



**Q** Some of my friends have started meditating. One of my teachers even talks about it at school. But I thought that wasn't a very Catholic thing to do. Is it ok to meditate?

We frequently may begin to reflect upon how Christ's example of the words found in Scripture can positively affect our lives. This form of Christian meditation is a wonderful thing!

**A** Great question, and I'll begin by saying that this can be a very confusing topic because there are various ways to meditate, and at the same time various goals that people seek to accomplish while meditating.

In fact, Pope Leo XIII (in 1888) wrote that "frequent meditation upon the things of heaven wonderfully nourishes and strengthens virtue," that through "meditation upon God (people) will be themselves encouraged, and will more effectually excite others to the love of God," and for this reason it "is the surest method for the salvation of all."

**Now, at the same time I will say that there are forms of meditation that are to be avoided at all costs.**

I say this because there are many different forms of meditation that are becoming very popular in our culture that are rooted in religious practices from Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism.

The goal in most forms of meditation that are not explicitly rooted in Christ, having God as the desired goal, is to reach a state where one is at peace with oneself or is reaching a higher state of consciousness.

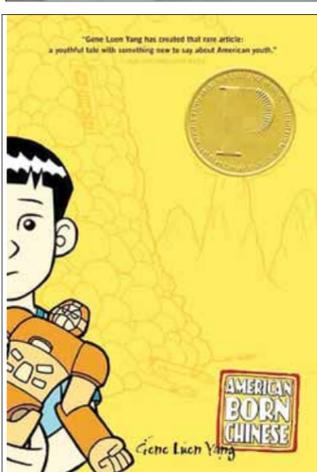
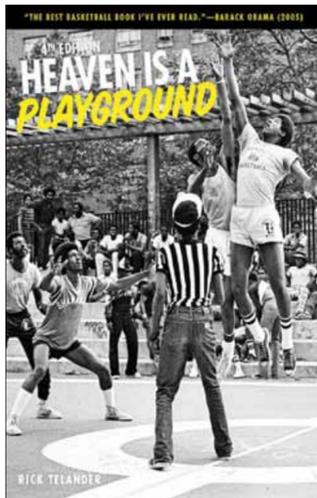
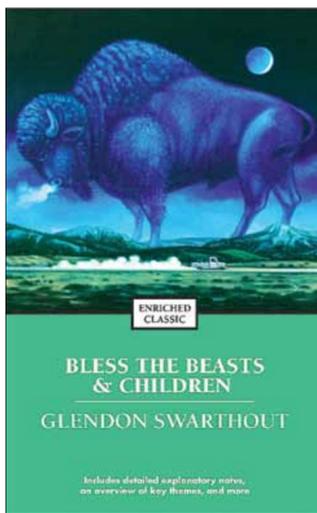
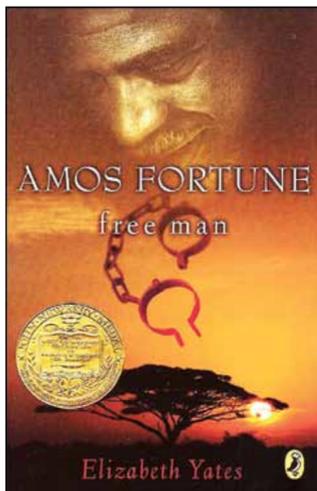
In other words, many forms of meditation focus on oneself as the higher power. Of course these all differ in minor ways but the over-arching idea is to try to find a peace of a spirituality that is actualized within oneself.

This can be a dangerous thing because it can lead to a notion and a belief that we can self-actualize ourselves to a point where we seek to find our own peace rather than reaching out to God.

Worse yet, if one who is meditating in this way is striving to reach out to some random, nameless power, he or she could unknowingly begin to welcome in spiritual forces that are opposed to our good and loving God.

So stay away from any sort of meditative practice that seeks to clear one's mind for the sake of "actualizing self and reaching your maximum potential" and just stick to prayer and asking our Savior to teach you who you are in His eyes!

*This month's YO Father is answered by Father Keith Romke. Send your questions to youngobserver@rockforddiocese.org*



# What are you reading?

**H**ere are some summer reading suggestions from the book lists and English teachers at diocesan Catholic high schools. The choices range from easy to advanced reading levels and represent a variety of genres, including graphic novels. A few will give you a chance to think about how you could defend your faith to some of the characters in the stories.

## Aquin Central Catholic Junior-Senior High School, Freeport

### Amos Fortune Free Man by Elizabeth Yates

When Amos was only 15, he was captured by slave traders and brought to Massachusetts, where he was sold at auction. Although his freedom had been taken, Amos never lost his dignity and courage in this Newberry Award-winning novel.

### Bless the Beasts and the Children by Glendon Swarthout

The nail-biters, thumb suckers, and teeth grinders at the Box Canyon Boys Camp were called the Bedwetters. They were the cast-away offspring of parents who were busy traveling, being divorced, remarrying, and garnering fortunes. They were rejects...until Cotton. Cotton pulled them together. Cotton led them on that fantastic mission to strike one final blow in the desperate battle to save themselves.

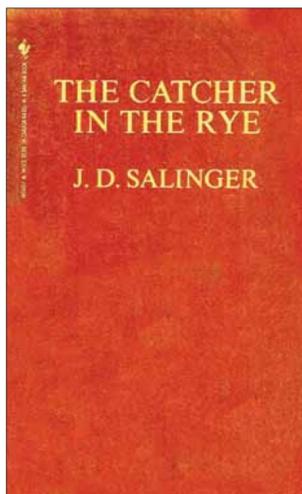
## Aurora Central Catholic High School, Aurora

### Heaven is a Playground by Rick Telander

The 1976 book is based on the author's observations of the streetball culture in Brooklyn during the summer of 1974. Among the players featured in the book are Fly Williams and Albert King.

### Cold Mountain by Charles Frazier

The novel opens in a Confederate military hospital near Raleigh, North Carolina, where the protagonist is recovering from battle wounds he received in the American Civil War. The soldier is tired of fighting for a



cause he never believed in and wants to go home to the woman he loves.

### The 5th Wave by Rick Yancey

A science fiction novel published in 2013, it is the first installment of a trilogy. It's a dystopic novel in which aliens invade the earth, bringing death and destruction in five well defined waves. During the first wave, an electro-magnetic pulse destroys all electronics on earth.

### American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang

There are three stories in this book. It starts with the Monkey King's story, moves to Jin's story then goes to the story of Danny (Jin's alter-ego). The pattern of the narrative continues through the book. The author, like his character, also grew up trying to balance his Chinese and American cultures.

### The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger

Holden Caulfield is the central character

and narrator in this novel set in the 1950s. Holden is not specific about where he is while telling the story, but he is undergoing some kind of treatment for mental or emotional problems after his brother's death.

## St. Edward Central Catholic High School, Elgin

### Maus: My Father Bleeds History by Art Spiegelman

In this Pulitzer Prize-winning biography/autobiography, the author depicts his father Vladek's experiences as a Polish Jew during the Holocaust. The graphic novel weaves together a harrowing tale of survival with the relationship between Spiegelman and his father.

## Newman Central Catholic High School, Sterling

### The Book Thief Mark by Mark Zusak

In another book about the period just

## Why are you reading it?

Sometimes it's just fun to enjoy a book, whether fiction or nonfiction. And it gives you something to talk about with your friends.

But, let's face it, sometimes we read because a teacher told us to. Here's why some of them make summer reading assignments.

"Summer reading and book discussions help ... maintain reading skills, improve reading fluency, and learn new vocabulary and concepts," says Debbie Daws, who teaches English and math at Aquin Central Catholic Junior-Senior High School in Freeport.

"The readings Newman recommends for Honors English encourage students to analyze literature, interpret, and evaluate characterization, conflict, and culture," says Donna Spencer, who teaches English at Newman Central Catholic High School in Sterling.

Both teachers require a report of some kind at the beginning of the school year. These are supposed to help with writing and critical thinking skills.

"Such synthesis done in the summer months requires students to appraise language by breaking down the text into idea and argument," Spencer says.

Mark Schwartz, who teaches English

and coaches golf at Aurora Central Catholic High School, makes a couple of recommendations that he believes stretch a student's analytic skills.

One of those books is "Catcher in the Rye" by J.D. Salinger.

He says he and his junior English students realize, "We are all unique and created in the image and likeness of God, (but) that doesn't mean that unique things happen to us. There's a difference. We are in this together. No one is special."

"And that's a great thing," he adds. "God loves us all. We lean on each other. Holden Caulfield lives a life in which he thinks he's special. He's alone because he thinks no one understands him. To him, you're a 'phony' if you don't complain and suffer as he does."

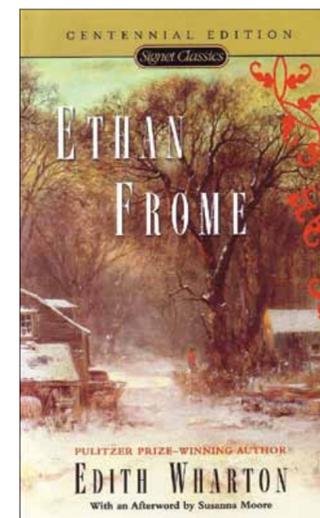
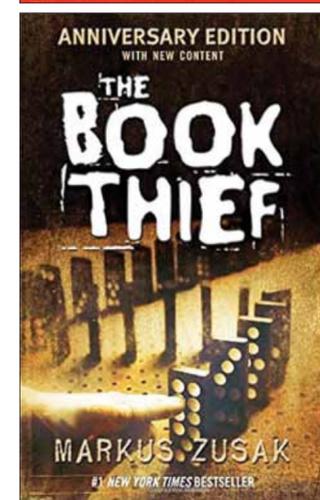
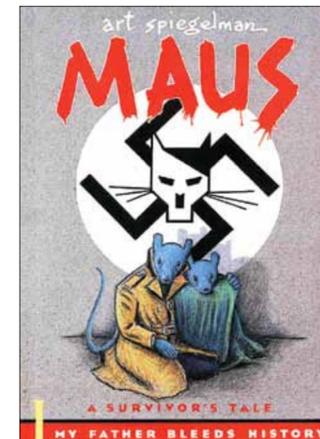
His other recommendation, "American Born Chinese" by Gene Luen Yang, is an opportunity to "dissect not only the complex structure and artistry of this text, (but also to) analyze it's way of showing teens that the need for acceptance, peace, self-awareness, and even rebellion is universal. It even incorporates a nifty way to conceptualize an omniscient being's presence both within and without bounds of reality — and how we, as humans in temporal realm, must admit our powerlessness in order to be truly free."

before World War II, Death watches Liesel Meminger, a 9-year-old German girl, who is given up by her mother to live with Hans and Rosa Hubermann in the small town of Molching in 1939.

### Ethan Frome by Edith Wharton

Ethan Frome is a novella published in 1911 by the Pulitzer Prize-winning American author Edith Wharton. Set in the fictitious town of Starkfield, Mass., the main story is framed by Wharton's prologue and epilogue describing a tragedy that befalls Frome.

— Sharon Boehlefeld, features editor



## VOCATION CORNER

### The Resurrection

**R**ecently I have had multiple instances

in which I've been given the privileged and humbling role of helping minister to a family following the death of a loved one who was quite young and in which the illness or circumstances that brought about the death were sudden.

The thing that has amazed me in each of these instances has been the faith of both the individuals who are now with the Lord, as well as the faith of their families. In each of these cases there was a peace in the midst of the storm and an unseen presence guiding those whose hearts were torn.

I share this right here in this column because I think I'm like a broken-record when I repeatedly insist that the peace which we all long for is made possible by striving to do things God's way rather than insisting on our own way.

Well, these dark moments have been the greatest affirmation for me of the reality of the workings of the Holy Spirit and the rewards that God gives to those who strive to follow His plan.

So for all who have lost a loved one: Know of my prayers and thank you for your witness to the way that God faithfully carries us through!

— Father Keith Romke, Diocesan Director of Vocations, kromke@rockforddiocese.org.