



2009-2010 Middle & High School Summer Reading

English Department

Students should **read the required book(s)** for their grade level and **one book from the additional list**, if an additional list is indicated.

6th Grade Reading

Required: *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli

Required: *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* by Robert C. O'Brien

7th Grade Summer Reading

Required: *The Cay* by Theodore Taylor

Additional: *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen

Where the Red Fern Grows by Wilson Rawls

The Light in the Forest by Conrad Richter

8th Grade Summer Reading

Required: *The Giver* by Lois Lowry

Summary by Amazon.com:

In a world with no poverty, no crime, no sickness and no unemployment, and where every family is happy, 12-year-old Jonas is chosen to be the community's Receiver of Memories. Under the tutelage of the Elders and an old man known as the Giver, he discovers the disturbing truth about his utopian world and struggles against the weight of its hypocrisy. Gradually, Jonas learns just how costly this ordered and pain-free society can be and boldly decides he cannot pay the price.

Rationale:

1. *The Giver* is the winner of the 1994 Newbery Medal, one of the most prestigious awards for youth literature in the United States.
2. The novel is relevant to young readers because it centers on the life of a 12-year-old boy and deals with themes such as identity, responsibility, truth, and hope.
3. The language of the novel allows students to connect Jonas's world to their own.

Red Scarf Girl by Ji-Li Jiang

Summary:

Ji-Li Jiang recounts personal events that took place during the Cultural Revolution in 1960's China. Her family experiences first-hand the persecution of the Red Guard and the influences of Chairman Mao's strive for a socialist country through a fall in social status due to past political choices.

Rationale:

1. The backdrop of the Cultural Revolution provides an ideal setting for analyzing the concepts and themes of culture, change, and diversity.
2. Jiang reveals the complexities of a politically explosive 1960's China in terms that middle school age children can understand, adding to their knowledge of world events.
3. It allows opportunities to compare and contrast these same themes through other cultural events in history.
4. Students can examine the topics of literary structure, sentence fluency, and characteristics of narrative text.

The City of Ember by Jeanne DuPrau

Summary:

When mankind is about to come to an end, a group of scientists create and populate a city deep underground. The city of Ember is to last 200 years after which its inhabitants are to retrieve instructions to return to the surface. Over time, however, the message is lost, and life in Ember is rapidly deteriorating. Their power supply is failing, and food is being rationed. Two children must unearth the secret of Ember and lead the citizens out of Ember.

Rationale:

1. *The City of Ember* has elements of mystery, fiction, and science fiction.
2. The novel is especially tailored for inquisitive learners to grow in their complex thinking skills. The novel addresses open-ended, world-wide issues and philosophically complex ideas.
3. The characters are young, and students can relate to their thoughts and actions.
4. The author does not explain the history of why the citizens of Ember live in the dark city. She allows the readers to make their own judgments, which lends well to classroom discussion. The political corruption present in the novel can also lead to classroom discussion.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain

Summary:

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer depicts the life of an imaginative, troublesome boy in the American West of the 1840's. The novel is intensely dramatic in its construction, taking the form of a series of comic stories based on Tom's exploits. These stories are linked by a darker story that grows in importance, Tom's life-threatening entanglement with the murderer Injun Joe.

Rationale:

1. The novel contains many themes which are relevant to young readers' lives.
2. The novel appeals to males as well as females and is literature that can become a means of escape from everyday life in the real world. Through rich language and a twisting plot, readers are transported back in time and experience 1840's Mississippi River life.
3. The novel raises social issues that foster an atmosphere for classroom discussion.

9th Grade Summer Reading

Required: *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

Summary:

The novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee is considered an American Classic as well as the 1961 Pulitzer Prize winning book. Lee deals with issues such as racism, oppression, and injustice. The novel follows the lives of the Finch family- Atticus, Jem, and Scout. Jem and Scout are an unforgettable brother and sister duo along with Dill, a friend, who visits them during the summers. The core of the novel, however, is when Atticus, a lawyer, accepts the Tom Robinson case. Because of Atticus' decision, Jem and Scout are subjected to abuses from the other children. The novel focuses on issues such as justice, innocence, guilt, love, hate, shame, pride, fear, and courage. Lee confronts the harsher realities of life in a compassionate, dramatic, and deeply moving way in which readers are taken to the roots of human behavior.

Rationale:

1. Advanced readers can develop critical thinking skills through the themes and concepts presented.
2. In the diverse world that students now encounter, Lee offers readers unforgettable characters that move from innocence and experience the kindness, cruelty, love, hatred, and humor the world has to offer.

Night by Elie Wiesel

Summary:

Night is a candid and deeply moving autobiographical account of surviving the Holocaust while being a teenager. The novel is set in a series of German concentration camps and offers a view of life inside a death camp. Although painful at times, it eloquently addresses the many personal and philosophical questions that surround the Holocaust. It is Eliezer Wiesel's recorded experiences and speaks for Wiesel and his family while also speaking for all the Jews. It is a story of hope, courage, fear, ignorance, and apathy. *Night* is considered a classic of Holocaust literature.

Rationale:

1. *Night* exposes students to a honest, firsthand account of the Holocaust.
2. The novel allows students to develop an understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism, anti-semitism and stereotyping.
3. Wiesel's writing is powerful, and allows readers to develop critical thinking skills through the concepts and themes presented.

Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson

Summary:

A powerful novel that takes a sobering look at the cruelty and viciousness that pervades contemporary high school life. A high school freshman, Melinda, begins the school year as a social outcast. She decides that the safest place is to be alone, inside her own head. Through her art work in class and with the support of a compassionate teacher, Melinda eventually finds her "voice". Melinda is sarcastic, witty, honest and courageous- all which make her a memorable character. Through first person narration, this extraordinary novel by Anderson leaves readers both touched and inspired. Anderson uses keen observation, vivid imagery, and symbolism to pull readers into the head of an isolated teenager. Anderson expresses the emotions and struggles of teenagers in a dramatic and compelling fashion. *Speak* will inspire and empower readers long after the last page.

Rationale:

1. The novel is 2000 Printz Honor Book and a School Library Journal Best Book of the Year. It offers opportunities to compare and or contrast universality of the themes with real- life experiences as well as to other works of literature
2. The novel is rich in ideas, concepts, and themes that advance students' intellectual growth
3. Students will gain insight into the meaning of strength, hope, courage, and survival.

English 10 Summer Reading

Required: *Notes from Underground* by Fyodor Dostoevsky (see below)

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe

Summary:

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a painfully honest depiction of Nigerian tribal life before and after colonialism. The novel follows the life of Okonkwo, a farmer and village elder with a fiery temper. Okonkwo is exiled for killing a man, and when he returns, he finds his village has changed dramatically because of colonial authorities. Okonkwo finds himself lost between the old beliefs and practices of his culture and the new ways of the colonial power.

Rationale:

1. While the novel contains simple prose, it carries a strong message that causes students to think about life that is very different than their own.
2. The novel deals with a culture students are not as familiar with and allows them to expand their knowledge of the world.
3. While it does help students to see another culture, it is also applicable because the characters are completely human. They have positive traits and flaws just like everyone else, and because of that, we are able to easily relate to its characters.

English 10 Honors Summer Reading List

Required: *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë

Summary:

Charlotte Brontë's classic, published in 1844, shocked many critics because of the actions of its heroine, yet became a beloved staple of the reading public. Jane Eyre fights circumstances, expectations, and her own nature to attain the life she wants. She is one of the first truly empowering female characters in English literature and provides a model for all who feel they must overcome innumerable impediments to achieve success, while also helping the reader decide how he should define "success".

Rationale:

1. Although written over 160 years ago, *Jane Eyre* still manages to challenge students' perceptions of struggle and self.
2. Despite its literary accessibility, the novel's breadth of vocabulary exposes the reader to dozens of important terms not often found in students' reading.
3. The novel provides background for another book, *The Eyre Affair*, that the students will read during the school year.

I recommend the Barnes & Noble Classics edition, ISBN 9781593081171.

Required: *Notes from Underground* by Fyodor Dostoevsky

Summary:

The first of Dostoevsky's masterworks provides a stunning, dark, and, at times, strangely comic counterpoint to the ultimately optimistic and self-assured heroine of *Jane Eyre*. The Underground Man is an unbelievably disturbed individual who lives at the margins of society, never quite able to partake, yet unable to remain aloof, either. One would almost believe that this person could not exist, if it weren't for the fact that we hear about these types on the news every day. Although written in 1864 in Russia, *Notes from Underground* includes archetypal characters whose analogues may be found in any high school in America today.

Rationale:

1. *Notes from Underground* is unparalleled in its depiction of the effects that a life lived on the margins of society has on an individual's psyche.
2. The themes of the story and the actions of its characters provide real insight into the very different perspectives that other cultures and eras might have on life.
3. The story challenges the student to try to understand on a deeper, psychological level seemingly irrational behavior.

I recommend the Barnes & Noble Classics edition, ISBN 9781593081249.

11th Grade Summer Reading

Required: *Ragged Dick* by Horatio Alger

Summary:

This book is one of the best known works by Horatio Alger, an author whose name has become synonymous with the "rags-to-riches" story that is such a central part of American history and culture. We use the term "a real Horatio Alger story" to describe someone who has risen from humble origins to a place of respectability, prominence, and (often) wealth. This book tells the story of a young orphan living on the street who makes something of himself.

Rationale:

1. This book was originally written for adolescents, so it's relatively easy to read (a bonus for summer reading).
2. It has a positive, uplifting theme.
3. The book has historical and cultural significance; knowing who Horatio Alger was and why his works are important is part of the cultural literacy we hope to impart to students.

4. The book represents some key themes in the history of American ideas. Specifically, it sets the table for an important idea that we will be woven into the curriculum throughout the year: the American Dream.

Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston

Summary:

This novel by Zora Neale Hurston is widely recognized as a masterful work of fiction. Hurston tells the powerful story of an independent-minded woman living in the early 1900s and the tribulations she faces as she tries to break free from the constraints of social custom and prejudice, as well as from the domineering men in her life. Janie's tale is a classic one of trying to figure out who you are and find happiness.

Rationale:

1. This book has a central place in the canon of American literature. A quote from an early review indicates the importance of the book: "*Their Eyes* belongs in the same category—with that of William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway—of enduring American literature."
2. The book offers a compelling story told in vivid, powerful language.
3. Janie's struggle to establish her own identity touches on an important theme in American Literature: the tension between the individual and society. This theme plays a central role in much of the material covered in the first half of the year.
4. Female students in particular may appreciate Janie's struggle to find love and security while still maintaining her independence and peace of mind.

[Non-fiction works are an important focus in the junior year. The following two works offer early exposure to non-fiction.]

Fatland by Greg Critser

Summary:

This book addresses a pressing issue in our country: the escalating obesity crisis. In a succinct and engaging way, the book examines the causes of the increasing obesity rate (some of which may surprise readers), the impact of the problem (which is more far-reaching than we may realize), and potential solutions. Critser's light, informal writing style helps convey serious material in way that's engaging and easy to understand.

Rationale:

1. The book is relatively current (published in 2004), which is a positive for summer reading. The language is contemporary and, hence, relatively easy to read.
2. Contemporary works may also encourage students to see reading as more enjoyable and more relevant to their day-to-day lives.

3. Although the junior course is titled “American Literature,” it naturally reaches beyond literature to touch on a broad range of issues dealing with American culture and society, both past and present. *Fatland* sets the table for such broad exploration, offering some interesting insight into a contemporary and ongoing issue in the United States.
4. Finally, the book is non-fiction, and a primary goal in the junior year is to acclimate students to reading for information (beyond just traditional textbooks), which is different in many ways from simply following the plot of a work of fiction. This book provides an accessible, interesting gateway to non-fiction.

Nickel and Dimed by Barbara Ehrenreich

Summary:

This book addresses a very real issue in our country: the plight of those who work hard yet still struggle economically (referred to by sociologists and economists as “the working poor”). However, this is *not* an academic study or a government report. Instead, Ehrenreich enters the world of the working poor, taking on low-wage jobs and living off the limited income they offer. The first-person description of her experiences brings to light the real problems of this often-neglected segment of society in a way that’s engaging and interesting.

Rationale:

1. Though the book was published in 2001, the current economic crisis makes the subject matter more relevant now than ever.
2. The book is fairly current, which is a positive for summer reading. The language is contemporary and, hence, relatively easy to read. Contemporary works may also encourage students to see reading as more enjoyable and more relevant to their day-to-day lives.
3. Although the junior course is titled “American Literature,” it naturally reaches beyond literature to touch on a broad range of issues dealing with American culture and society, both past and present. *Nickel and Dimed* sets the table for such broad exploration, offering some interesting insight into a contemporary and ongoing issue in the United States.
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Advanced Placement Language and Composition (11th Grade)

Students in this course are to see Mrs. Taylor for specific assignments.

Required: *Fast Food Nation* by Eric Schlosser

Summary:

Fast food has hastened the malling of our landscape, widened the chasm between rich and poor, fueled an epidemic of obesity, and propelled American cultural imperialism abroad. That's a lengthy list of charges, but here Eric Schlosser makes them stick with an artful mix of first-rate reportage, wry wit, and careful reasoning. He uncovers the fast food chains' disturbing efforts to reel in the youngest, most susceptible consumers even while they hone their institutionalized exploitation of teenagers and minorities. (From ReadingGroupGuides.com)

Rationale:

1. This non-fiction piece requires that students give thought to some important ideas related to personal responsibility, advertising and marketing tactics, company profits, and health issues.
2. The work introduces early in the year the argument mode of writing, a major concentration in the AP curriculum. Students will look at all sides of the author's presentation and write a persuasive essay in which they defend, refute, or qualify Schlosser's argument.

Required: One of the following biographies/autobiographies

An American Childhood by Annie Dillard
Dust Tracks on a Dirt Road by Zora Neale Hurston
The Woman Warrior by Maxine H. Kingston
Angela's Ashes by Frank McCourt
The Way to Rainy Mountain by N. Scott Momaday
The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath
Hunger for Memory by Richard Rodriguez
One Writer's Beginnings by Eudora Welty
Black Boy by Richard Wright
Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass by Frederick Douglass
Teacher Man by Frank McCourt
Reading Lolita to Tehran by Azar Nafisi
Dreams from My Father by Barack Obama

Required: Four short stories from *A Good Man is Hard to Find* by Flannery O'Connor, to include "A Good Man is Hard to Find"

12th Grade Summer Reading

Required: *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad

Summary:

Considered a classic in Western literature, *Heart of Darkness* is about the evils of colonialism. Its narrator, Charlie Marlow, takes us on a journey down the Congo River and explains what he learns about human behavior, particularly focusing on Kurtz, an ivory-procurement agent who loses all restraint. This psychological novella, semi-autobiographical, explores the depravity of which man is capable.

Rationale:

1. College reading lists often include Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as a must read before attending college.
2. The story is rich with many layers of meaning; it is a tale of adventure, a psychological study of man's inner darkness, a look at race relations; a commentary about choices and responsibility; and, finally, a document of brutal exploitation.
3. Students will allude to the story again and again as they study other works, particularly from the modern period, poems like Eliot's "The Hollow Men".

The Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingsolver

Summary:

The novel focuses on the Price family from Bethlehem, Georgia, who go to Africa as missionaries; told by the mother, Orleana Price and her four daughters, it is the tale of their undoing as they attempt to adapt under the rigid doctrines of their husband and father in a land ravaged by civil war. A story of personal sacrifice and redemption, *The Poisonwood Bible* is an Oprah's Choice.

Rationale:

1. The book is an excellent companion piece to *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*, both part of our high school curriculum.
2. The novel's accolades include nomination for the Pulitzer and Faulkner awards, a two-year run on the *New York Times* bestseller list, a Booksense Book of the Year Award, and an Oprah's Choice.
3. The novel's narrative voice; the themes of gender equality, caste division, and religious oppression; and the rich literary allusions merit its inclusion in summer reading.

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini

Summary:

Set primarily in Afghanistan, this bestselling novel by Khaled Hosseini narrates the story of Amir, a wealthy merchant's son whose life changes suddenly and painfully when he betrays his closest childhood friend Hassan. Amir flees to the United States, where life is relatively peaceful until a phone call from his father's close friend thrusts him back into Afghanistan--now during the mid-1990s Taliban takeover--to atone for his disloyalty. When he arrives, he finds that both his childhood home and the truth he thought he knew have drastically changed. A 2003 review from *Publisher's Weekly* calls *The Kite Runner* "a complete work of literature that succeeds in exploring the culture of a previously obscure nation that has become a pivot point in the global politics of the new millennium."

Rationale:

1. The novel's historical and cultural backdrop provides students with a greater awareness of Afghanistan, including religious infighting between the Sunni and Shiite Muslims, the Taliban takeover, and the lives of Afghani immigrants in the United States.
2. Students will be attracted to the novel because of its recent release date, contemporary setting, and accessible writing style, but the novel still challenges readers with symbolism, dynamic characters, and universal themes--discrimination, friendship, loyalty, betrayal, and redemption.
3. A film version of the novel provides students the opportunity to visualize the characters and events in the book.

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

Summary:

This classic novel introduces its primary conflicts and themes in the first sentence: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." Austen wittily depicts the story of Elizabeth Bennet, a twenty-year-old woman who lives at her family's estate in the English countryside with her parents and four sisters. Lizzy, her sisters, and her best friend Charlotte, navigate a web of amorous connections as they struggle to decide whether to marry for money and connections or for love.

Rationale:

1. A classic work of British literature, this comedy of manners aligns with GWA's curriculum for Senior English.
2. The novel depicts the culture of 19th Century English society, particularly the customs and beliefs surrounding the ideas of love and marriage in the middle and upper classes.
3. The novel's themes--love, marriage, social class, reputation, and pride--are universal.

4. The text is challenging but accessible, and students will be attracted to its witty, conversational style.
5. Film adaptations of the novel provide students the opportunity to visualize the characters and events in the book.

Advanced Placement Literature and Composition (12th Grade)

(Students in this course are to see Mrs. Taylor for specific assignments.)

Required: *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad

(See summary and rationale under 12th Grade.)

Required: *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver

(See summary and rationale under 12th Grade.)

Required: *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini

(See summary and rationale under 12th Grade.)

Required: *The Inferno* by Dante (translation by Ciardi)

Summary:

One of the three books in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, *The Inferno* is an epic poem written in terza rima. It is the last great writing of the Middle Ages and the first great work of the Renaissance. In the story, Dante Alighieri travels deeper and deeper into the circles encountering some of the most well-known people who ever lived – poets, scholars, political leaders, church leaders. As Dante's journey ensues, the reader identifies with Dante who often pities the sinners, but who sometimes feels indignation for those who have caused pain to others.

Rationale:

1. Dante's *Inferno* has always been considered a cornerstone of the canon. Many of the great works refer to Dante, and because the poem transcends time and place, it affords students the opportunity to explore important questions of all eras: What is the nature of sin? Is perfect justice possible, in this life or in another? Can true happiness be attained?
2. This fourteenth century work provides an excellent study in imagery and classical and historical allusions.
3. *The Inferno* deals with the consequences of our choices. Dante's work explores the dark side of human nature and is a good parallel to other works with the same theme, including the other summer reading, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Poisonwood Bible*.