

Summer Reading Guides/2017

The assigned books will control 10% of your first quarter grade. There will be discussion and testing on one of the books the first week of school. The reading of the second book will be assessed through an essay. Bring the books with you to class in September. Use these guides to help you mark important passages in the books as you read.

Upper School

English 9

Lord of the Flies

Lord of the Flies was written by William Golding. A deserted island becomes the battleground setting for stranded young boys—and for opposing views of human nature. Refugees from adult violence, British schoolboys attempt to set up their own responsible and democratic governance, but conflicting impulses of civilization and savagery rend the boys apart.

Written shortly after the horrors of World War II, the book represents Golding's meditation on opposing views of human nature. The Romantic view of man says that man is basically good and his institutions are perfectible. A classic statement of this approach is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's: "Man is born free but is everywhere in chains." According to the Romantic view, man's essential goodness is corrupted and repressed by society—by churches, schools, laws, etc. (All they are is "just another brick in the wall" of oppression.) The Romantics believe that, since society corrupts man's essential goodness, those who are furthest removed from civilization (say Tarzan, for example, the "Noble Savage") are innocent and free. Children also are innocent because society has not had time to corrupt and repress them.

The Doctrine of Original Sin, a Christian belief, says otherwise: Since Adam's sin (the original one), man has "fallen" into wickedness and corruption. Only social, moral, and religious institutions can control man's natural evil. How is the island setting of the novel the perfect laboratory for Golding's battle between these two positions? Identify the symbols of civilization in the novel and the symbols of savagery.

The Pearl

But the pearls were accidents, and the finding of one was luck, a little pat on the back by God or the gods or both (Steinbeck 16).

Like its title, *The Pearl* stands as a small work of tremendous literary and philosophical value. Told in the form of a parable, the deceptively simple tale recounts the story of Kino, a pearl diver, who finds the "Pearl of the World."

As you read, consider the following questions: What is the purpose of a parable? To what Biblical parable does the story allude? In what way are the first two paragraphs a metaphor for human experience? Note the play between light and dark.

Look for irony in the story. How does Steinbeck portray those in power (the priest, the doctor, and the pearly buyers)? In what ways is this book a political commentary as well?

Does the ending shock you? Would you have written this story differently? Are we capable of determining our own outcome, of determining how life treats us? And finally, what is the nature of courage?

Honors English 9

A Tale of Two Cities

A Tale of Two Cities is a classic historical thriller written by Charles Dickens. The novel's first and final lines are among the most well-known in literature: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" and "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known." The opening-line antithesis (best-worst) establishes the motif of *twins* and *parallels* that begins with the title and continues throughout the story. Lead characters Sydney Carton and Charles Darnay are strikingly similar in appearance. The two cities are Paris and London, and as Dickens tells the horrific story of the guillotine (the National Barber) and the French Revolution, he is also warning his British readers of the conditions in their own country that could one day foment bloody revolution: extremes of poverty and wealth (another of the novel's antitheses) and indifference to the suffering of the poor.

Note Dickens' explicit warnings on the need to reform in order to avoid the fate of the French. Find other examples of pairs and foils in the novel. Visit historychannel.com or some other website to read a brief overview of the French Revolution.

Make a list of characters and give one or two sentences of identification of each. This will help you master the large cast of colorful characters in the novel. You may turn the character identifications in for extra credit. Double-space your work if you type; skip lines if you handwrite.

Dandelion Wine

Dandelion Wine, written by the science fiction writer Ray Bradbury, is a novel of growing up in small-town America in the 1920s. Douglas Spalding, the main character, is a twelve-year-old boy who wakes up to the first day of summer vacation with a sense of profound possibilities. In a series of vignettes of small-town life, the reader follows Douglas through the adventures of a boy's summer. Bradbury presents a golden and nostalgic view of a less technology-driven time in our history. The Happiness Machine, Leo Auffman's invention, is a symbol for our reliance on machines in the modern world. Douglas has no television or computer to entertain him, and Bradbury implies his world is the richer for the absence of these machine-toys that dominate the lives of young people today. Look for other instances in the novel of the misuse of technology. What values do the people of Green Town have that we have lost today? What do you think is the significance of Douglas's strange illness?

Bonus: *Lord of the Flies*

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English 10

Catcher in the Rye

The action of the novel centers on the experiences of its sixteen-year-old narrator, Holden Caulfield. Holden is an impulsive loner whom Salinger portrays as isolated and alienated from the society in which he seems unable to find his place. Because he longs for honesty and acceptance of his differences in his conformist society, Holden faces rejection and seclusion.

As you read, note the divisions between Holden's reality and his imagined world. Be aware of the people Holden likes and the people with whom he is able to honestly communicate. Pay attention to the conflicts in the story and note whether these conflicts are resolved by the end of the novel.

A Raisin in the Sun

At a time when there was perceived to be no commercial viability and no possibility for critical success of a play about African Americans, the 1959 Broadway production of *A Raisin in the Sun* achieved the impossible: an all-out commercial and critical success. While the play is very much of its moment, it has also proven to be for all time; its relevance to modern life, its perpetual popularity, is attested to by the fact that it has continued to be given important and innovative new productions. It has established itself as an American classic.

Central to the play is the concept of the “dream.” What is each major character’s “dream”? Do these dreams change in any way throughout the course of the play? Are these or any dreams realized by the play’s major characters? How might this be Hansberry’s commentary on the *American dream*?

Be attentive to the play’s major symbols. Examine, for example, Mama’s plant, money, George’s white shoes, Joseph’s Nigerian robes, and the contrasted sunlight and darkness. Trace the appearance of these symbols in the play and be able to discuss their significance. Make note of other symbols you believe appear in the play. The play is told in an ironic voice. Be able to identify examples of irony. Being able to understand the ironic tone of the play will enhance your understanding of the world of disappointment and false hope Hansberry portrays. However, do not miss the fact that beneath her cynicism, Hansberry is, at heart, an idealist who wants to believe in dreams that do come true.

Though many changes have occurred since the play was written, as you read, pay careful attention to the fact that many of the social problems depicted in the play are still a part of our world.

Honors English 10

Brave New World

Brave New World was published by Aldous Huxley in 1932. The novel is surprisingly contemporary; indeed, in many ways it appears to have predicted the world we live in today in the 21st century. The novel is a futuristic dystopia in the same genre of literature as *1984* by George Orwell and *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells. Huxley extrapolated trends in technology, sexual morality, genetics, pharmacology, and culture, and he created an imaginary world that should be disturbingly familiar.

In Huxley’s novel, God and traditional religion have been supplanted by the worship of technology. “In Ford we trust” is one of numerous parodies found in the worship of the new gods of technology. Henry Ford, the founder of Ford Motor Company, early in the twentieth century invented the assembly line method of mass production and thereby put automobiles within the financial reach of the masses. (If the book were written today as a forecast of the future, Bill Gates would perhaps be the new god.)

Huxley’s satirical treatment of social issues of the day looks keenly relevant. His satire is our reality. Identify parallels between his imaginary society and our own.

***Man’s Search for Meaning* by Doctor Viktor Frankl**

Friedrich Nietzsche: “He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*.”

Dr. Viktor Frankl’s work is a classic in modern psychology as well as a classic of Holocaust literature. It is “one of the ten most influential books in America,” according to a Library of Congress survey. Dr. Victor Frankl (1905-1997) was Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry at

the University of Vienna Medical School. During World War II he was imprisoned three years at Auschwitz, Dachau, and other notorious Nazi concentration camps.

Forced to undergo the most horrible extremities and to struggle daily for survival, Dr. Frankl wrote this classic exploration of the role of *meaning* in our lives. How does he translate his experience of twentieth-century Hell into a humane and optimistic view of the meaning of life and the potential for human development? What are the critical experiences in the death camps? What conclusions does he reach about the search for happiness in life? What does he mean by “saying yes to life in spite of everything”? What are the principles of his theory of *logotherapy*? After the war, Dr. Frankl was Visiting Professor at Harvard, as well as at universities in Pittsburgh, San Diego, and Dallas. The American Medical Society, the American Psychiatric Association, and the American Psychological Association officially recognized Dr. Frankl's school of Logotherapy as one of the scientifically based schools of psychotherapy. Make sure to read the complete book.

“When we are no longer able to change a situation . . . we are challenged to change ourselves.”

Bonus Credit: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time takes its title from a comment by the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes. The narrator of this novel is a fifteen-year-old boy detective named Christopher Boone, but he can be a hilariously “unreliable narrator” in that he has an autism spectrum disorder. We see his adventures through his eyes—but also ironically through the eyes of other characters and our own since our storyteller is clearly not “normal.” We see his attempts to understand the world he lives in, a world that frightens him and periodically makes him retreat into a shell. All the while, he is solving a murder and dealing with his own difficult family situation.

Note the effects of having a narrator that is so seriously out of tune with his world. Many of these effects are comic, but some are quite sad. Christopher is a math savant, and math appears throughout the novel, which includes chapters numbered by prime numbers. Pay attention to the incidental math lessons and to the role of math in his life.

American Literature

The Crucible

In Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, John Proctor is faced with the choice between self-respect and self-preservation. It takes awesome courage to say “No” when the consequence is death, but to dissent from the will of the majority at school, at home, even in the family, takes a similar strength of character. Fiction helps us confront those moral choices in life that we avoid by luck or cowardice, or, as Arthur Miller puts it, “the stuff that you didn't dare or want to look at before.”

Consider these questions: Could I have behaved better than the characters in the play? Am I capable of betraying my country, my friends, my family? What was happening in 1953 that Miller might have been commenting on with this play? Why did Miller use events from nearly three hundred years before to address his concerns?

Unbroken

By Lauren Hillenbrand

1. In many ways, Louie Zamperini's story is the quintessential American story. A son of immigrants he rises to fame as an Olympic track star. But as Random House Reader's Guide states:

Louie's experiences are singular: It is unlikely that one person will ever again be in a plane crash, strafed by a bomber, attacked by sharks, castaway on a raft, and held as a POW. And yet the word used most to describe him is "inspiring." What does Louie's experience demonstrate that makes him so inspirational to people who will never endure what he did? What are the life lessons that his life offers to us all?

2. Few of us are ever called to be a hero in the way that Louie is. What makes a hero?
3. In childhood, Louie was bullied. He was also a juvenile delinquent and a hell-raiser. Do you think any of these traits foreshadowed how he would handle his wartime ordeal? Did they foreshadow his vulnerabilities after the war?
4. Louie's brother, Pete, was devoted to Louie and inspired him to start running. If Pete hadn't been in Louie's life, how do you think Louie's ordeal might have turned out?
5. When Louie, Phil, and Mac were on the raft, a key factor in their survival was optimism. All three men were able-bodied, veterans of the same training, experiencing the same hardships and traumas, yet Louie and Phil remained positive while Mac was hopeless. Why are some people hopeful and others not? How important are attitude and mind-set in determining one's ability to overcome hardship?
6. After more than 47 days on the raft, the men lost half their body weight... Yet they refused to consider cannibalism. Would you, in the same situation, consider cannibalism? If it could ensure that two men survived, when all three most certainly perish, would it be a moral decision?
7. Louie believed he was the beneficiary of several miracles: his escape from the wreckage of the plane, the fact he wasn't hit by bullets, and the appearance of singers in the clouds. How do you interpret those experiences? Do you believe in miracles?
8. The POWs took enormous risks to carry out thefts, sabotage, and other acts of defiance. What benefit did they derive from defiance that was worth risking severe beatings or even death?
9. In the 1930s and 1940s, Germany and Japan carried out what are arguably the worst acts of mass atrocity in history. What leads whole societies to go along? Do we each all carry that capacity for cruelty?

10. Many of us struggle to forgive those who have wronged us, especially since forgiveness is difficult to find. What makes it so hard to let resentment go?
11. Hillenbrand wrote that among the former POWs she interviewed, forgiveness became possible once each POW had found a way to restore his sense of dignity. Do you agree with this? Does it apply in your own life?
12. Louie has a second major turning point in his life as the result of listening to a sermon by Billy Graham. What message restored Louie's self-worth?

Adapted from the Random House Readers' Guide for *Unbroken*.

AP English 11

How to Read Literature like a Professor

Every trip is a quest (except when it's not). A simple meal or a feast can be an act of communion. Vampires don't only roam the pages of gothic novels, and they can be a Christ figures, too. Such is the wisdom of Thomas C. Foster's guide to cracking literary code, to understanding, in part, how to read between the lines.

As you read, keep a list in your dialectical journal. For each chapter, try to think of something you've already read which contains the pattern or symbol the author is discussing. In what ways are settings, events, and characters metaphors for meaning?

***A Lesson before Dying* Ernest J. Gaines**

There are many different ways to "read" a book. Sometimes, we read a book to appreciate it as an art form. In that approach, we can "read" the book as we would look at a painting: every word serves a purpose; objects, settings, and people function as symbols as well as dramatic elements; even the structure communicates meaning. Each part of the book is like a brushstroke in a painting: it has been put there for a reason. And the more we recognize how the pieces of the artistic puzzle fit together, the more enjoyment we glean from reading it.

Another way to "read" a book is to look at it as an argument. What issue does the author raise? Whose side is the author really on? What complex problem is the author inviting us to wrestle with?

I'm going to ask you to look at all of your reading in both of these ways. As you read this summer, you will want to keep a pen, pencil, or highlighter in hand and annotate (make notes) as you go. It's important for you to highlight details you think are significant or scribble your thoughts in the margins of the page.

A Lesson before Dying as a Work of Art:

Draw on your knowledge of *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* to answer the following questions:

- Note the passage of seasons in the course of the novel. What is the significance of the seasons? At what time of year is Jefferson executed?
- Pay close attention to the meals. Where do the meals take place? Who is eating? How do they change over the course of the book? If meals indicate someone's place in society or one's relationship status, what do the meals show about Jefferson and Grant?
- The narrator changes near the end of the book.

A Lesson before Dying as Argument:

- Name three key social issues that Gaines raises in this novel. What do you feel Gaines is saying about these three issues?
- For most of the novel, we see the novel through Grant's eyes, but near the end, Jefferson tells the story. Why do we need to hear directly from Jefferson? How does this change help make the author's argument?

Some books are events. Something happens to us after we read them. Some books change lives. This book did that for me.

British Literature

Things Fall Apart (1958), written by the Nigerian author, poet, and scholar, Chinua Achebe, ranks not only as one of the great works of British post-colonial literature but is also the most widely read novel in all of African literature. Aggrieved by the European literary depictions of Nigerians, and the African people in general, Achebe set out to create a more truthful account of the continent, its inhabitants, and their culture, and does so with an unbiased eye, pointing out both their strengths and weaknesses. The novel chronicles the story of Okonkwo, the strong, proud clan leader of the village of Umuofia, as he, and his society, deals with the changes brought about by the encroaching British imperial forces. In addition to being a poignant look at colonialism and its often devastating effects on an existing culture, the novel also spurs debate on such varied issues as the value and validity of religion, the efficacy of militarism, and even what it means to be a man.

War of the Worlds, written by the critically acclaimed science fiction author H.G. Wells, depicts one of the first meetings on the page between the inhabitants of earth and its extraterrestrial visitors. Enormously successful with both critics and the common readers alike when it was first published in 1897, its popularity has never dimmed. Along with inspiring a slew of science fiction books and films after its publication, a 1938 radio broadcast of *War of the Worlds* sparked a panicked debate about the dangers and the influence of radio, as several listeners tuned into what they thought was an actual news broadcast of a real live alien invasion. The novel itself, however, is not without its own controversies as critics have viewed Wells' text as a critique of British Imperialism, Social Darwinism, and even Religion itself.

In both novels, the issue of culture and colonialism are central themes. As you read, consider the following questions. What particular rituals, traditions, and morals make up the different cultures in the novels? Is there a “best” culture? What are the difficulties created by a meeting of dissimilar cultures? Can one’s culture be imposed on another? What part of your own culture would you be willing to sacrifice in the name of progress?

Honors Utopia/Dystopia

Utopian and Dystopian works encourage us more than most literary works to "think outside of the box," but nowhere in literature is this more true than in Edwin A. Abbott's *Flatland*. This short "masterpiece of science (and mathematical) fiction is a delightfully unique and highly entertaining satire that has charmed readers for more than 100 years. The work of [an] English clergyman, educator and Shakespearean scholar, [Flatland] describes the journeys of A. Square, a mathematician and resident of the two-dimensional Flatland, where women--thin, straight lines--are the lowliest of shapes, and where men may have any number of sides, depending on their social status." Our class will use this thin volume as a base from which to begin our discussion of what makes up a society, be it utopian, dystopian, or yes, even two-dimensional.

Our second great summer read is *Herland*, one of the 20th centuries most unique utopian novels, which appeared in serialized form in 1915 in *The Forerunner* (1909-1916), a feminist and socialist magazine published by Charlotte Perkins-Gilman. Perkins-Gilman, in addition to editing *The Forerunner*, wrote all of its copy, which amounted to nearly 28 full-length books during its seven years in print. In *Herland*, Perkins-Gilman describes an isolated society composed entirely of women, and the plot unfolds when three male adventurers find their way into *Herland*, only to discover a land inhabited by a race of extremely rational and well-educated women, who have set up an ideal social order, free of war, conflict and domination. Through her depictions of how the adventurers from our world react to the women of *Herland*, Perkins-Gilman entertainingly delivers a deliciously satirical and poignantly philosophical critique of the patriarchy of her day—a critique which still resonates loudly in of our own day and age.

In both novels, readers are asked to consider the construction of the social order within the societies crafted by the authors and to compare them to those in our own modern society. As you read, consider the following questions. What particular systems, traditions, and morals make up the different societies in the novels? Is there a “best” system? Are our systems, traditions, and morals superior, inferior, or on par with those in the novels? What are the difficulties created by the new information being processed by the protagonists, and by the reader, as they journey through these strange new lands?

AP English 12

The Stranger

The novel begins with two of the most famous sentences in existential literature: "Mother died today. Or, maybe yesterday. I can't be sure." This novel is divided into two parts. In Part I, covering eighteen days, we witness a funeral, a love affair, and a murder. In Part Two, covering about a year, we are present at a trial that recreates those eighteen days from various characters' memories and viewpoints. Part One is full of mostly insignificant days in the life of Meursault, an insignificant man, until he commits a murder. Part Two is an attempt to judge not only Meursault's crime but also his life.

To Meursault, life is not all that important. He does not ask much of life, and death is even less important. He is content merely to exist. However, by the end of the novel, he will have questioned his existing and measured it against living with a passion for life itself. In this novel, you will learn much about life and death, freedom and non-freedom, existence and living. One learns to confront the absurdity of life and its meaning.

The Metamorphosis

"When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin." With this sentence, Kafka begins his story of a young man who, transformed overnight into a giant beetle-like insect, becomes an object of disgrace and anathema to his family, work, and society. He becomes a quintessentially alienated man. A harrowing meditation on human feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and isolation, *The Metamorphosis* has become one of the most influential works of modern fiction. As W. H. Auden wrote, "Kafka is important to us because his predicament is the predicament of modern man."