

Quest Forward Middle School  
2026 - 2027  
8th Grade Summer Reading Assignment

Summer reading is designed to keep your mind active, improve your literacy skills, and prepare you for the upcoming school year. This assignment ensures you are ready to participate in class discussions, projects, and assessments from the first day of school.

Failure to read the assigned book and submit the corresponding project by the deadline of **Friday, August 14th, 2026** will result in a deduction of points towards the assignment grade.

**Learning Objective:** Students will read *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner and analyze his use of suspense techniques. Students will then apply these techniques to create an original suspenseful narrative.

**Success Criteria:**

- I can define and identify key suspense techniques used in *The Maze Runner*.
- I can use context clues to decode unfamiliar vocabulary within the novel.
- I can analyze how pacing and foreshadowing contribute to building tension.
- I can explain the impact of sensory details and cliffhangers on the reader's experience.
- I can draft an original suspenseful scene using the techniques studied in this packet.

### Suspense Key Vocabulary

**Pacing:** The speed or rhythm of the story. Authors vary pacing (making it fast or slow) to build tension or allow for reflection.

**Cliffhanger:** A plot device where a chapter or scene ends at a moment of high tension or suspense without a resolution.

**Sensory Details:** Descriptive language that appeals to the five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch) to immerse the reader in the scene.

**Foreshadowing:** Subtle hints or clues provided by the author that suggest what might happen later in the plot.

**Suspense:** The intense feeling of anticipation or even dread that a reader feels while waiting for the outcome of certain events.

### Genre Focus

*The Maze Runner* is a **Young Adult (YA) Dystopian Science Fiction** novel.

Dystopian fiction explores 'dark' worlds featuring:

- Dehumanized societies
  - Ex: Citizens being monitored and controlled by an all-powerful government
- Loss of individual freedom
  - Ex: Characters having their life paths chosen for them by the state

Science Fiction deals with imaginative concepts like:

- Advanced technology
  - Ex: Time travel, teleportation, or sentient robots
- Futuristic settings
  - Ex: Life on other planets or high-tech cities in the distant future
- Scientific 'what-if' scenarios
  - Ex: What would happen if humans could live for hundreds of years?

## Part 1: Vocabulary Log: Decoding the Maze

As you navigate through the Glade, you will encounter words that are unfamiliar. In the space below, list at least 8 "unknown terms" you found. For each, include the word, the sentence it was in, and your best guess at the definition based on context clues.

Unknown Term	Definition	Sentence from the Text

## Part 2: Pacing & Foreshadowing

Analyze how the author controls the speed of the story to create tension. Then look for clues that hint at what is coming later in the book. Use text evidence.

### Pacing Analysis

Identify a **fast-paced scene**. What sentence structures (short, punchy sentences) made it feel urgent?

Identify a **slow-paced scene**. How does the author use detailed description to stretch out the moment?

How does the **change in speed** between these scenes affect the overall tension of the chapter?

### Foreshadowing Analysis

Find a quote that **hints** at a future problem. Include the page number and a direct quote.

How does this specific hint create a sense of **unease or curiosity** for you as a reader?

Locate another "clue." How does this second hint **build upon** the first one you identified?

How does this connect to what you already know about building tension?

## Part 3: Cliffhangers & Sensory Details

Identify moments where the story leaves you hanging to build anticipation and suspense. Suspense is often felt through the senses. Find descriptions that appeal to sight, sound, smell, or touch to build dread.

### Cliffhangers

Find a chapter that ends on a **cliffhanger**. What is the specific unanswered question or immediate danger left at the end?

Why do you think James Dashner (the author) chose to end the chapter at that exact moment instead of resolving the scene?

### Sensory Details

Locate a passage where the author uses **sound** or **smell** to create fear. Provide the quote and page number.

How does this sensory detail make the reader feel more immersed in Thomas's fear or confusion?

**The Big Picture:** Based on your reading, why are we as readers drawn to suspenseful stories? What is satisfying about feeling "on edge"?

## Part 4: Creative Writing

Now it's your turn! Write your own original suspenseful scene (15-20 sentences) set in a dystopian world. Be sure to use the techniques mentioned in this packet: pacing, foreshadowing, cliffhangers, and sensory details. See the passage below for inspiration.

The air in the Corridor was thick with the scent of rusted iron and ancient dust. Thomas pressed his back against the cold stone, his breath coming in ragged, shallow gasps. *Click-clack. Click-clack.* The sound of metal claws dragging across rock was getting closer. He remembered Newt's warning from that morning: "The Maze doesn't just trap you; it waits for you to make a mistake." He had to reach the Section 7 opening before the sun dipped below the horizon. One wrong turn and he'd be lost in the dark forever. He gripped the strap of his pack, took a lungful of stale air, and sprinted. He didn't look back. He couldn't. Then, just as the exit came into view, the floor beneath his feet gave way.

Write your 15-20 sentence suspense story below: