical health (Yang et al., 2016). Due to the free or low-cost nature of community programming, they provide a viable option for families across the financial spectrum (though their benefits are arguably priceless).

### **Prepare for Transition Back to School**

Donaldson et al. (2022) examined 34 studies on school transition interventions; their goal was to improve the mental health and well-being among children. They discovered that social outcomes, like peer relationships and school belonging, were more responsive to interventions than behavioral or psychological outcomes (Donaldson et al., 2022). Interventions that targeted prioritizing, enhancing social support, and creating a sense of belonging were found to be more effective during the transition between school and summer break. Early transitions benefited from support in the paternal and school environment, and later transitions displayed better improvement with peer-focused strategies, showing that the effectiveness of these interventions varies by age. Parents consider the risks and prepare in advance for the summer months to ensure a smooth transition and return to school.

### **Conclusion**

Summer provides unique mental health challenges for children and their caretakers, but accessible solutions are available. Loss of structure, reduced social interaction, limited access to mental health services, increased screen time, food insecurity and exposure to unsafe environments remain factors to consider during the summer months. Through intentional efforts by caregivers, educators, communities and policymakers, children can receive the support they need to thrive year-round. Strategies such as maintaining daily routines, encouraging social connection, providing access to mental health resources, promoting physical activity, fostering creative expression and leveraging community programs can all contribute to children's better mental and emotional outcomes.

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