

FAMILY MEDIA/BOOKS

Awesome Books That Celebrate Summer Adventures

An age-by-age guide to summer books for adventurous kids



BY GEMMA ALEXANDER • PUBLISHED ON: MAY 30, 2019





Worried about the summer slide?

Bring summer reading to adventurous life beyond the page with ideas and activities that will keep the kids engaged all through the dog days. Chances are good that you've already got plans for some of these iconic summer adventures anyway, so get your kids psyched for fun and keep them reading at the same time with these summertime stories.

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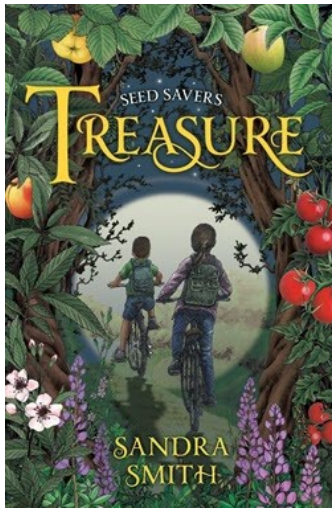
The bounty of a Pacific Northwest summer makes up for the many months of rain. A small backyard garden can yield a lot of produce, and studies have shown that kids are more likely to try vegetables they've had a hand in growing. Even if you have a black thumb, our region is blessed with [U-pick farms](#) offering every berry you've ever craved and a few you might not have heard of. Arlington's [Biringer Farm](#) is a longtime family favorite, but don't overlook the other options. [Remlinger Farms](#), in Carnation, pairs berry picking with a family fun park, while [Henna Blueberry Farm](#), in Fall City, is a likely place for spotting wildlife. Whether you just want an afternoon in the berry fields or you're trying to grow a gardener this summer, consider these books your green allies.

Picture Books:



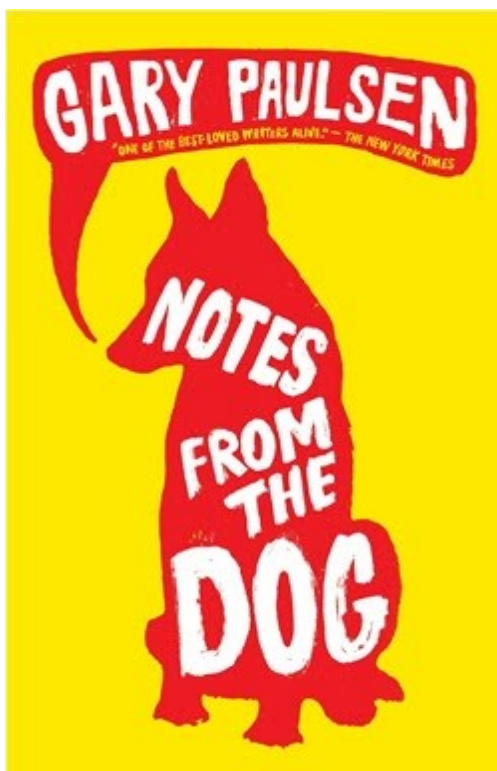
For berry-picking adventures, you can't do better than Robert McCloskey's classic "[Blueberries for Sal](#)." This simple story of mothers and children — both human and ursine — harvesting berries in preparation for winter is delightful no matter how old you are. "[Wild Berries](#)," by Vancouver-based indigenous author Julie Flett, tells the story of a young Cree boy who picks wild berries in the forest with his grandmother. Along the way, they observe wildlife and learn the Cree names for things. Kids will be excited to try the accompanying wild blueberry jam recipe. In author Paul Fleischman's "[Seedfolks](#)," a Vietnamese girl plants six lima beans in a vacant lot in Cleveland. Along with her beans, she grows a community, as diverse neighbors become friends and an empty lot becomes a garden.

Middle Grade:



School-age kids probably won't need any prompting to pick berries, but Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic "[The Secret Garden](#)" established a century ago that forbidden gardens are more appealing than the ones your parents put you to work in. Northwest author Sandra Smith updates the concept in "[Seed Savers: Treasure](#)," the first book in a dystopian series about a world in which growing your own food is illegal. In Holly Goldberg Sloan's "[Counting by 7s](#)," biracial genius Willow is obsessed with numbers and her garden, but when she enters the foster-care system, she needs to learn how to connect with people. "[Black Gold](#)" by another local author, Sara Cassidy, is the third in a series about Rudy and Cyrus. The boys previously resisted moving to a farm, but in this installment, they graduate from fruit-stand managers to worm moguls when a neighbor drops off a bin full of composting worms. Looking for a more direct connection between reading and action? "[Gardening Lab for Kids: 52 Fun Experiments to Learn, Grow, Harvest, Make, Play, and Enjoy Your Garden](#)" by Renata Brown contains just what it states on the cover.

Young Adult:



In Gary Paulsen's "[Notes From the Dog](#),"

which skews to the younger side of YA, lonely 15-year-old Finn and his dog befriend a woman battling cancer. While Finn's attempts to take care of her garden don't always work, he does learn how to care for people. For a nonfiction approach, Michael Pollan's "[The Omnivore's Dilemma: Young Readers Edition](#)" encourages kids to consider the personal and global health implications of their food choices, and might encourage your teen to grow their own.

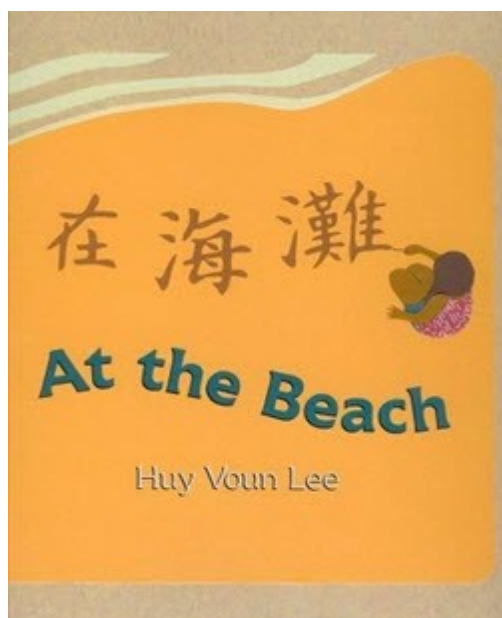
If neither reason nor drama can pique your teen's interest in growing things, they will probably enjoy author Stella Gibbons' 1932 classic satire "[Cold Comfort Farm](#)," in which an urbane young woman descends upon her hapless and depressing farmer relatives and proves she really does know better than her elders.

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The Pacific Northwest is all about water. It falls on us all winter, and when the sun finally peeks out from behind the clouds, we seek it out at the beaches, lakes and rivers that are never very far away. You could take the ferry over to Everett's Jetty Island to get out of the heat, explore the tidepools at Me-Kwa-Mooks Park in West Seattle or relax at one of the area's [other terrific beaches](#). Refreshed by the cool air over the water, your family might [take a more active approach](#), say, stand-up paddleboarding on Green Lake, kayaking the Sammamish River, canoeing out of the Enatai Beach boathouse or sailing from the Center for Wooden Boats. Whatever your pleasure, we've got a book for that.

Picture Books:



Gary Paulsen is better known for middle-grade adventures, but "[Canoe Days](#)" is a gentle picture book that illustrates the joys of a day spent on the water. In Tom Booth's "[Day at the Beach](#)," big brother Gideon learns that building sand castles is more fun with a friend — or even a little sister. Huy Voun Lee's "[At the Beach](#)" is quietly educational, as Xiao Ming's mother draws in the sand to teach him Chinese characters related to the sights near the sea.

Middle Grade:



Arthur Ransome's "[Swallows and Amazons](#)" series, about a group of children messing about on and near the water in England's Lake District, is nearly 100 years old, but it evokes the world of childish adventures as effectively as ever. For kids who want their adventures on an epic scale, consider H.M. Bouwman's "[A Crack in the Sea](#)," the first Raftworld historical fantasy, in which children from different periods in Earth's history are connected to the events on the high seas of the Second World. Or try Chris Grabenstein's "[The Island of Dr. Libris](#)," in which books come to life at a lakeside cabin. Looking for something more educational? "[Pacific Intertidal Life](#)," coauthored by Ron Russo and Pam Olhausen, is an illustrated, pocket-size guide to Pacific coast tide pools.

Young Adult:



From Herman Melville's "[Moby Dick](#)" to Ernest Hemingway's "[The Old Man and the Sea](#)," and more recently, Yann Martel's "[Life of Pi](#)," there's something about the ocean that inspires metaphors for life. "Moby Dick" is a doorstep, but the others are great choices for teens, who may feel the power of the metaphor more than they understand it. For something more direct, try the graphic novel "[This One Summer](#)," a coming-of-age story by Mariko Tamaki that is set at a beach house. And if your teen wants to read a real surviving-at-sea tale, give them "[Sailing the Dream](#)," the autobiography of Mike Perham, who turned 17 during his solo sail around the world.

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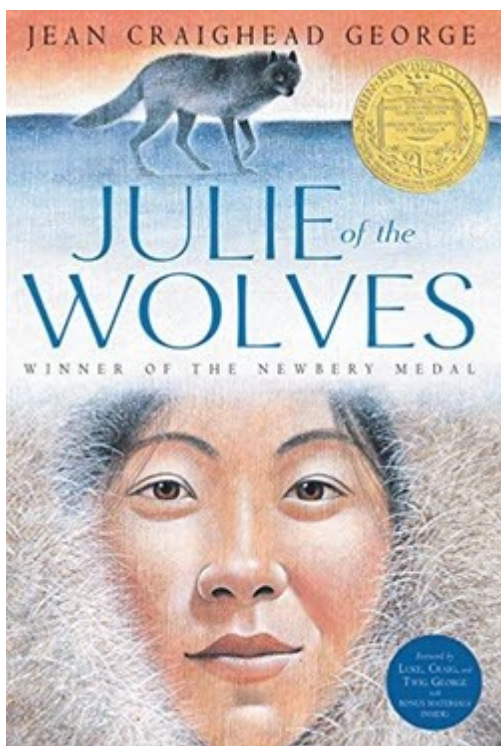
The Pacific Northwest is nature's playground, and in the summer we all want to get out among the trees. Our styles vary from gentle walks at Carkeek Park or Schmitz Preserve Park (both within latte range) to primitive hike-in camping at a natural hot spring, like Goldmyer. Either way, a little fantasizing (with a good book) about living closer to the land is in order. "[The Swiss Family Robinson](#)" by Johann David Wyss is a classic example, but if the dated grammar and morality lessons are too much of a hard sell for your kids, try these contemporary stories instead.

Picture Books:



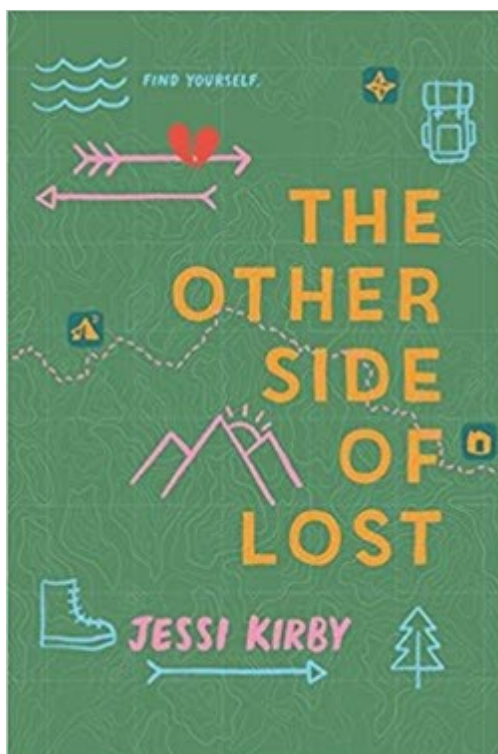
"[Do Princesses Wear Hiking Boots?](#)" by Carmela LaVigna Coyle is the first in a series of beloved books that reassure even the most precious princess that hiking, camping and rowdy outdoor activities are perfectly in keeping with a refined young lady's decorum. In author Anne Rockwell's "[Hiking Day](#)," a young girl goes on her first family hiking trip up a nearby mountain and makes wonderful discoveries, such as toads and berries. "[Backpack Explorer](#)" (by the editors of Storey Publishing) is a take-along field guide that encourages young explorers to look and listen wherever they roam.

Middle Grade:



Kimberly Brubaker Bradley's middle-grade books are powerful at any age. After their family disintegrates through death and divorce in "[Halfway to the Sky](#)," 12-year-old Dani and her mother hike the Appalachian Trail together. Jean Craighead George has written a genre's worth of books about youth living off the land alone. Try "[Tree Castle Island](#)," about a boy's solo summer in the Okefenokee Swamp, or if the heat gets to be too much, escape to the Arctic with "[Julie of the Wolves](#)." Gary Paulsen also specializes in middle-grade wilderness survival stories. The best of them is Newbery honoree "[Hatchet](#)," the first of five books about a 13-year-old's adventures surviving in the Canadian wilderness. For a dose of practical naturalism, the "[Curious Kids Nature Guide](#)" by Fiona Cohen is full of facts about the Pacific Northwest environment, organized by habitat — forest, beach, backyards and others.

Young Adult:



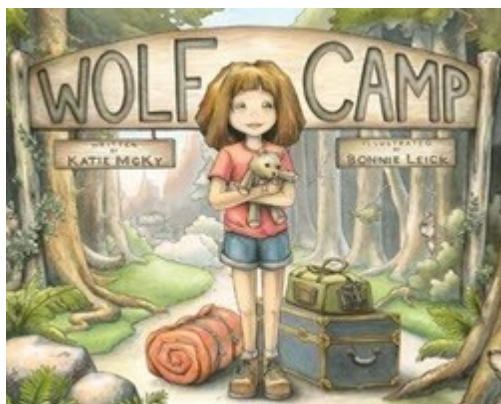
Convincing teens to break their Snapchat streaks and go off-grid with the fam can be a challenge. In [“The Other Side of Lost”](#) by Jessi Kirby, social media influencer Mari realizes her whole life is for show. She sets out on the John Muir Trail to learn how to live for real. Your teen may not listen to you when you say that time in the wilderness builds character, but they might listen to a best-selling author whose memoir was adapted into a hit movie. Cheryl Strayed was 26 when she hiked 1,000 miles of the Pacific Crest Trail alone, but make no mistake, [“Wild”](#) is her coming-of-age story. The [“Distance From Me to You”](#) by Marina Gessner ups the drama with romance on the trail, animal encounters and the terror of getting lost. Finally, if you can’t make mountaineering fun, you can at least make it funny: [“The Ascent of Rum Doodle”](#) by W.E. Bowman is both a parody of and a classic within the mountaineering genre.

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Few summer traditions generate as much anticipation and anxiety as sleepaway camp. Parents worry about whether their kids are ready (or whether they are), and kids worry about being away from home and lonely. But whether they attend a big traditional camp like [Camp Fire's Camp Sealh](#), a smaller one like [Hidden Valley Camp](#) in Granite Falls or a themed camp like the one at [Icicle Creek Center for the Arts](#), sleepaway camp creates memories for a lifetime. It's no surprise that summer camp stories are almost a genre unto themselves.

Picture Books:



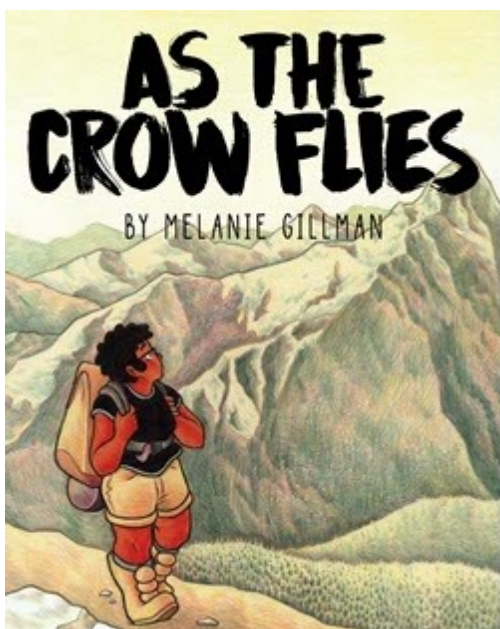
Preschoolers probably won't be going to sleepaway camp, but they will still be curious about it, especially if older siblings are going. Natasha Wing's "[The Night Before Summer Camp](#)" is a picture book written in the same meter as the classic Christmas poem. It tells the story of a little camper who doesn't know what to expect from camp. For the little ones left behind, James and Eamon's free-time adventures in Marla Frazee's "[A Couple of Boys Have the Best Week Ever](#)" overshadow the activities at nature camp. Older siblings might seem different when they get back from camp, but at least they aren't likely to exhibit Maddie's feral changes from "[Wolf Camp](#)" (by Katie McKy).

Middle Grade:



Nobody needs to be reminded that the wildly popular Percy Jackson books by Rick Riordan take place in part at a summer camp for demigods (check out [Camp Half-Blood](#) in Leavenworth if you have a Percy fan in your house), but there are plenty of other middle-grade summer camp stories to choose from. Elissa Brent Weissman’s “[Nerd Camp](#)” celebrates kids who love their calculators as much as camping. In Lisa Jenn Bigelow’s “[Drum Roll, Please](#),” two weeks at Camp Rockaway are just what shy 13-year-old Melly needs to help her navigate her parents’ divorce, her best friend’s sudden abandonment and a crush on another girl. The “[Lumberjanes](#)” graphic novels by Noelle Stevenson take place at a summer camp for “Hardcore Lady Types.” Beginning with “[Beware the Kitten Holy](#),” five spunky, lovable characters challenge gender stereotypes as they explore events both supernatural and surreal.

Young Adult:



Despite dealing with race, faith and sexuality,

Melanie Gillman’s graphic novel “[As the Crow Flies](#)” skews toward the younger side of YA. Charlie is excited to attend Camp Three Peaks for feminist Christians until she discovers she is the only queer black girl at camp. Will God help her learn to speak up to her well-meaning camp mates who aren’t aware of their own biases? Rachel Mann’s “[On Blackberry Hill](#)” follows Reena to the same Jewish summer camp that her late mother attended decades earlier. Gabe Durham’s light-hearted “[Fun Camp](#)” uses many different voices and formats — including letters home, lists and monologues from very different characters — to illustrate the full camp experience.

Need more adventures?

If you are looking for more adventures, pick up a copy of ParentMap’s “[52 Seattle Adventures With Kids](#),” a local’s guide to the most affordable and awesome family outings in the Puget Sound region, with a new seasonal adventure for every week of the year.