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High School summer reading a hit with students *by Holly Hobbs* Staff writer

With days still remaining in the regular school year, Chantilly High School junior Yasmine Palmer, 16, is already gearing up for her summer reading project. All students at the high school are required to read this summer's selection, Roland Smith's "Peak," (2007) the story of 14-year-old Peak Marcello who climbs Mount Everest.

"I actually went to the [local] library yesterday [Monday] to check it out. But all the copies are already gone," Palmer said. Being out of stock is a tribute to the success of Chantilly's ONE Book program, which is now in its third year.

"I think the summer reading program is a really good idea because Chantilly is really big on community and this brings everyone together," Palmer said, adding that the workload is not too heavy during the summer and the books selected for the ONE Book program are typically fun reads. "Otherwise we'd be reading Shakespeare or 'Catcher and the Rye' and no one wants to read that [during their summer break]."

The goal of the ONE Book program is to encourage reading for enjoyment while creating a community bond between school staff and students, said Principal Teresa Johnson.

"Several years ago I read an article about a college that required their entire study body to read one book," she said. "I investigated further and found out that a number of colleges had done something similar to create community and a common experience. At the same time, I read a book by Kelly Gallagher called 'Readicide' that provided research indicating the positive outcomes of students who read for enjoyment [such as higher achievement scores and stronger readers]."

Themes and the setting of the chosen summer book become part of lessons taught all over the school. For example, with "Peak," teachers said it is likely science classes will discuss altitude and its effects, geography and geology. History could pull lessons about explorers and great mountain climbers.

"Spanish class [last year] had an assignment where we had to cast who would play what part in the movie," Palmer said of a writing assignment based on last year's selection "Whale Talk," by Chris Crutcher.

"Last year, some parents expressed concerns to me about the book choice due to language and content," Johnson said. "So, this year, the ONE Book Committee was more cautious about the content of the book and ensured that we had a broader representation of the parent community on the committee. We let parents know every year that if they do not want their child reading the book choice, they may choose another book within the genre [which is typically young adult books]."

The school and neighboring Chantilly Regional Library also provide a number of copies of the summer reading selection for students and staff who cannot or do not want to purchase the book. While some of the books are already checked out, Chantilly High School's library had 38 of the 60 copies it purchased as of Wednesday afternoon. "You pick a book that the kids like and they really get on board," school librarian Lynette Constantinides said. "One of the goals here is to — once the kids start reading — keep them reading. So we'll have a display up when they get back."

She added that the school has also purchased other books on mountain climbing.

The Fairfax County library system currently owns 85 copies of "Peak." Chantilly Regional Library has 60 copies donated by the Chantilly Regional Library Friends organization, a fundraising group.

"[W]e hope to encourage students to read over the summer months. We also hope that students will develop a joy of reading for pleasure as well as enhance their reading skills in school and in life," Chantilly Regional Library Branch Manager Daria Parnes said.

The library will also host two ONE Book group discussions on Aug. 12 and 28, beginning at 7 p.m. at the library.

Of this year's summer reading selection, Johnson said, "This year's book has a great character building theme. The main character has some negative experiences and grows tremendously from all his experiences. It is a feel-good book and it will leave the reader wanting more."

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